

9-2014

# Lament as Transitional Justice

Michael Galchinsky

Georgia State University, mgalchinsky@gsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_facpub](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_facpub)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Galchinsky, Michael, "Lament as Transitional Justice" (2014). *English Faculty Publications*. Paper 22.  
[http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_facpub/22](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_facpub/22)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

Michael Galchinsky

Georgia State University

mgalchinsky@gsu.edu

## Lament as Transitional Justice

### Abstract:

Works of human rights literature help to ground the formal rights system in an informal rights ethos. Writers have developed four major modes of human rights literature: protest, testimony, lament, and laughter. Through interpretations of poetry in Carolyn Forché's anthology, *Against Forgetting*, and novels from Rwanda, the United States, and Bosnia, I focus on the mode of lament, the literature of mourning. Lament is a social and ritualized form, the purposes of which are congruent with the aims of transitional justice institutions. Both laments and truth commissions employ grieving narratives to help survivors of human rights trauma bequeath to the ghosts of the past the justice of a monument while renewing the survivors' capacity for rebuilding civil society in the future. Human rights scholars need a broader, extra-judicial meaning for "transitional justice" if we hope to capture its power.

### Keywords:

Transitional justice, human rights, literature, culture

## Lament as Transitional Justice

### 1. The Fall of the House of Creon

Four major literary modes reappear during and after periods of human rights abuse, regardless of the writers' nationality. These are the modes of protest, testimony, lament, and laughter (Galchinsky 2012). This article examines the mode of lament, the literature of mourning. Human rights lament voices a community's grief and rage for all that was lost when its people were laid waste. Memorializing the victims, lament plays a part in rituals of remembrance such as museums, monuments, prayers, and funeral rites. While the focus of the mode of testimony is on establishing what happened, lament's focus is on helping people in the present exorcise their pain, anger, and loss (Schaffer and Smith 2004; Cubilie 2005; Dawes 2007; Swanson Goldberg and Schultheis Moore 2012). While protest and testimony tend to address themselves to the experience of a single representative victim, as in Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* or Rigoberta Menchu's autobiography (Byrstom 2012; Slaughter 2007), lament represents multitudes of victims. Lament is always a ghost story, a means by which to apprehend the past violations that still haunt the present, and a way to perform and assuage grief. It goes about this task by adopting a remarkably persistent set of formal strategies, which it is the aim of this article to discover.

As literature that performs a public ritual function, lament's natural forms are poetry and oratory. Here, I will consider many examples of these, primarily from Carolyn Forché's massive anthology, *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*, which anthologizes over 150 poets who endured war, apartheid, exile, torture, and other human rights crises from around the world. Yet I also want to show how, as a mode, lament occurs in prose forms as well, so I

will reflect on Antjie Krog's report on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Country of My Skull*, J. P. Stassen's graphic novel of the Rwandan genocide, *Deo gratias*, Steven Galloway's novel of the Bosnian war, *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, and Toni Morrison's novel of American slavery, *Beloved*.

The type of grief I am concerned with here must be distinguished from the type Judith Butler discusses in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Butler 2004). Butler argues that public memorials and obituaries render some lives "grievable" while others are forgotten or ignored. In the United States after 9/11, she points out, the newspapers did not cover the deaths of Iraqi or Afghan children in the U.S. wars, much less those of Guantanamo detainees. Obituaries, she says, were reserved for American citizens, and so "we have to consider the obituary as an act of nation-building" (34). She observes that in the ancient tragedy of *Antigone*, the king, Creon, forbids Antigone from grieving publicly for her brother's death (36). The king refuses, Butler says, because he knows that grief like Antigone's has a political function. What is equally true, however, is that when Antigone defies Creon's orders, when she refuses to accept that her brother's death is ungrievable and vows to lament anyway, the people of Thebes, the prophet Tiresias, and ultimately the gods are with her. The king's house falls, and a new city is born (Sophocles 1984). Denying Antigone her right to grieve results in regime change.

Like Antigone's defiant act of mourning, the human rights lament redefines the appropriate subjects of grief in a political context. Lives that during the period of violations had been abused and abjected, dehumanized and marginalized, demeaned as cockroaches, vermin, and swine—these lives are now publicly commemorated *as national losses*. These non-people, these ghosts, are now mourned, and the act of mourning gives them, and their persecutors, back

their humanity. They are no longer considered parasites, but vulnerable human beings who did not deserve what the nation did to them, and whose pain, for the sake of the nation's future, must be recollected. Precisely because an obituary is an act of nation-building, the human rights lament's radical re-centering of national consciousness from Creon to Antigone, from the voice of the tyrant to that of the suffering citizen, has the potential to heal the nation's wounds.

That is a literary way of saying what a political scientist might put into different words: public mourning after human rights abuse serves as a form of *transitional justice*. Under the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine established by the United Nations, the world community has three responsibilities in relation to atrocities, wherever the responsible state fails to protect its citizens: to prevent, to react, and to rebuild. After large-scale rights abuse, various mechanisms are designed to help the society transition to democracy under the rule of law. These are meant to "provide accountability for the perpetrators, reparations for the victims, and reconciliation among the wider society" (Lekha Sriram, Martin-Ortega, and Herman 2010). Such mechanisms include ad hoc tribunals like the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda; transnational tribunals like the British Law Lords deciding on the extradition of Chilean dictator Pinochet; hybrid tribunals combining domestic and international judges, like those created for Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Timor, and Kosovo; and the International Criminal Court. Together these courts practice what is called "transitional justice." Because transitional justice tries to smooth the way from a period of abuse into a functioning, democratic society, it also encompasses non-judicial legal mechanisms like truth commissions, traditional conflict resolution methods like reconciliation ceremonies, and symbolic processes like the changing of street names, and the dedication of monuments. To the list of symbolic processes that contribute to transitional justice,

I argue, we must add one more: the literature of lament. In many respects, this literature serves parallel functions to other transitional justice mechanisms, in particular to truth commissions.

At least since Bishop Desmond Tutu, who led South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), truth commissioners have recognized that rebuilding requires more than physical, legislative, and judicial acts, but cultural and emotional acts. There is an affective dimension to transitional justice. Truth commissions give voice to it by staging cathartic public acts of storytelling, and through the publication of those stories in the commission's final report (Hayner, 2011; Sikkink 2011; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010). It is still unclear whether or not the "unspeakable truths" that come to light in the commissions have therapeutic outcomes, enabling individuals to recover and communities to reconcile (Hayner 2011; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010). Yet whatever the results, at least the aims of lamenters and truth commissions are analogous: to re-establish a civil society after it has been dismembered by human rights abuse. Both laments and commissions hope that the acknowledgement of the massive losses sustained by the victims (and even those losses experienced by the perpetrators) will help citizens move from a state of mutual fear and hatred to a state of interpersonal and intergroup civility.

The similarity of the aims and questions implicit in both poems and tribunals suggests that we need a broader, extra-judicial meaning for the concept of transitional justice if we hope to capture its true power. Transitional justice encompasses both formal/legal processes and informal/cultural processes, as well as the interaction between the two. A civil society reknits itself with many threads. By speaking in the emotion-laden symbols of resurrection, renewal, and redemption, lament seeks to help citizens make peace in the wake of their violent past.

