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**LITERARY AND CINEMATIC MELANCHOLIA:  
WOOLF, LISPECTOR, VON TRIER**

MA Thesis

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## Preface

*The anguish of beginning signals the difficulty of the enterprise.*

*(Földényi: 3)*

To begin, I will start from the beginning. Having been overjoyed by my acceptance to the MA programme to study Comparative Literature at the University of Tartu in the summer of 2019, the farthest thought in my mind was the topic of my final, and inescapable, thesis, the position of which, for better or worse, it maintained for the good part of the studies due to different reasons. But why did I choose to continue studies in literature after all? Well, the answer is rather simple, or even simplistic as some would say, I yearned to feel as if the world of literature was – as corny as it may sound – my oyster, having dreamed so long of immersing my entire being in words, ideas and theories, open to whatever came my way. Thus, the boundless world of letters at last would lay before me, and I was ready to commence innumerable journeys under the guidance of my professors. Picking a specific topic and a point of research early on, as practical as it would sound, felt acutely narrowing to me, as if I was asked to look at something so incredibly vast and extraordinary as literature through the limiting zoom-in of the binocular instead of pure and broad eyesight. Indeed it was only later that I realised the importance of looking at something very closely in order to understand anything at all.

I thought long and hard about what it is that really interested me about literature, trying with very little success to push past the answer “Everything!”, and so I came up with a scrap of a title: “The Liberating Effect of the Literature of Suffering”. For all I knew, I had been deeply moved by books that were simultaneously sad to the bone and beautiful to the core, gravely and desperately questioning yet bright and lucid, one of the most poignant examples of which, for me, was and still is Fernando Pessoa's 1982 posthumously published *The Book of Disquiet* (*Livro do Desassossego*), which remains a flourishing piece of inspiration throughout the writing of this study. It was then that after some discussion, one of the professors, Arne Merilai, thought perhaps it might be melancholia that I should like to take a look into. I did and here I am – having at last arrived to what seemed to be future not so long ago.

*March 3, 2021*

*Tallinn*

The aim of this thesis is to provide a conceptual framework through which manifestations of melancholia could be examined in the case studies. In the introduction, melancholia's cultural history will be presented, followed by discussion on the agencies of time and loss when it comes to practices of intensely melancholic self-reflections that contribute greatly to subject formation. In the case studies, I will focus my attention on what is distinctive to melancholia through the Heideggerian sense of mood in the examples of modernist and postmodernist literature as well as in the medium of cinema. The works of analysis thus include Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva*, and Lars von Trier's, very conveniently titled indeed, *Melancholia*. In these, signals of melancholia will be identified in metaphors and lack of faith in language's reliability, reactions to time and loss, self-reflective pursuit of identity and formal manifestations of melancholia. The study will come to a close in a conclusive summary, presenting the findings of the thesis.

# 1. Introduction

*It is beyond our reach. Yet there I venture.*  
(Woolf 2016: 98)

## 1.1 What I Talk About When I Talk About Melancholia

Different studies on the concept agree, in spite of so much that we still cannot put our finger on, that the phenomenon that is known as melancholia calls forth affects such as grief, sadness, despondency (Flatley: 1), but also, at times, joy (Kristeva: 21). To put it broadly, it seems to be a state that vacillates between grieving and yearning (Middeke and Wald: 3). It has also been thought that being subjected to melancholia is often accompanied by intense efforts to reach some truth or knowledge about things that more often than not do not yield easy answers. For example, Fernando Pessoa, one of the biggest melancholics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, comments on the innate limitedness of the human mind: “But something always eludes us, there is always some analysis that slips our grasp; the truth, albeit false, is always just around the corner” (Pessoa: 250). The objective of this thesis is thus to examine what there is to know about melancholia's search for light, and likewise, what is there to learn from darkness.

Quite often, varied and intriguing metaphors, each aiming to capture the essence of melancholia in a nutshell, are made up by relying on an image to impart what it encompasses, in order to produce a compelling evocation of its intrinsic qualities. To name a few, “the evening twilight devil” (Nietzsche 1883), “the intimate confidant” (Brady 2003), “the black sun” (Kristeva: 3), “the ghost of sadness” (Undusk: 25). What these image-driven definitions of melancholia suggest is that the phenomenon is difficult to define, and also that figurative language and melancholia go hand in hand from the start. These images give ground to faint impressions not clear-cut answers. The power of metaphors lie in the symbolic rendering of the thing itself, and this is what will be seen in the case studies as well, where I hope to open up the suggestive meanings found in each cultural context. Drawing on George Lakoff's ideas on metaphors, Francesco Sticchi indicates how metaphor is “not as much a figure of speech as a cognitive model through which physical /.../ experience can be associated with abstract thought” (Sticchi: 3). Melancholia's complexity and paradoxical nature lead to more questions than answers, but by way of “these cognitive conceptualisations we can organise the world and interact with our fellow humans, trying

