

Spring 2015

Presentation on Chang-rae Lee's The Surrendered Day 3

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Repository Citation

Strombeck, A. (2015). Presentation on Chang-rae Lee's The Surrendered Day 3. .
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A black and white photograph of a dirt road. On the left, a portion of a vehicle is visible. Several people are walking along the road, some carrying items. The background shows trees and utility poles. A white box with a red border is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text.

Chang-rae Lee, *The Surrendered*
Day 3

Today

- Rehearse what we've learned/concluded about the relationship between narrative/story and atrocity/violence
- Examination of Lee formal strategies in telling stories of characters in *The Surrendered*
- Relationship between bodily experiences (pain, sex, and so on) and narrative

Based on our discussion so far

- Write down whatever you have concluded about the relationship between storytelling and atrocity/violence.

One way to think of this relationship

- Critics Cathy Caruth, Shoshona Feldman: trauma studies (critical school popular in early 1990s). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*(1994), *Testimony* (1992)
- Drawing on theories of Sigmund Freud, others, Caruth and Feldman argue that narrative helps readers/writers negotiate and discover places where memory and understanding fail.
- In telling story, reader/listener recognizes form of relation to violence
- In Richard Bausch's *Peace* Marson and others can never "process" the episode with the dead woman, but the *attempt* tells us
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But

- Other writers and critics (Sally Bachner *The Prestige of Violence*) argue that to say “violence can’t be written” is to say “I’ve figured out the answer”
- For Bachner, literary representations of violence = somewhat false because reader is always at a remove from person experiencing violence

What does this passage suggest about storytelling in *The Surrendered*?

- For with the bright daylight the past reared up, the name of June its unexpected summons. *June, from the war.* He almost wished now that Tick had gotten the best of him, put him in the emergency room at Hackensack. He'd have to forget all over again (97).
- “But of course Nicholas, an imaginative and artistic young boy, had begun to reconstruct what he wanted from whatever she said, to build up his own mythologies, until an irresistible mystery naturally emerged” (50).

Form of *The Surrendered*

- Each chapter depicts a different time and space (with some continuities)
- Lee: novel in general “delights in the interlacing of chronologies and the consequences of that interlacing”
- Our question: how do Lee’s formal strategies help readers process violent experiences?

Body and storytelling

- I'm fascinated in this book by how people get through the day. The aches and pains and wellings that they have. Not just erotic, but of illness. I spent a lot of time on June and her body and how she struggles with this flesh of hers that doesn't recognize her will to live. Hector struggles with his beauty and his imperviousness. He's immortal and yet he desperately wants to die, to erase himself. And Sylvie has her problem with drugs. I think they all wanted to forget they were trapped in their bodies. What is Eros but the life force? That's what these folks are trying to tap into. It's a mode of survival and enduring. And being present.

Memory

- Look at the moment when June does remember 58-60
- What circumstances allow her to remember?

Body and story

- Benjamin—moment where body enters story
- Both *Peace* and *The Surrendered* have characters overcome with what Lee calls "aches and pains and wellings" How does this sense of being in the body relate to storytelling?
- Choose a moment when one of the characters is experiencing bodily pain...