## 2. Post-Traumatic Innocence

While lament's primary functions are to grieve and memorialize, the mode is more than a device for mourning. In lament, the expression of *grief* often serves as a platform for the expression of *grievances*. Lament as a means of social protest hearkens back to the tradition of ancient Greek laments, which mourn the fall of cities (Alexiou 1974). In rural Greece in modern times, where lament has been a common art performed by women, the mode has been a means by which women could protest against the social restrictions on widowhood, modern medical practices, and even war (Caraveli 1986). For example, on August 17, 1978, folklorist Anna Caraveli recorded one Greek performer, Artemisia Kapsali, lamenting her husband, Yianni, who had been killed in the Greek-Turkish conflict over Cyprus that took place in July-August 1974:

What's wrong with you, miserable crow, wailing and squealing so?

(Oh, I can't bear it, Yianni!)

Are you that thirsty for blood, that hungry for young flesh

(How awful, my fate!)

Go beyond Gribala mountain, go to Gribala peak

(I can't bear it, Yianni!)

To find proud, young bodies there all bathed in dark blood

(Oh, I can't bear it, Yianni!)

To find their poor mothers singing laments for them.

(Oh, my luck is awful!)

How bitter the wound! How poisonous the gunshot! Damned be the war! Damn it a thousand times!

(Oh, what a horrible fate!)

It takes children away from mothers, brothers away from brothers

(Awful, awful fate!)

And it tears man away from wife, though they love each other

(My fate is awful!)

And on the spot on which they part, no grass can ever grow (Caraveli 1986).

In this lament, what begins as a cry of pain for one woman's loss ends as an aggrieved complaint about the general losses inflicted by war itself: Damned be the war! Kapsali especially mourns war's destruction of familial and communal bonds.

In the specific type of lament composed in the wake of human rights disasters, social bonds are destroyed, and the form may serve as a means by which the audience can renew its capacity for peace, civility, and social harmony in the future. Those who lament are in the position of the girl in the poem, "Pictures," by the East German poet Sarah Kirsch, the foremost female German poet of the post-WWII generation. In the poem, the girl's city has been burned to the ground in the war, and she grows up in the destruction's aftermath:

I was small and mornings gleaned  
 ears of grain from the fields  
 when the midday hot was over  
 I practiced on the bike  
 or sat in our garden  
 wound jasmine to circular wreaths  
 laid them on the pretty  
 raised mounds of drowned birds (Forché, 476).

Kirsch's speaker identifies three tasks for those who come after mass death. First, she has to glean the stray remaining ears of grain from the scorched earth—to seek out what has survived,



and put it to use to sustain the present. Second, she has to reassert the rhythms of normalcy, of unself-conscious movement (on her bike) and peaceful rest (in her garden), of which war deprives its victims. Yet she may not simply relax in her garden as if it were a bower of pre-war innocence—a Garden of Eden—for this young girl must lay jasmine wreaths on the mounds of drowned birds. The white jasmine often appears in Catholic funerals as a sign of the innocence of the Virgin Mary and by extension of the dead. That is, the flower's symbolic power purifies the victim. This girl may not shut her eyes to the past's abuse and destruction, but by laying jasmine wreaths she can purify her city's loss. The poem itself serves as one such wreath.

It is one thing to ritually purify the dead, but another to forget the abuse they suffered when grieving is done. For Kirsch, moving on does not mean moving *past*. The speaker ends by recognizing that, despite her best efforts, she is doomed to “trample” the “late heads” of the asters in the garden “under my postwar shoes.” In this latter-day, post-catastrophic garden, there is no escaping her complicity with death. This girl may not return to a naïve, unfallen innocence. But in mourning her naivety, she makes a post-traumatic innocence possible. Whereas, prior to the war, she lived in innocence unconsciously, afterwards, she seeks to reclaim her innocence through conscious choice and hard work, through a decision to move ahead as if the world were going to be habitable again, as if she could reconcile herself to life in a reborn city, and as if her victimhood, though central and never to be forgotten, were less than the sum of herself. Like Kirsch's girl, the lament writer does not assume that the fall into atrocious experience is irreversible. By holding out the possibility of a reclaimed innocence—we could also call it conscious, or secondary, innocence—lament functions as a hopeful human rights mode. It may even be the most optimistic of the modes.

Beyond death, lament asserts, lies the possibility of renewal. The trope of renewal is a vestige in modern lament from biblical sources, in particular from the Book of Lamentations. Lamentations sets the agenda for modern lament, even as it differs from its descendant in important ways. “Alas!”—the first word of four of the five chapters in the book—captures its tone of deep grief. Jews ritually re-read Lamentations every year on the holiday of Tisha B’Av, which commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples and later catastrophes, including the Holocaust. Like latter-day laments, Lamentations gives an itemized catalog of sufferings, followed by an introspective account of what went wrong. Whereas human rights laments tend to identify the source of the suffering with the oppressive human power, Lamentations identifies the source of the suffering as God Himself, who is punishing the people for their disobedience:

We have transgressed and rebelled,  
 And You have not forgiven.  
 You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us,  
 You have slain without pity (Lam 3.42-43).

Many Orthodox Jews have historically understood the Holocaust precisely in these terms—as a punishment for sin—while other Jews have rejected the idea that Jews can be blamed for Nazism or the death camps (Katz, Biderman, and Greenberg 2007). In Lamentations, the recognition that God is all-powerful does provide the possibility for a hopeful end. What the Lord has taken away, the Lord can restore: “Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself,/And let us come back;/Renew our days as of old!” (Lam 5.21). Renewal is figured as the ultimate telos of lament.

The prophet Ezekiel envisions the yearning for a new start in even more radical terms than Lamentations, not merely imagining renewal but resurrection. The Lord takes Ezekiel by

the hand into a valley filled with dry bones and commands him to declare that He will raise the bones. Once Ezekiel has performed this task, the bones reassemble themselves and are re-fleshed, until “a vast multitude” stands before him (Ez. 37.10). God then interprets the meaning of the scene for Ezekiel: “O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.’... I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel” (Ez. 37.11-12). Hope springs in the valley of death and grief. The vision of resurrection has analogs throughout the Jewish and Christian scriptures: to the Exodus story of slavery followed by redemption, to the notion of a messiah who arrives at the end of days to lead the Israelites to the World to Come, to the miracle of Lazarus’s resurrection, and of course to Christ’s own death and rebirth. In each case, Jewish and Christian scriptures emphasize that, like punishment, renewal is in God’s hands.

Unlike Lamentations, modern, secular human rights laments are not invested in divine intervention as the source of renewal. In fact, these poems tend to emphasize the horror that arises because of the speaker’s awareness that God’s salvation has failed. For example, Victor Serge’s speaker in “The Asphyxiated Man” declares flatly that “The Savior botched your salvation” (Forché, 115). The poet confesses that his own words are no more effective than religion’s promises. He describes himself as “the only person conscious of [the asphyxiated man’s] suffering and death,/I, the last, impotent human face he’ll ever see,/I who have nothing for him but this absurd remorse” (115). Mariana Tsvetayeva, another poet lamenting the victims of Communism in “A white low sun...,” ends her poem in disgust with God: “What have these grey huts done to anger you,/my God? And why must so many be killed?... /It’s soldiers who sing these days./Oh Lord God” (Forché, 125).