to understand their perceptions and values” (ibid.). Some of the images refer to melancholia as closely linked with depression, but in this study, the objective is slightly more directed towards what there is to notice of melancholia's, to use Jonathan Flatley's phrase, “antidepressive” qualities (Flatley: 41). However, let it be very clear that this is in no way to extol severe depression by romanticising melancholia. Rather, it is a peek into what one can learn from melancholia, the interest in the love part, without cancelling out its opposite: “We have a love-hate relationship with melancholy, recognising its potential, yet fearing its connotations” (Bowring: 18).

Therefore, to fix an image that would serve to communicate just this specific view on the concept, I propose the image of a setting sun. Why? Anyone who has watched the sun set has noticed that it is over before it started. The sunset is as if an epitome of the transience of time, reminding us of the transience of our own lives. It is the component of bittersweetness that sometimes takes hold in the chest after a graceful sunset. It is the sadness of an ending, but also hope for a new day. For after the sun sets, it will rise up again. To compare depression and melancholia, the former can be seen as an unending night whereas the latter is more about grieving for yesterday yet yearning for another tomorrow to come alight. It is a hope for continuity despite all the odds.

## **1.2 Cultural History of Melancholia**

Melancholia, as it has become clearer in the readings of different studies and approaches, is not something that can be fully discussed without referring to the cultural context of a given point of time in history in which each individual inevitably finds themselves. For a long time, it seemed to me as if being melancholy was mostly related to one's distinctive nature of the soul and personal history. It is not to say that individual reactions to loss are non-existent, but rather it goes to suggest that the discourse of melancholia can be discussed as part of much larger systems like cultural theories, medicine, arts, philosophy, anthropology and so on (Middeke and Wald: 1-9). What comes under examination in this thesis is precisely how the roots of melancholia become established in the collective human imagination, which to a crucial extent is able to influence an individual's sense of self as in relation to the world. Consequently, what is deemed uniquely personal to oneself cannot be quite separated from the point of time in history which people inhabit. According to Walter Benjamin, our personal histories are enmeshed with our collective history for we are born into and continue to be shaped by cultures, sciences, atmospheres, and other people with whom we share mutual space, history and traditions, as we make up complex systems that undergo changes over

time (Benjamin 1974). Therefore, in studying melancholia as a cultural phenomenon, it should be considered and probed in the vein of Benjamin: “[t]he past carries a secret index with it, by which it is referred to its resurrection. Are we not touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before?” (ibid.)

Equating sadness with melancholia may come easily, but the very distinction between the two is exactly that “sadness is generic, [but] melancholy is culturally inflected, and has been since its origins” (Bowring: 32). If we agree that it is culturally inflected, we also concur that treatments of melancholia are most likely to differ across sets of cultures. It should be therefore noted that the focus of this study is on the arts and theory of the Western part of the world. Therefore, in order to examine melancholia, a period of time that is of interest should be outlined in relation to the phenomenon to see what is in it that produces certain tendencies in how the world and one's own subjectivity is perceived. As a result, the enigmatic nature of incommunicability of the intensity of feeling and thought, which one may experience when melancholy (Kristeva: 42), is not that painfully singular when we are able to fathom the interrelation of aspects that contribute to the emergence of such a specific disposition in people. In this research of melancholia, a more nuanced view has opened up after studying the efforts of numerous thinkers, who have endeavoured to define what it stands for and examine the way it finds representation in the aesthetic practices, which have been of great support in the case studies of this thesis. It has been a collective effort from the beginning, which I hereby, by writing this thesis, continue.

The cultural history of melancholia suggests that there is really no one way to sum up what it constitutes, referring to the concept's puzzling nature. A Hungarian thinker, László F. Földényi has thus claimed: “When melancholia made its first appearance as a concept, everything that might be said was said about it. From the very beginning, however, the “elusiveness” of the concept was conspicuous, and later ages were unable to alter that. No unequivocal, accurate definition of melancholia exists” (Földényi: 6). It is however largely agreed on that melancholia seems to entail intense emotional, and/or accompanied by physical, suffering on an existential level, which poses great difficulty in verbally relating that state of being. What is also intriguing is that the discourse of melancholia pans over different disciplines, including art, sciences and philosophy, showing its attention-worthy embeddedness, as well as curious agency, in various spheres of life (Middeke and Wald: 1-9). A brief overview of the history of the interpretation of melancholia, and its strong connection to arts, from antiquity up to Renaissance seems to be a welcome starting point, which will be followed by a more specific look into the Romantic, Decadent and then concluded with the examination of the Modernist sense of melancholia and its representations in greater length.

