Presentation on Chang-rae Lee's The Surrendered Day 4

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Chang-rae Lee, *The Surrendered*

Day 4
Today

• Examination of Lee formal strategies in telling stories of characters in *The Surrendered*
• Relationship between bodily experiences (pain, sex, and so on) and narrative
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?
For your group’s chapter

• Use the Chapter Worksheet provided
• Spend 2-3 minutes taking notes on the chapter’s contents.
• As a group, discuss and fill out each section of the worksheet
• Chapters: 6, 7, 8, 9
Body and Narrative: How would you describe Sylvie here?

• Each time she’d take a little more, Jim warning her to be careful and that it was not meant for a healthy young woman, but she knew she wasn’t a tenth as sturdy as she appeared to Jim or to her aunt or to everyone else who saw her as a beautiful, somewhat aloof, scholarly girl who had so quickly righted herself after such a lamentable family tragedy, whose good long years spanned out freely before her (225)
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.
Body and Narrative

• Benjamin—moment where body enters story
• But also Elaine Scarry *The Body in Pain* (1983): some bodily pain, like torture, cannot be communicated
• Both Peace and The Surrendered have characters overcome with what Lee calls " aches and pains and wellings"
• Our question: what are the different relationships that *The Surrendered* articulates between the body and narrative?
But the recent past was a well-rutted road, still the only way she knew to get back and forth to the present, and as she went to her classes at the college, attended church with Aunt Lizzie, a part of her couldn’t help but wish to run to Jim and the pitch-black room at the factory, drink in the potion and transmogrify, be anything but her mortal self (225).

How does this relate to past violence, such as that described on the first paragraph of 236?

Where do we see other characters acting similarly?