Even though modern laments despair of salvation, resurrection nonetheless continues to find its way into their imagery, and does not appear only in the work of Jewish or Christian writers. For example, Adonis (pseud. of Ali Ahmad Sa'id), the modern Syrian poet, reacts to what he describes as universal loss in "Elegy for the Time at Hand." In the poem, he expands from his own particular experience of loss to that of "All men":

All men [are] choked by ashes,  
 crushed by the rocks of silence,  
 mounted by empire builders,  
 paraded in arenas for their sport,  
 so many footstools,  
 so many banners" (Forché, 557).

The lamenter's first reaction to the universal condition of oppression is to apostrophize his land in grief and rage in terms reminiscent of Ezekiel: "O my dry and silent land,/who left you like a fossil?" Once the dry bones have been acknowledged, a second reaction becomes possible—to anticipate the raising of the bones: "Shall a new race grow in the poppy fields?/Shall fresh winds rearrange the sand?" Ultimately, Adonis asks, "What god shall resurrect us/in his flesh?" (556).

Where it does not come from religious sources, the hope for resurrection may be stirred by cultural sources. That is the situation of the musician at the center of Steven Galloway's novel, *The Cellist of Sarejevo*, a narrative of the city's siege during the Bosnian war. The cellist is inspired by the memory of a musicologist who, in 1945, in the ruins of a bombed building, found four bars of a work by the Venetian composer Tomas Albinoni and spent the next twelve years "reconstructing a larger piece from the charred fragment" (Galloway 2008, xv). Albinoni's reconstructed Adagio becomes, for the cellist, a symbol of hope that beauty and civility persist

amid destruction. So when mortars destroy the cellist's beloved Opera Hall, he decides to play the Adagio on the spot of the bombed building every day for twenty-two days, one day for each person the bomb killed. Part protest and part lament, the cellist's performance galvanizes both the inhabitants of the city and their enemies. It serves as a daily pause in the war, a reminder that war does not last forever, a proof that civil society has not been completely destroyed and can be rebuilt. The music reminds a sniper, who goes by the nom-de-guerre Arrow, that her given name was something else, and when she finally chooses not to kill, "She closes her eyes, recalls the notes she heard only yesterday, a melody that...feels very close" (Galloway, 231). The cellist's music gives Arrow back her proper name.

### 3. The Truth Commissioner's Lament

The questions asked by human rights laments in the natural language of renewal and the supernatural language of resurrection may seem distinct from the questions asked by truth commissions in the legal language of reconciliation and rebuilding. After all, truth commissions since the 1980s have been preoccupied by the legal mandate to establish the truth of the horrific past. Yet in several respects, the stories told to truth commissioners function as public laments.

Unlike testimony, which must grapple with the possibility of forgetting due to trauma or the erosion or distortion of memory, lament *demand*s the capacity to remember. The demand is made not of individuals, but of the entire afflicted community. To be forgotten is, in Toni Morrison's evocative phrase, to be "disremembered" (Morrison 1987), with its echo of being dismembered: individual members of the community have been amputated from history. Having, perhaps, already been disappeared—kidnapped, tortured, disposed of—during their lives, the forgotten are disappeared again in the telling. In the case of Morrison's ghost,

Beloved, being disremembered results in her own physical dismemberment, as well as in the breaking apart of her language. As Beloved recalls her mother, Sethe, digging Beloved's own infant grave, her prose begins to have typographical holes in it, becomes elusive and poetic, and then simply comes apart:

I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she  
 puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket  
 she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I  
 say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place  
 where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her  
 face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing (210).

In Sethe's lexicon, the opposite of disremembering is "rememory"—the reconstruction of what had come apart. Rememory is the territory of lament.

But why should the traumatized survivors and their descendants, and even the perpetrators and their descendants, be compelled to remember? There are, after all, instances in which the act of storytelling retraumatizes the witness, and there are instances, such as in the war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone, in which some survivors of the crimes resented being asked to tell their stories: they would have preferred that the tribunal rebuild their homes (Millar 2011). Still, transitional justice relies on the belief that reconstruction requires recollection. Timothy Garton Ash wrote in the Preface to Priscilla B. Hayner's study, *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*, that the narratives in truth commissions ideally set off a process of "remembering in order to forget" (xii). Just so, laments construct collective stories that aim to help societies move through their traumas by constituting a common account of what has been lost. On this view, the requirement to remember encompasses both victims and

perpetrators, each of whom must contribute their own narrative. Truth commissions like the South African TRC serve to invite the creation of such narratives that tell both “objective” and “subjective” truths, with the express purpose of opening up social and political space for forgiveness (Best, Long, Etherton, and Smyth 2011).

#### 4. Memory vs. Recollection

Many scholars treat laments as records of personal trauma, analyzing them for clues to the toll the abuse has taken on the individual storyteller. The critical lens they adopt is trauma theory, a subspecies of psychoanalytic theory (Felman and Laub 1991; Caruth 1996; Miller and Schweitzer 2006). Yet focusing on grief’s toll on the individual subject is not the only way to think about lament. Grief for human rights abuses also has a social meaning. Not the individual alone, but the society, collectively, must try to form a more harmonious national consciousness going forward from the trauma. As part of its act of rebuilding—of transitional justice—it will have to shape a valuable national myth from the wound. That is no easy task, because, in these cases, the national story has been commandeered and misused by persecutors. In the aftermath of the crisis, the very idea of the nation may come to seem polluted, and some citizens may prefer to retrench themselves in religious, ethnic, or tribal enclaves. By contrast, the human rights lament assumes that an inclusive national myth can and must be forged if the country is going to rebuild its civil society. Lament grieves for the hatreds that led to the conflict, describes the abuse, mourns the losses, acknowledges remaining suffering, and finally lets go of the bitterness that flowed from it. It offers the nation a new collective story, not by forgetting or evading the period of trauma, but by prodding the wound’s pain to the surface in ritual, periodic, and strategic ways.

Determining which of the many potential voices will be heard in that story is generally the outcome of strenuous, public negotiation. Narratives in truth and reconciliation processes are often authored under social pressure—by some of the authors against others, by auditors, by the authorities, by the perpetrators who fear exposure, by international observers, activists, and officials. They are cobbled together from scraps of written, oral, and forensic testimony; snippets of radio and television broadcasts; the reports of journalists, bloggers, artists, and NGOs; and the official documents of state and intergovernmental agencies. The messy, often internally inconsistent and competing nature of these sources suggests that literary laments are embedded in socio-political dynamics. Such narratives are not so much the product of individual *memory* as of social *recollection*, to adopt the useful distinction of the historiographer Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Yerushalmi 1982). The mode of lament gathers together—re-collects and redacts—the memories of diverse individuals. By attempting to speak not of my past or yours but of *ours*, laments set themselves the task of reconciling competing voices into a single compelling expression. Lament undertakes a priority-setting process to establish precisely which, among the multiple potential memories, must be passed on.