When it comes to melancholia's history, it is noteworthy that the biggest discrepancy seems



to have been whether it is an acceptable part of human nature, with an important role to play, or more akin to a pathology, to be cured once and for all. In antiquity, Aristotle regarded humans as consisting of different bodily substances of which the curious black bile, or to be exact, the excess of it, was thought to be the cause for melancholic temperament, a “paradox of the “normally abnormal” (Bowring: 32). He also linked melancholia with genius, without understating the accompanying suffering through which “an avenue to deeper insight” was thought to have been fostered by the disposition (Middeke and Wald: 1). In the medieval times, however, the signs of melancholia were equalled with the sin of acedia, as well as an ill behaviour before God. As a result, the concept was pathologised. The era of Renaissance witnessed a rise in the emergence of heroic melancholia, leading to an artistically constructed type. For example, Shakespeare's Hamlet was often emulated, his tragedy and sadness romanticised. What also deserves mentioning is Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), a monumental treatise on melancholia, where he put down the famous lines: “If any man except against the matter or manner of treating of this my subject, and will demand a reason for it, I can allege more than one; I write of melancholy by being busy to avoid melancholy” (Burton: 18), which has evolved into a widespread practice undertaken by those subject to melancholia's elements since then. (Flatley: 35-38)

During Romanticism, melancholia became the most dominant mood in the field of arts, especially in poetry, after all, it became the Romantic poet's mood by default. For Keats, it referred to “a mode of intensified reflection and self-consciousness, and the suffering accompanying it a soul-ennobling force” (Flatley: 38), as can be seen in his poem “Ode on Melancholy”. This echoes what seems to be characteristic to the complex and paradoxical nature of melancholia – the very notion that “joy cannot be had without anguish” (Kermode: 14), a Romantic notion that will be an important point of examination in the case studies. The representations of melancholia in predominantly lyrical poetry relied on distinctive imagery and motifs that served to convey the poet's sense of himself in relation to the world, the sense of which communicated, amongst else, severe loneliness and anxiousness caused by the overwhelming perplexity of the world. For example, the use of such motifs as the night, hills, thick forests and deep valleys communicated the sublime gloom of the soul, one's sorrowful existence. The colours and sounds also helped to form the background from which confessions of the soul could be voiced that served to convey melancholy mood. Though writing seemed to bring some relief, then paradoxically it further fuelled the sense of isolation for to create meant to “be cut off from life and action /.../ as a [necessary] preparation of the 'vision'” (ibid. 9). It was also in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when melancholia started to acquire a closer connotation of a disease as the sciences developed, and the revival of the phenomenon began to die a slow death (Földényi: 252-253).

As this thesis is interested in the way how the characteristics of a given time in history influence the examination of melancholia, it is important to point towards what formed the cultural background of Romanticism, or what were the sources for the melancholy mood. For one, it was the increasing attention to one's inner life as it was subjectively felt, a conspicuous shift of focus from the external to the internal. Additionally, the Romantic ideas began to imbue into the arts, literature and philosophy already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe as a way to counter the rational stance on life, which was characteristic to the Enlightenment era. This is why the interest into the dark side of the human nature, mysticism and the irrational really took ground, and began to be sought in order to foster creativity, get inspiration, and ultimately, reach hidden truths (Talvet, *II*: 303-306). In this, a rebellion against ready-made clear-cut answers arose, which went to have great influence on the 20<sup>th</sup> century thought. Therefore, melancholia did not emerge from some exceptionally private grievance, but it was the surrounding atmosphere in Europe that gave way to how artists felt inside and chose to express it. As a result, the subject matter in the arts became the egocentrically perceived mystical cosmos of one's own soul. It was also acutely felt that "the truth" as such was inaccessible, giving way to philosophical discussions on the biggest questions of life and death that could not and cannot be answered conclusively due to the limitedness of the human mind. Thus, Romanticism served as a turning point during which growing subjectivity started to take root, in which "[m]elancholic suffering caused by life becomes the basis of a new life" (Földényi: 215) as it deeply influenced one's ideas of their own existence.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a need for change was in the air which opposed the approach to subject and form that had been made use of throughout the century. One of the movements that served to counter the rationalist-scientific and positivist mentality as well as the periods in the literature and arts of the previous century, and thus greatly influenced Modernism, was Decadence. A Decadent view to the world was rather pessimistic, but it differed drastically from the Romantic one, where the poets imparted spiritual sorrow that accompanied the search for truth, beauty and elevation of the soul. Decadence, however, is characterised by a strong tendency towards taking pleasure from decline in different spheres of life, including morality, lifestyle and faith (Talvet, *III*: 213-214). Decadents often suffered from mental and physical decay, which made them very sensitive to the outside stimuli. Baudelaire, the father of Decadence, put down in his writings the acute sense of ennui, the vacuity of the world by bringing "attention on what had been lost, and thus also, by way of these losses, on the specificity of the present moment" (Flatley: 69), through which he let "the reader see that it is the product of specific historical processes, and thereby also connected to a shared situation" (ibid.). Thus, his poetry "holds in his hands the scattered fragments of genuine historical experience" (Benjamin 1940: 336) that merges objective and subjective experience within