The collective story that emerges from this process is available to be reworked imaginatively in the name of lament. The poet and South African Broadcast Corporation journalist Antjie Krog sets herself precisely this task in *Country of My Skull*, in which she painstakingly meditates on the narratives coming out of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, creating, in literary form, a ritual process of reconciliation (Krog 2000). The truth she is after is not literal. As she writes:



I'm busy with the truth...*my* truth. Of course, it's quilted together from hundreds of stories that we've experienced or heard about in the past two years. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling the story to (225).

The state of mind through which Krog receives the stories from the TRC involves, in part, her own painful struggle with love and shame as she reckons up her family's history on the white side of the apartheid line. What Krog demonstrates is that going forward from the trauma toward a resilient social order requires not only the healing of traumatized individuals but of the wounded national ethos through what she calls the "first" and "second" narratives—the narratives of victims and persecutors, respectively. Only by soliciting both narratives can a post-conflict society shape a reconciliatory national myth from the crisis. As Krog describes the dialogues surrounding the TRC, "Our conversation becomes part of the big South African tongue of consciousness groping down toward a broken tooth" (313). Nudging the broken tooth is a fragile and painful exercise. Ultimately, however, when it works, lament provides what Best, Long, Etherton, and Smyth call the "ritualistic or symbolic behavior" that signals a reconciliation event (2011).

The stakes in creating a collective story that can be worried like a broken tooth are clear, for instance, in two laments on the experience of apartheid in South Africa. The first narrative, that of the victims, is represented by Sipho Sepamla's poem, "I Remember Sharpeville," which begins by testifying to what happened on March 21, 1960, the day of the first major anti-apartheid protest, when white South African police opened fire on a crowd protesting the infamous pass laws, killing or injuring 250 people and leading to the illegalization of the African National Congress and to thousands of arrests (Forché, 729). The second narrative—that of the

perpetrators—can also be told in the mode of lament, as illustrated by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela in *A Human Being Died That Night* in her depiction of Eugene de Kock, the commanding officer of the state-sanctioned death squads, as he came to grips, in prison, with his legacy of violence and hatred (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003). Neither the laments of the first or the second narrative is sufficient to tell apartheid's collective story. As Bishop Desmond Tutu well understood in eliciting both victims and perpetrators to speak to the TRC, the truth that makes reconciliation possible can only be told by both narratives, together. Dialectic, dialogue, even conflict among the narratives is to be expected, and yet as a whole the recollected story that emerges aims to avoid inciting further outbreaks of violence. Sepamla and de Kock are merely examples of the first and second narratives in South Africa, each of which is itself comprised of a multitude of voices. Both narratives are themselves internally varied, and are best conceived as broad spectra rather than as discrete points.

Some citizens may not wish to be included in a collective story of national rebirth, or may be excluded from it by others, because they continue to nurse the resentments and factionalism that led to the conflict, or because the conflict itself has left them compromised, embittered, or unable to move on. Krog spends one chapter, "Mother Faces the Nation," describing the active attempts of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela to disrupt the TRC. Nelson Mandela's ex-wife repeatedly refuses to address whether she participated in crimes committed during the anti-apartheid struggle by members of her own household. Krog paints an ambivalent picture, unable to decide whether Madikizela-Mandela is a mother of the nation or a symbol of its corruption. Her house "had become the centifiugal force behind seemingly opposing attitudes.... The house where destabilized youngsters were both protected and killed. The house of famous, regal personalities and the house of a particular kind of gangster personality...."

(327). Not all stories of human rights abuse parse neatly into victims and perpetrators. Can the limit cases be incorporated into the myth of a renewed nation? Krog says that they can—as long as they are filtered through ambivalence.

## 5. Containing Multitudes

Alongside the question of which voices the collective story will include, there is the aesthetic question of how to represent the woes of so many. What kind of collective story could contain such multitudes? In lament, massive numbers of victims can take on a talismanic quality: the number 6 million in relation to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust has been given artistic significance in many cases, as when a group of schoolchildren from the town of Whitwell, Tennessee collected 6 million paper clips and housed them in a cattle car. Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, is dedicated to "Sixty Million and More"—an approximation of the number of people subjected to slavery. The emphasis on huge numbers of victims in lament—whether measured in thousands, millions, or tens of millions, forces us to wonder how one lament can possibly give voice to all those dead and those who must live after atrocity. Primo Levi addresses Nazi death camp victims as "You multitudes with dead faces..." (Forché, 374). Osip Mandelstam describes the victims of Stalin in terms strangely evocative of Ezekiel's dry bones: "Mounds of human heads are wandering into the distance." How can the one speak on behalf of multitudes without erasing them or (what is the same) homogenizing them?

Laments often disclose a great anxiety about the inadequacy of language to the task. Akhmatova says in "Requiem," "I am powerless to tell/somebody brute from something human/or on what day the word spells, 'Kill'" (Forché, 104). The power of language is mute before the power of the deranged state, as suggested by the history of Akhmatova's poem:

although she composed it between 1935 and 1940, she felt it was too dangerous to write down. Her friend memorized it, and Akhmatova only published it in 1963, and then only in Munich (Reeder 2006). Celan goes so far in his celebrated Holocaust poem, “Deathfugue ,” as to break the syntax of the German language itself, to show that even language cannot survive genocide:

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
 we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening  
 we drink and we drink  
 a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Marguerite  
 your aschenes Haar Shulamith he plays with his vipers  
 He shouts play death more sweetly Death is a master from Deutschland

If poets sometimes assert language’s adequacy in defiance of their despair, the assertion is always barbed and ironic, as when Mariana Tsvetayeva writes, “while our mouths have spittle in them/The whole country is still armed” (Forché, 126). But is it? She is perhaps protesting too much.

While sometimes despairing that their language can adequately capture the magnitude of their loss, lament poets nonetheless adopt a certain set of techniques for doing so. These include parataxis, synecdoche, and metonymy. Parataxis was originally pioneered in another context by Walt Whitman, who declared in *The Song of Myself*, “I contain multitudes” (Whitman 2009). Whitman sought to depict the magnificent variety of citizens in America’s democratic experiment. His strategy was additive: he made lists. These lists were not meant to be seen as exhaustive and exhausted catalogs, but as beginnings. Whitman’s lists point beyond their own finitude to the field of uncontainable possibility that the poet named “America.” While the lists lack topic sentences, transitions, or summations, they do not appear haphazard or formally

meaningless, but are made coherent by immanent principles of selection and ordering, and by the use of tropes of balance and tension: parallelism, equation, repetition, comparison. Parataxis is an art of juxtaposition, in which an item's placement implies a meaning horizon for the whole, even if that horizon stretches always just beyond our view.

Whitman's paratactic logic for containing America's masses provides an analog for the poetics of massive loss in the human rights lament. The problem for the grieving poet after genocide is how not to extinguish in the poem the voices that have already been silenced by atrocity. In her Holocaust poem, "Bashert," Irena Klepfisz uses parataxis to solve the problem of how to recognize the uniqueness of the millions of individual victims of the Holocaust, while maintaining a structured, manageable poetic world. The poem is structured in two parts, a list of reasons why Holocaust victims died, followed by a list of reasons why survivors survived. The poem's first lines indicate the use of a paratactic logic, or logic of juxtaposition: "These words are dedicated to those who died/because they had no love and felt alone in the world/because they were afraid to be alone and tried to stick it out" (Forché, 391). The victims in these lines are linked through their aloneness: either they were too alone or not alone enough. The implication is that regardless of how alone they were (or how social they were), they would have died. Their death was *bashert*, a Yiddish word meaning inevitable or predestined. Colloquially, the word is often used as a noun to describe the person to whom one is espoused ("She is my *bashert*," my destiny). The Holocaust is, in this sense, an ill-fated marriage of victims and violators.

Other items in Klepfisz's list are also structured as balances or oppositions. The victims died because they "played it safe" or because they "took risks," because of acts of commission ("a bed was denied") or omission ("a place was filled and no other place was left"). Some of the accounts of death are structured according to timing: "because someone was late/because

someone did not arrive at all/because someone told them to wait and they just couldn't/any longer" (Forché, 391-392). The picture that emerges is that there were multitudes of deaths, deaths beyond containment, haphazard, various in cause. But in every case death was *bashert*, meaning: the dead are not to be blamed for having succumbed.

The situation is precisely the same in the poem's second part on survival. Indeed, the same causes often led to survival as to death: "because they took risks," "because they played it safe" (Forché, 392-393). The survivors did not earn their survival any more than the victims earned their deaths. A modern, non-Orthodox Jew, Klepfisz rejects the biblical logic of Lamentations, which understands suffering as divine punishment for sin, and survival as the reward for obedience.

The use of parataxis is not limited to Holocaust laments. Wislawa Szymborska, a Polish poet often critical of the Communist state, adopts an analogous strategy in "Any Case":

You survived because you were the first.

You survived because you were the last.

Because alone. Because the others.

Because on the left. Because on the right.

Because it was raining. Because it was sunny.

Because a shadow fell (Forché, 458)

The opposed pairs of terms reject that there is any such thing as "Any Case." Each case is unique. Yet somehow they all belong to a single series of horrific events. Similarly, Vladimir Holan, in a long poem on Soviet repression, "In the Yard of the Policlinic," repeats the clause, "I had to think.../And I had to think..." fourteen times, each time introducing a different category of victim (Forché, 422-24). The fourteen categories add up to a list of atrocities, but the horror

the catalog produces goes beyond any of the individual cases. The horror is multiplied to encompass the whole regime.

Juxtaposition, as a means of indicating uncontainable multitudes, is not limited to parataxis. Lament poets also put to use the rhetorical figures of synecdoche (the part that stands for the whole) and metonymy (the image that stands for what it is next to) to signify the magnitude of atrocity. Tadeusz Rozewicz's poem, "Pigtail," recalls the piles of hair one finds in an exhibit at a Holocaust museum: "Behind clean glass/the stiff hair lies/of those suffocated in gas chambers...." (Forché, 449). This is horrible, but becomes even more so when the speaker narrows his vision to a single lock of hair from one little girl, "a faded plait/a pigtail with a ribbon/pulled at school/by naughty boys" (Forché, 449). The pigtail, clearly a synecdoche for the girl herself, is infused with her individual experience. Rozewicz implies that all the hair in those piles belonged to women who had unique stories, even though not all of these can be told. The poem's synecdoche invites us to imagine more than we can put into words.

Clea Koff uses metonymy in a similar way in one of the most affecting moments in her memoir, *The Bone Woman: A Forensic Anthropologist's Search for Truth in the Mass Graves of Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo* (Koff 2004). As she digs up the bodies of those consigned to mass graves, the obvious metonym for the individuals is what remains of their clothing. Laying out the tattered clothing on tables once it has been reclaimed from the bodies is part of Koff's job. Often, the clothing enables family members to identify the victims. Koff is emotionally detached enough to do this. But in some cases, the metonym becomes so powerful that it breaks through her reserve. This is the case in the chapter, "The Boy with the Marbles," which recounts Koff's work in a mass grave in Kosovo. At one point Koff finds, in the soil near one skeleton, "a cloudy turquoise marble" (226). Bone evidence suggests that the body near

where the marble was found belonged to a boy of between twelve and fifteen years of age. When she exposes more of the body, she finds lots of marbles lying near the remains of his tracksuit pants, and her reserve slips:

Suddenly I was thinking about children. About how I'd noticed young kids playing what I thought of as the 'old-fashioned' game of marbles while the forensic teams had played soccer with the older children from our neighborhood a few weeks earlier.... The boy in my grave had a pocket full of marbles, and that told me more about his life than almost anything else could.... I saw beyond the forensic facts to the boy he might have been" (227).

As in the case of parataxis, lament writers adopt synecdoche and metonymy in order simultaneously to individualize the victim and suggest the larger tragedy to which he or she belongs. By attending to one aspect of one victim, the writer attempts to counteract readers' tendency to become desensitized to the suffering of large numbers of victims. Emotionally speaking, it is often more affecting to imagine one victim than one hundred thousand (Borer 2012). Once a lament writer secures a reader's sympathy for the individual, he or she can then show how the victim's story points beyond itself to the vast suffering of which he or she was a part. In Kantian terms, although mass atrocities create suffering that is too enormous to *comprehend* in its totality, lament enables the reader at least to *apprehend* the suffering in its parts—and to perceive how much more there is to perceive than one can grasp (Kant 1986).

## 6. The Sublime's Dark Double

Lament emerges when the numbers of dead are piled high. Seeking to find words commensurate to the massiveness of the loss, lament's language reaches toward the ultimate, the



infinite, the absolute. It seeks to voice the sense of supreme damage, because the writer's whole world has been violated and come undone. Duoduo of the Chinese democracy movement, in "Looking Out from Death," writes that the Tiananmen Square protesters who have been killed will protest yet more loudly from their graves: "Then from death will come,/...the absolute scream of anguish!" (Forché, 762). How can one adequately represent abuses so vast and devastating if not as the result of monstrous, demonic forces, of dark matter as expansive and powerful as God?

In the history of aesthetics since Longinus, Burke, and Kant, vastness and might have been associated with sublimity, an experience that touches on the awe and fear of divine power (Longinus 1992; Burke 1992; Kant 1986). Typical images of chaotic, superhuman power abound in the sublime: chasms and peaks, oceans and earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and avalanches. In human rights works, there is a carnage so vast, the consequence of so much abused might, that atrocity itself reaches toward sublimity: it is the traditional sublime's dark double.

Robert Graves observes in the poem, "Recalling War," "War was return of earth to ugly earth,/War was foundering of sublimities...." (Forché, 87). Yet in a state of atrocity, ugly earth is not so much the foundering of sublimity as it is the sublime's perverted and inverted reflection, its antithesis. Paul Celan invokes an inverted sublime in the Holocaust lament, "THERE WAS EARTH INSIDE THEM, and they dug":

There came a stillness, and there came a storm,  
and all the oceans came....