a particular time in history. In the famous Decadent novel, *Against Nature* (*À rebours*) (1884) by the French writer Karl-Joris Huysmans's, the protagonist tries to find sustenance in all things artificial. He believes that he can create a paradise for himself in the ridiculous opulence of his own isolation, but he fails, and suffers miserably from illnesses of both the mind and body. It thus follows that nature is no longer a place where one goes to search for answers and meaning, as in the vein of Romanticism, and ultimately, there is no escape from oneself nor the despised world. Despite all pose and effort, at the very soul of Decadence there was immeasurable anguish. Let us consider Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, where a creation of artistic existence resulted in profound doom. At the very heart, Decadents were completely disconnected with the world in and around them.

Now, for the purpose of this study, it should be asked about the connection between Decadence and melancholia. Firstly, the economic crisis of 1873 was certainly a huge factor that turned the Western world upside down. Many of the formerly rich became poor and the structures of society naturally went through drastic changes as a result. A Decadent is “not only emotionally alienated from the world: he has been left off the map altogether” (Flatley: 68), a sense brilliantly represented in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) which is “oriented toward something irretrievably lost” (Benjamin 1940: 333). However, it seems like the loss was so fresh that it found clearer melancholy representation only in Modernist writing in the form of mourning and no longer rebellion. What is important to note is that such a collapse must have fuelled the generation of the mood of decline, and thus produced the very Decadent disposition that was expressed through aesthetic practices. In order to communicate this changed relationship to one's surroundings, a different set of poetic devices was required as “the late nineteenth century was a time whose complexity seemed to escape, more and more, traditional forms of literature and art” (Gumbrecht: 11).

The Decadent aversion to order and solidity was not carried on by the Modernists, on the contrary, it was the loss of any permanence that was now grieved. For some time now, the environment did not support the idea of wholeness. The cracks started to break down the coherence that used to be in place in the past, so the writers of Modernism dedicated themselves to relating the new atmosphere where there were no tools to be found with which one could build stability and a sense of wholeness. When it comes to melancholia, then much has been written about its connection to the Modernist period. It is widely agreed that the source of Modernist melancholia has got to do with an acute sense of loss (Middeke and Wald et al 2011), which will shortly be discussed in greater length. But let us consider the background of the era in which different senses of loss can already be noted. To start with, industrialisation changed the structures of communities where

human was replaced by machine. Secularisation meant that there was no longer a sense of absolution, leaving one to inhabit a world that no longer made sense the way it used to, thus, confidence in where meaning was to be found fell under severe questioning. Urbanisation brought more people from countryside into the bustling cities. As a result, being overexposed to sensory experience of daily life, “required people to shield themselves from the material world around them, to stop being emotionally open to that world and the people in it” (Flatley: 69). Consequently, urbanisation, among other processes of modernisation, fostered isolation and loneliness, generating distance between the self and others. This can be seen as one of the reasons why humans came to grow shells around their being as means to protect themselves, a mechanism to shield from potential shock (see Benjamin 1940). The onset of the First World War further intensified the above mentioned. What thus emerged was a disillusioned, disintegrated, and fragmentary existence in a faithless world without a clear idea how to live and what to make of life, a perspective that saw present reality as fundamentally different from that of the past.

What is more, due to the revolution of consciousness which owes much of its theorisation to the works of Freud, who based his work on his studies of literature to a large extent, a Modern subject began to take heightened notice of the potential that there is more going on inside their mind than they can gather. The protagonist in R. M. Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) verbalised just such realisation when he said: “I am learning to see. I don't know why it is, but everything enters me more deeply and doesn't stop where it once used to. I have an interior that I never knew of...” (Rilke: 5). This example might also serve to illustrate the surprise element of regarding one's self in this novel manner, as if it is a small shock to acknowledge the complexity of human mind. Especially when it comes to the unconscious where temporal levels like past, present and future exist in a chaotic manner, and through the use of the stream of consciousness, the very workings of the mind are able to make their way into the novels (Talvet, *III*: 280). Consequently, identity issues and the melancholic inability to fully grasp one's own self, become one of the main themes in Modernist writing. The emphasis, thus, concerning the subject matter of literature, turned towards the direction of inner life in even more extreme detail and multilayered sense as compared to Romanticism, which went hand in hand with the increasing subjectivity of an individual in the Modern world.