O one, o none, o no one, o you:

Where did the way lead when it lead nowhere? (Forché, 382).

For Celan, the power of all the oceans does not provide the transcendence—the glimpse of the all and everywhere—that the traditional sublime offers; rather, the oceans figure the “nowhere” and “no one” produced by the Nazis’ total war, their utter destruction of places and people. This is the anti-sublime of atrocity.

Lament’s inverted sublimity differs from the traditional sublime in several ways. First, whereas in the traditional sublime, the terror is virtual, in the human rights lament, the writer comes face to face with terror and suffering. In Kant’s analytic treatment of the sublime, he describes the imagination of the perceiver of the sublime as being threatened by the magnitude of the sublime’s power: “the point of excess for the imagination...is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself” (Kant, 107). It is “like” fearing an abyss. However, in the inverted sublime of the human rights lament, the speaker is not separated from the abyss, nor is he standing on its edge. He is swallowed up by it. Second, in traditional sublime poetry like that of William Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey,” the experience of nature’s dynamic power enables the poet to glimpse transcendence. In the inverted sublime, however, the power that oppresses is neither supernatural nor natural, but human. When the lamenter sees into what Wordsworth calls “the life of things” (Wordsworth, l. 50), what he sees is human aggression. In “Requiem,” Anna Akhmatova’s lament on the seventeen months during which her husband and son were locked in the Yezhov prison in Leningrad, she writes: “Such grief might make the mountains stoop,/ reverse the waters where they flow/, but cannot burst these ponderous bolts/that block us from the prison cells/crowded with mortal woe” (Forché, 102). Here, for all their power, the typical images of sublime nature—the mountain, the water—are useless, thwarted by the human power to lock people behind bars. Inversion regularly marks lament’s sublime. As Gottfried Benn puts it in “Monologue,” “The obese/course after the gazelle,/ the windswift one, the lovely

animal!/Inverse proportion enters everything” (Forché, 72). In the anti-sublime of atrocity, all of the ordinary relations of life are inverted and distorted.

Whereas God calls for light, lament’s inversion calls for vast images of darkness and night. Victor Serge, in a lament on the victims of Stalinism, writes: “O rain of stars in the darkness,/constellation of dead brothers!” Serge’s image of the infinite star field of the dead anticipates the use of the night sky in *Deogratias*, J. P. Stassen’s fictional lament about a traumatized young Hutu man living in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide (Stassen 2006). During the genocide, Deogratias was forced to commit the rape and murder of both his girlfriend and her mother. When the genocide is over, Deogratias hallucinates that he has been transformed into a dog looking for bellies to eat, and in attempting to stave off the hallucinations, becomes addicted to the local banana beer. For him, the genocide never ends: he uses the beer to poison numerous individuals who had encouraged or witnessed his crimes. The text’s final image is of a night sky full of stars, as if to say that some experiences are so terrible and immense that only the God of the darkest night would know how to make sense of them. We are left to look at the image of the thousands of stars, pause at the thought of all the human lights that have gone out, and mourn.

## 7. Feeding the Dead

Massive suffering, mass graves, botched salvations, unbounded horrors.... Where, then, is the room for hope? Hope arises in lament because the mourners learn through their grief how to relate to the dead in a way that is healing to individual grief and collective national loss. After atrocities, the dead are present as ghosts, and very often they are speaking. The dead demand to be heard. Horst Bienek puts it concisely in “Our Ashes” (Forché, 473): “When will our ashes

“speak?” Lament’s task is to hear the ashes speak, voice their speech, give them that justice—and finally lay them to rest.

Literary laments depict the dead’s presence through the use of the figure of prosopopeia (speech on behalf of another person) and through representing the dead as ghosts. In Czeslaw Milosz’s “Dedication,” he uses both techniques. “You whom I could not save/Listen to me,” he begins (Forché, 437). This sounds like the typical story of botched salvation, and indeed, the speaker cries, “What is poetry which does not save/Nations or people?/A connivance with official lies.” If the speaker does not find or give salvation, he does find comfort, by constructing a relationship with the dead that is mediated through poetic language:

They used to pour on graves millet or poppy seeds

To feed the dead who would come disguised as birds.

I put this book here for you, who once lived

So that you should visit us no more (Forché, 438).

It is not, ultimately, the dead who must listen to the speaker, but he who must listen to them. Milosz’s book feeds the dead by giving voice to their lament—and he hopes that speaking for them will enable them, finally, to rest in peace. Whether the dead will rest is a matter of some urgency, for those killed in human rights crises have a way of sticking around, haunting their wounded communities. Their presence can threaten the living, who may feel themselves bound to relinquish their own voices in order to give voice to the dead. In the poem, “Any Case,” Szyborska asks the dead, “So you are here? Straight from that moment still suspended.” The ghost’s effect on her is to render her speechless: “I can’t stop wondering at it, can’t be silent enough.” Her poetic function has changed from speaking to listening. Her own voice is silenced: “Listen,/how quickly your heart is beating in me.” She has become an empty vessel,

possessed by the ghost of the traumatic past. Abba Kovner's post-Holocaust poem, "What's Not in the Heart," may begin with a sense that moving on is possible—"even in the burned forest the bird/has come back to sing"—yet his own efforts to sing are ultimately "Useless" because, he tells the dead, "Your coffin/never leaves my shoulders" (Forché, 543). As the narrative of a community haunted by past atrocities, lament asks its audience to imagine ways to live with the ghosts' fury: how to become the ghosts' mouthpiece, how to honor their memory, and, finally, how to persuade them to rest so that the living may honor their own future.

## 8. Grief-time

Under the weight of grief, the future can seem constrained, for then it is more tightly bound to the past than usual. Time no longer operates in an ordinary way. The imagination's most basic temporal operation—distinguishing between before and after—becomes compromised. The lamenter can no longer tell the difference between the story's beginning, its middle, and its end. No longer marching forward, time stops, or even doubles back on itself. Generations of the dead and the living co-exist.

Mikhail Bakhtin has identified different schemes, which he calls *chronotopes*, by which narratives structure time (1981). For example, romance writers tend to adopt a chronotope Bakhtin refers to as "adventure-time." Mourners, too, have particular ways of structuring the passage (or non-passage) of time, which we could call "grief-time." Lament often makes use of the pause, a space of silence and rest. Krog puts it this way: "It is fragrant inside the song, and among the keynotes of sorrow and suffering, there are soft silences where we who belong to this landscape, all of us, can come to rest" (286). All of us: that is, both the speakers of the first and second narratives, both the victims and the perpetrators. In grief-time, the clock and the sun both

stand still, as in the Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti's poem, "Peace, Horror": "In silence morning halted, it was ten o'clock,/peace hung along the street, a touch of horror too" (Forché, 371). The pause is a moment for contemplation, prayer, experiencing the pain of loss. In graphic novels, it can take the form of a blank or black frame.

Grief-time operates outside of the linear conventions of ordinary time. When it does not simply cease to move, lament's chronotope folds the plane of time back on itself, so that yesterday and today can exert their force upon each other. In *Beloved*, Sethe describes time's unfolding as "rememory." In talking to her living daughter, Denver, Sethe says:

"I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head." (35-36)

Certain categories of experiences—like the traumatic burning of a house—continue to live on, and not just in the individual's memory, but "out there" in communal space. When Denver asks if other people can see the picture, too, Sethe replies emphatically that they can "bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else.... The picture is still there," and if you go to the place where the picture exists, "it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you" (36). Here, Morrison gives a precise description of the intergenerational fold that characterizes the grief-time chronotope. You bump into other people's traumatic memories out there in the world, in the places that mark them: at such moments you come face to face with a ghost from another time.

Rememory makes it possible for multiple generations to interact in the same now. This trope is about cultural transmission. Primo Levi's "Shema" is named after the central prayer in the Jewish worship service, which commands parents to teach the precepts of the Torah to their children. Levi's poem offers a parallel commandment that he hopes will become equally engraved on the new generation's hearts. Echoing the language of the Shema, he urges his listeners to speak of the victims' sufferings "When you are in your house, when you walk on your way,/When you go to bed, when you rise./ Repeat them to your children" (Forché, 375). Peter Huchel's poem, "The Garden of Theophrastus," is likewise dedicated "To my son": "Remember, my son. Remember those/Who once planted their conversations like trees.../Preserve the hours." The poem imagines the encounter between the living and the dead taking place where the victims' conversations were once planted. For the son, "The garden is dead" because the orders of the Nazi and Soviet persecutors "were to cut it down and root it out." As a result, "Your light is fading, defenseless leaves"—the past generation is in danger of being forgotten. Without the trauma site, recollection becomes almost inconceivable. Nonetheless, the son is exhorted to remember the garden, even though he himself never stepped foot in it in its vital state. He must transport himself, imaginatively and emotionally, back through time, back into *that* space; he must lament. By doing so, he will perform two kinds of transitional justice. His lament will secure the ghosts of the dead a hearing, easing them into their final rest. And at the same time he will close the chapter of atrocity, easing the living on into a new day.

## 9. Maternal Recurrence

If there is to be a new day, it will be marked by the Mother. Lament claims a secondary innocence so that it can make emotional space for communal reconciliation. Lament imagines

both the initial loss of primary innocence and the struggle to claim its conscious echo as a property of motherhood. This is not surprising, because alongside the biblical predecessors of modern lament are its classical antecedent, Niobe, who, according to Homer, lost fourteen children to the wrath of the gods, becoming an archetype of all mourning. Turned into stone, she nonetheless broods over her lost children and weeps forever (*Iliad* 24.602-617). In many cultures, lament is specifically a woman's poetic form. Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan depicts Niobe's modern descendant in her poem, "Behind Bars, Sel." As the speaker sits in her prison cell, she imagines her mother sitting at home: "I see her/on her face silence and loneliness now/and in the house/silence and loneliness..." (Forché, 541). In Clea Koff's memoir of her forays into forensic anthropology, she recounts how a group of Croatian women, the Mothers of Vukovar, at first tried to keep the forensic team from digging the graves, not wishing to credit the physical evidence of their children's deaths. Eventually, however, the Mothers came to see the exhumation and identification of their children as a valuable and necessary process (Koff, 191-194). The atrocity at the center of the graphic novel, *Deo gratias*, involves the rape and slaughter of a mother, Apollinaria.

In Krog's account of the South African TRC, chapter titles like "The Mothers of the Nation" hint that Niobe is still present in modern lament. In the chapter called "Then Burst the Mighty Heart," which ends a series of reactions to the testimonies by members of the apartheid government and police, it is mothers who come forward to tell the stories of their bereavement and to ask the hardest questions. These women are the so-called "Guguletu Seven," whose children were shot by police on March 3, 1986. Cynthia Ngewu's son, for instance, was shot twenty-seven times. In her testimony, she remarks that after his killing, "I didn't want to see any



white man in front of me, because I was—I was full of hatred at that time. . . . “ Later, the hatred turned into anguished moral questioning and curiosity:

Why did the *boers* kill everyone? Couldn't they just warn them, or even shoot them in their legs just to save their lives?

Didn't these *boers* have any feelings at all? Why did they just kill everyone, absolutely everyone? Not leaving even one to give witness. Now nobody knows the real, real story” (252).

As much as she laments the loss of her son, she also mourns the loss of the *boers*' civility, and of the buried truth. Another of the mothers, Eunice Miya, voices a similar lament: “What makes me cry now is that these policemen, they were treating people like animals, that's what makes me cry right now. But even a dog, you don't kill it like that. You even think that the owner of this dog loves it” (254). When it bursts, the mother's mighty heart asks, what happened to the oppressors' capacity to love?

If innocence can be reclaimed, it is because the mother's grief is imagined to be pure and purifying. Her embrace of the wounds of loss enables everyone else to grieve, and so her grief has a special, primary status. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison's Niobe is Baby Suggs, Sethe's own mother and the grandmother of Beloved, the ghost. Baby Suggs must grieve for both daughter and granddaughter. She is a sacralized figure, described repeatedly as “holy,” and serves the role of spiritual guide and leader among the freed slave community in her neighborhood in Ohio. One Saturday morning, she leads her community into the woods and there delivers a sermon on the grief and loss caused by being a slave. She begins by reminding her parishioners of innocence, specifically the innocence of mothers and their children:

Then she shouted, 'Let the children come!' and they ran from the trees toward her.

'Let your mothers hear you laugh!' she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling (Morrison, 87).

This is a profound act of reclaiming innocence in the aftermath of abuse. Baby Suggs then commands her listeners to reclaim the very flesh that the slavers have abused, to love it, and she demonstrates what she means by taking her own old and battered body and dancing with it. Her words and her dancing are contagious, and soon she has leveraged her maternal grief into a respite and hope for everyone. She has successfully performed the emotional and communal renewal that is lament's primary task.

The grief of Niobe has an authority and special status that cannot be questioned or overruled, even by tyrants. In Anna Akhmatova's poem, "Requiem," the mother's grief cannot be questioned because its origin is the wanton destruction of the most important bonds of human life.

This woman is sick to her marrow-bone,  
 this woman is utterly alone,  
 with husband dead, with son away in jail.

Pray for me. Pray.

Akhmatova imagines that women's special grief descends from their status as bearers of life, and from the primal experience of those women who surrounded Jesus at the crucifixion, who at the moment of pain may have wondered if they were witnessing a botched salvation. She is especially drawn to Jesus's mother, Mary:

Mary Magdalene beat her breasts and sobbed,

His dear disciple, stone-faced, stared.

His mother stood apart. No other looked

into her secret eyes. Nobody dared.

All women are in the position to lament, but even Herod would not dare to defile the mother's grief.

Maternal lament is so powerful that it has the capacity to channel everyone's loss.