The representations of melancholia in the Modern literature are often concerned with the theme of loss which goes together with the pursuit of the knowledge of self, owing much to Freud's theories (Vermeulen: 254). To express these themes artistically, the Modernists felt a strong need for new poetic devices, as will be elaborated in more detail in the chapter concerning Virginia Woolf. But generally, what follows is the emergence of a new type of a deeply psychological novel, where

writers introduce a new treatment of time and space, becoming especially visible on the level of plot and form. This means that “melancholia is not simply depicted in, say, the psychology of a central character; it is *textually performed*: lack of closure with respect to plot is thus in part a formal expression of melancholia’s interminability” (Wollaeger and Dettmar: ix-x, their emphasis). Furthermore, plots do not tend to follow linear time, there is no clear beginning, middle and/or end. It is an open form that is now celebrated, where novels made use of complex layers, different plot lines, plurality of subjective viewpoints and/or other techniques. The illusion of order, of finality, of absolute truth, had gone, and this is a specifically Modern experience which will guide a distinctive way of interpreting melancholia by following along the text and noticing what points towards it. Consequently, novels became more fragmentary in nature, and reading them posed much more challenges than before. Intriguingly, the complexity of the new novels went to mirror, in turn, the altered experience of human complexity. In this way, technique mimed reality, and through literature we are able to face a representation of that reality. To achieve this, the consciousness of the human mind was moved to the foreground, it was the Modernist objective to try to authentically convey what is going on in the different layers of the human mind. Therefore, these detailed observations of the psyche enable better research into such intimate internal feelings and thoughts. By tracing the characters' thought processes and the underlying mood, melancholia becomes visible on the textual level in the works that are inflected with it.

What becomes evident, is the vast crevice that had come between the past and present, which would also cast a shadow over the future, and the Modern artists saw in that void their responsibility to address it through their work. As a result, what emerges is particular time-consciousness, where linearity is broken due to the break from the past, leaving one with no solid place of support. In this view, it was tradition that was gone, and its main task to connect societies and cultures “collectively to the past, that exceed our own private experience” (Flatley: 69) simply carried no longer. Evidently, private experience shadowed the collective experience, over the increasing individualisation. What followed was a predominantly anchorless existence, so visible in the Modernist literature, which continued on in different ways into postmodernist writing, with the emphasis on the very groundlessness of an individual. The chaotic sense of time that ensued, in which the present was felt as forever fleeting (Harvey: 11), crucially conveyed the sense that the “passage of time means that the world around one is forever eluding one's grasp, producing an endless accumulation of losses” (ibid.). Such Modernist notion of loss is tightly connected with the subjective experience of time and change, which may, and often does, result in what might be called, to use Anne Enderwitz's phrase, “temporal homelessness” (Enderwitz: 174). Therefore, melancholia can be seen as “the dominant socio-symbolic emblem of “modern times”” (Bahun: 23).

The well-argued researches concerning the notions of time and loss as fuelling the emergence of melancholia is found in the works of many thinkers (see Flatley 2008, Middeke and Wald (et al) 2011, Bahun 2013, Kristeva 1989, Földényi 2016, Bowring 2008), on whom I will occasionally rely on for enriching support.

### 1.3 Time, Loss and Subject Formation

*Loss is pain, but pain can be a navigational aid.*

*Jeanette Winterson (Woolf 2016: XV)*

When it comes to loss, it can be regarded as multifaceted, and does not only have to be thought of in terms of a specific period of time, but what is to be stressed is the inseparability of the sense of loss and temporality (Middeke and Wald: 4). In many ways, loss is of universal nature, but it is the above discussed Modern experience of loss, of course, that will guide this thesis fruitfully from Woolf to Lispector, and lastly to von Trier. However, for the purposes of acknowledging the broader nature of loss as in relation to time, and the involvement of these factors when it comes to the theme of becoming, which is in close relation to the 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas of subject formation, a deeper examination is required of the three notions to be better able to analyse the representations of melancholia.