Akhmatova recounts how she and other bereaved women stood every day outside the prison, attempting mostly futile efforts to get information and contact their loved ones. "I stand as witness to the common lot,/survivor of that time, that place," she begins. She emphasizes the general nature of her grief when one of the other women in line at the prison finds out she's a poet and asks her, "Can you describe this?" "And I said, 'I can.'" Later, in the *Epilogue*, her maternal voice grows to encompass all who suffered with her under Communism: "And I pray not for myself alone.../for all who stood outside the jail/in bitter cold or summer's blaze/with me under that blind red wall." By the end of the poem, the speaker's voice represents the woe of millions: "and if a gag should blind my tortured mouth,/through which a hundred million people shout,/then let them pray for me, as I do pray/for them, this eve of my remembrance day." Her voice speaks for multitudes.

In part, she is forced to speak on behalf of the common lot because it is impossible to remember the individual lots in all their specificity: "I want to name the names of all that host,/but they snatched up the list, and now it's lost." Parataxis will not work for Akhmatova, but perhaps metonymy will. She thinks of the words she creates for the lost host as a monument, a memorial you can stand next to and be defined by, in the way of metonyms: "And if my country ever should assent/to casting in my name a monument," she thinks, she wants the marker

placed near the prison wall, “here, where I endured three hundred hours/in line before the implacable iron bars.” Where the monument is placed, what it is *near*, becomes critical to lament’s task of transforming individual grief into a collective story. Unlike individual memory, national recollection takes place “out there, in the world,” as Morrison says. Just as ghosts are bound to the places they haunt, so, too, lament’s grief-time needs the setting of its trauma site. In rural Greece, it is common for women to perform laments on the graves of their beloved dead (Caraveli 1986; Danforth and Tsiaras 1982). Even when Akhmatova’s speaker imagines her “blissful death,” she fears “to lose the banging of that odious gate.” The gate is the marker of her bereavement, the barrier she lined up beside: it is the metonym she chooses to define her posthumous existence in the collective story.

In addition to fearing the disremembering of the gate, she fears to lose the image of “the old crone howling like a wounded beast.” The old crone: the bereaved woman. Her wordless howl contains multitudes. It is the heart-song of atrocity’s inverted sublime. Along with murder, rape, displacement, and the rest, her howl is one of the atrocities, and it, too, must be recollected by generations to come. The point is not to overwhelm the living with the ghostly rage and sorrow of the dead, but to bequeath to the victims the justice of a monument—to lay the jasmine wreath. Then, those who lament may move through the sacred repetition of their griefs, become charged again with conscious innocence, and find the strength to resurrect their world.

In this fugue of comparative reflections, what I hope to have shown is that, as a mode, lament speaks in a particular register, the grammar and syntax of which appear repeatedly in national literatures the world over. Lament forms an important part of a rights culture without borders. Its special language is comprised of a widely adopted set of literary devices: the

images of renewal, resurrection, the inverted sublime, the speaking ghost, and the weeping mother; the figures of parataxis, metonym, synecdoche, and prosopopeia; and the grief-time chronotope. Some of these devices have historically travelled from place to place through demonstrable channels of cultural transmission, but no direct influence is required to explain why national expressions of the mode are so similar. Rather, as in Darwin's theory of convergent evolution, parallel problems often result in the emergence of parallel solutions, even without inheritance. The literary mode of lament is globally dispersed because lament writers around the world have had to address similar needs: to express public grief, establish recollections, and seek reconciliation. These are the same needs addressed by truth commissioners and other participants in the rebuilding efforts known as transitional justice. As a symbolic, affective expression that supports a social ethos of truth and reconciliation, lament prepares the public to embrace more formal, legal mechanisms. Lament writers play a critical role in the human rights drama of civic repair.

### References

Alexiou M (1974) *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Bakhtin M M (1981) *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*. In: Holquist M (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination*. University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, 84-258.

Best M, Long W J, Etherton J, and Smyth T (2011) *Rich Digital Media as a Tool in Post-Conflict Truth and Reconciliation*, in *Media, War & Conflict* 4.3: 231-249.

Borer T (2012) (ed.) *Media, Mobilization, and Human Rights*. Zed Books, New York.

Burke E (1992) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. In: Adams H (ed.) *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 298-306.

Butler J (2004) *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, New York.

Bystrom K (2012) *Literature and Human Rights*. In: Cushman T (ed.) *Handbook of Human Rights*. Routledge, New York, 637-646.

Caraveli A (1986) *The Bitter Wounding: The Lament as Social Protest in Rural Greece*. In: Dubisch J (ed.), *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 169-194.

Caruth C (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Cubilié A (2005) *Women Witnessing Terror: Testimony and the Cultural Politics of Human Rights*. Fordham, New York.

Danforth, L M and Tsiaras A (1982) *The Death Rituals of Ancient Greece*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Dawes J (2007) *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity*. Harvard, Boston.

Felman S and Laub D (1991) *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. Routledge, New York.

Forché C (1993) (ed.) *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*. W. W. Norton, New York.

Galchinsky M (2012) *Framing a Rights Ethos: Artistic Media and the Dream of a Culture without Borders*. In: Borer T (ed.) *Media, Mobilization, and Human Rights*, Zed Books, New York, 67-95.

Galloway, S (2008) *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. Riverhead Books, New York.

Gobodo-Madikizela, P (2003) *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid*. Mariner Books, New York.

Hayner P (2011) *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Routledge, New York.

Kant I (1986) *The Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Meredith J C. Oxford, New York.

Katz, S T; Biderman, S; Greenberg, G (2007) (ed.) *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Koff C (2004) *The Bone Woman: A Forensic Anthropologist's Search for Truth in the Mass Graves of Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo*. Random House, New York.

Krog, Antjie (2000) *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*. Three Rivers Press, New York.

Lekha Sriram C, Martin-Ortega O, and Herman J (2010) *War, Conflict, and Human Rights: Theory and Practice*. Routledge, New York.

Longinus (1992) *On the Sublime*. In: Adams H (ed.) *Critical Theory Since Plato*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 75-98.

Millar G (2011) *Local Evaluations of Justice through Truth Telling in Sierra Leone: Postwar Needs and Transitional Justice*. *Human Rights Review* 12.4: 515-535.

Miller B and Schweitzer P (2006) *The Art of Survival: A Conversation with Dori Laub, M.D.* *Reading On 1.1*: 1-14.

Morrison T (1987) *Beloved*. New American Library, New York.



Reeder R (2006) (ed.) *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova*. Zephyr Press, Boston.

Schaffer K and Smith S (2004) *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Sikkink K (2011) *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions are Changing World Politics*. W. W. Norton, New York.

Slaughter J (2007) *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. Fordham, New York.

Sophocles (1984) *Antigone*. In: Fagles F (trans.) *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*. Penguin, New York.

Stassen J P (2006) *Deogratias*. First Second, New York.

Swanson-Goldberg E and Schultheis Moore A (2012) *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*. Routledge, New York.

Whitman W (2009) *Song of Myself*. In: Loving J (ed.) *Leaves of Grass*. Oxford, New York.

Wieselhaus-Brahm E (2010) *Truth Commissions and Transitional Societies: The Impact on Human Rights and Democracy*. Routledge, New York.

Wordsworth, W (2013) Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey. In: Halmi N (ed.)

Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose, 65-70. W. W. Norton, New York.