To begin with, our ever elusive true nature, and the surroundings that influence us in becoming who we are, seem to change with the changing time. As Jeanette Winterson has written in the introduction of Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves*: “the sense is in the pattern and the pattern is always changing” (Winterson: XV). In other words, to understand some inner workings of life or the cosmos of the self are not a given, not stagnant, as over the course of time our understandings are prone to alter and evolve. Thus the patterns that seem clear at one point, may be completely unfathomable the next, for life is in constant flux. Time keeps on ticking, it cannot be stopped, rendering reality always a little too brief due to which it is often felt to pass too quickly in the subjectively experienced time. The subjective time and objective time do not match, which brings about a temporal discontinuity. As a result, one may lose touch with their sense of self, and/or with the world, becoming groundless in the winds and waves of life. Therefore, time is a crucial agent in causing the general sense of loss, more importantly, time itself is experienced as loss already, for the moments that make it up are inherently transitory. A fitting example of Modernist literature where the regretful nature of the ephemerality of time and a melancholic's painful reaction to it is found in Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*:

“I experience time as a terrible ache. /.../ But the good things of life, when I have to leave them and think, with all the sensitivity my nerves can muster, that I will never see or have them again, at least not as they are in that exact, precise moment, hurt me metaphysically. An abyss yawns open in my soul /.../ Time! The past! [...] What I was and will never be again! What I had and will never have again!” (Pessoa: 140).

Julia Kristeva has described melancholia as “an abyss of sorrow” (Kristeva: 3), to which Pessoa's character most likely seems to refer in the cited passage. From this also results, in Deleuze's ideas, how “we no longer take ourselves as unchanging perceivers set over and against life” (Colebrook: 128), which produces metaphysical anguish.

While one of the reactions may be to grieve the loss of time with extreme regret, and thus live in the past with all its ghosts, unable to drag oneself over to what constitutes the present reality, perhaps the other is to try to catch precisely the present moment, to embody the present moment, with each and every cell, like it was the quest of the Modernists. What is more, the Latin *modernus* in which 'modo' signifies 'just now', is indeed very telling of this quest, which postmodernist aesthetic practices further continue in its own way, as will be seen in the example of Lispector's novel. In this sense, the melancholic becomes as if “the gravedigger of the present” (Nietzsche 1874), in which one tries to hold the physicality of the present moment on the palm of one's hand, sustaining the belief that it just might be possible yet having to face the disappointment of the opposite, as will be pointed out in the case studies. To sum up:

“For the melancholic, the extension of the present moment and its exclusivity are a result of glimpsing the essence of time: for him, time is not an “objective” entity to be measured with a clock, but a function of human situations; it is not external in relation to man, but a consequence of human activity and perspective. Time and the human condition are just as indistinguishable as body and soul: their relation is characterized as one of interdependence.” (Földényi: 316)

This artificial lengthening of the moment, thus, which the speaking voice admirably performs in Clarice Lispector's novel *Água Viva*, is doomed from the beginning yet, paradoxically – for melancholia is very much inflected with paradoxes –, a melancholic's capacity to hope and believe often equals their sense of hopelessness and disbelief. Here, we may recall back on the image of the setting sun of melancholia, which I proposed in the beginning. Therefore, a melancholic mourns the past, tries to seize the present, and dreads the future, a point of finality we all arrive to sooner or

later. Perhaps it is the possibility of sooner that so dislodges a melancholic type, letting the fear of death take over. It is also the fear that there will not be enough time to figure things out. Time is an agent of pressure, no matter from which perspective one perceives it. All in all, it is the acute sense of the passing of time that produces pain and suffering, the inability to change and come to peaceful terms to that very nature of time.

Another way to interpret loss is by way of the Freudian lens, as for him the source of melancholia lies in the inability to give up, and/or even identify, the lost object (see Freud 1917). He related such essence of mourning to melancholia firstly as a kind of pathology in his foundational essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), where he argues that it is through introjection that melancholics “incorporate it [the lost object] into the ego via identification” (Enderwitz: 174), resulting in the splitting of the ego. He also commented on the inherent complexity of melancholy condition from the external perspective as “the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely” (Freud: 246). However, in his later works, he distanced the concept from pathology and instead emphasised the “importance of loss for subject formation” (Middeke and Wald: 7), which is an important theme relating to melancholia and will be discussed shortly. As a consequence of the splitting, one experiences a loss of self as a side product of the object loss – a double loss in a way – resulting in a rather incoherent sense of self, made more difficult by the complicated communication of such an enigmatic state (Kristeva: 9-11). This becomes especially curious to observe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, where the open-ended, fragmentary form and employment of the stream of consciousness method to relate inner life, become extremely meaningful uses of technique that are able to produce the effect of melancholia as if it were tangible despite its intangibility.

However, the loss does not have to, and will not, be interpreted as such in a strictly Freudian sense, but rather, it is also interesting to consider what Giorgio Agamben proposes: it is “an object of desire that is out of reach and cannot be possessed” (Enderwitz: 175). This connects with another idea which points to the broader sense of melancholia as “a deep-rooted, often unaccountable craving or a yearning for something more, different or other” (Middeke and Wald: 3). Therefore, the melancholic sense of loss, in its plurality of causal agents, denotes something that is no more and is mourned, or something that is longed for but cannot be attained, which might not even be clearly identifiable. Thus, it is an ambivalent desire, producing sorrow due to its very intangibility. In addition, the loss may have already occurred, but it may also be an anticipated future loss. Ultimately, at the very end of the road, we all must surrender and cease to be no longer. In this sense, it is the anticipation of the loss of one's own life, which the passing of time brings nearer.



Time and loss thus become inseparable, as on the one hand, the passing of time brings us closer to inevitable losses, and on the other hand, past losses find their way into the present time as ghosts. Thus, melancholia is a two-way street where past can be seen as a symbol of loss whereas future is in turn clouded by fear and/or unnamable longing.

As briefly mentioned above in relation to Freud, it is losses that form us over time. In his paper “The Ego and the Id” (1923), he arrives at the idea that melancholia is necessary as it is in part responsible for the formation of the ego, since the very creation of a “psychic entity” (Eng: 1277) requires melancholy identifications (ibid.). In this sense, “melancholia cannot be regarded as pathological. To the contrary, it must be thought of as entirely normative—as a constitutive psychic mechanism engendering subjectivity itself” (ibid.), and in turn, can be seen as “the only way to be attuned to the unavoidably melancholic nature of modern life” (Flatley: 6). Therefore, the

“theory of melancholia and in the theory of subjectivity derived from it, the past which is constituted by lost objects also shapes the present and future of the subject in a different sense. Although the ego will continue to be transformed by future attachments, these future attachments themselves are in a sense a product of the past.” (Enderwitz: 175)

In other words, the melancholy grievance of time and loss may actually help us put together ideas about who we are and why we are the way we are, potentially equipping us with a “navigational aid”, to echo Winterson, so as to better sail the seas of our lives. One of the reasons of this being the case is that a melancholic has a tendency to intensely and minutely analyse their thoughts and feelings, and the big philosophical questions, out of the great effort of which, there is the prospect of reaching safer ground (Brady 2003). Another thing is that over the course of time we are subject to change, as do the atmospheres that surround us, and throughout these individual changes, one is presented with opportunities to shape and reshape what makes up who they are, or discover and rediscover the sources of meaning, through laying claim to their very subjectivity.

Now, let us address the theme of subject formation more closely. I find this theme central to how we grow older in time is by default connected to the growing self-awareness, and the endless changes we must adapt to, be it about our identity or what is going on around us in the world at large. Therefore, these 'growing pains' that are associated with adolescents actually seem to be part of our whole lives in a way, and even more so if the current atmosphere that surrounds one does not facilitate a sense of wholeness or does not present itself as orderly and meaningful. It should be recalled that the rise of subjectivity in the age of Modernism, and the revolution of consciousness, took place in a crumbling world, which led to the recognition of the scope of loss, and the

ephemerality of all things, especially time, without any certain truths or meaning to depend on. This directed the attention on questions of life itself, including the human mind, identity and subjectivity – the nuances of which were also found paramount to be communicated through aesthetic practices of the era – were avidly researched (e. g. Freud), but despite all effort, many things remained unclear about the human psyche, as well as truth and meaning in general. In this thesis, I would like to argue that absolute clarity about these things cannot be found as the case studies also implicate. For one, we are subject to change over time, whether we like it or not, in a way that there is no definite sense of oneself that one can reach, in which respect, we are without the prospect of “ever reaching a final stage of, say, a fixed identity” (Jobst: 60).

This becomes inherently problematic for one subjected to melancholia, for the way they try to make sense of the complexity of self as well as the world surrounding them gravitates towards a rather obsessive nature, where the lack of answers is translated over into a painful lack in their ego, to which their acute self-criticism can be attributed to (Freud: 244-246). For there is the belief that the truth is somewhere, and can be found, so an intense search continues, which goes to illustrate over and over again how the destination simply cannot be reached. This is because there is no fixed destination, which is one of the ideas the reactions to which this study is seeking to examine via the representations of literary and cinematic melancholia. It will be seen in the case studies that the best thing a melancholic can reach is the idea that “there is a freedom in no longer seeing the world from our partial and moralising perspectives. In perceiving the force and power of life *that is also ourselves* we become with life, affirming its creative power: no longer reacting against life from a position of illusory human judgement. Freedom requires moving beyond the human to affirm life” (Colebrook: 129, her emphasis). In other words, by discovering that there is no permanence of self, nor the world, one can exercise their freedom to notice how all life is becoming, to use Deleuze's concept, and how a need to push oneself or the world in the limiting definitions would not bring the desired resolution (ibid. 128).

It is the constant checking into oneself and shaping of oneself in order to find resonance and resolution, so as to better navigate their individual lives as well as the world at large. The tool melancholics make great use of in this pursuit is introspective contemplation, the tracking of one's consciousness, verbalising one's psychical processes (Brady 2003), which is what the Modernists set out to represent in their writings. The inherent difficulty, however, in the quests of self-examination is that “[w]e are both the instrument of knowing and what we seek to know” (Winterson: XIV), or in other words, “[w]e are isolated within ourselves from ourselves, an isolation in which what separates us is as stagnant as us, a pool of dirty water surrounding our inability to understand” (Pessoa: 119). Precisely in this, there lay the source of the meanest of

melancholia: the very inability to understand despite all the efforts. Has not Socrates advised to “Know thyself”? I suppose many of us have discovered that there are limits as to the extent we are truly able to do that, including Pessoa when he wrote:

“To know oneself is to err, and the oracle who said 'Know thyself' proposed a task greater than all of Hercules' labours and an enigma even more obscure than that of the Sphinx.” (Pessoa: 250)

Therefore, to even begin to know oneself is constant work, and sometimes it pays off, resulting in ecstatic exaltation, and sometimes it does not, resulting in anguish, as will be seen in the poignant examples in the case studies. But even if complete knowledge of the self and the surrounding world remains unattainable, which more often than not tends to be the case, then as one reflects and observes, deeply, often existentially and philosophically, one is making the effort to get to know who they are and what is the world around them. These two are bound together, as how we feel inside is reflected back onto us since “[t]he representation of the melancholic makes a psychological state of mind correspond with the outside world” (Middeke and Wald: 1). Thus it follows when we are anxious, we also tend to perceive the world as a hostile place. When we achieve inner clarity, it is also easier to perceive the world as a place that makes sense. The process of self-reflection enables us to monitor ourselves, perhaps helping us find a more solid ground where to stand through the tackling of important questions and tending to the inner chaos in order to feel more at ease in the world. For when we try call ourselves into being, through verbal formulation, we may notice what stands in the way of becoming at peace with ourselves and the surrounding world, and by dealing with our losses, fears and troubles, there lay the capacity to be more able to detect and put out the fires that so burn us.

In conclusion, melancholia invites one, amongst else, to deal with the things that are complex, difficult and uncomfortable for us, to shed light onto aspects that otherwise remain in the dark, but that is also not to say introspection always yields answers. That is the struggle, it is where sorrow and anguish are birthed, in the inability to reach absolute knowledge of anything.

#### **1.4 Melancholy Mood in Literature and Film**

*Moods are not in us, we are in them; they go through us.  
Mood is total or totalising.  
(Flatley: 21)*

This study will employ the theory of mood as the method of analysis by which representations of melancholia are to be identified in literature and film. Firstly, I will examine the ways melancholia manifests on the subjective level as a powerfully formative mood that has its roots in the historical context. Secondly, I will examine the ways we can identify the representations of mood on the level of literary and cinematic texts by way of signs and signals that suggest the presence and performance of melancholia. In this section, I will take note of Jonathan Flatley's (2008) and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's (2012) works, both of whom base their ideas of mood on Martin Heidegger's philosophy, as they develop it into a methodological tool with which to study moods in literature, as it is also the idea in this thesis.

According to Heidegger, *Stimmung* or mood, in the broad sense, determines how a subject relates to themselves and their surroundings. For him, mood signifies the very colour of existence, a particular way of being attuned. (Heidegger 1962: 172-175) What Benjamin argues is that any kind of mood “exists only in the air we have breathed, with people we could have spoken with” (Benjamin 1974), which supports Heidegger's argument that mood is neither inside or outside a subject, but “arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being” (Heidegger 1962: 176). To examine melancholia by way of the method of mood, what gives it any relevance, and thus also merit, is that “we all only have access to the moods that we find around us, the moods into which we have been educated, and the moods that have been shaped or determined by the concrete historical context in which we coexist” (Flatley: 19-24). Having discussed above how melancholia can be studied as a cultural phenomenon that is strongly tied to a specific time period in which it is being perceived, then mood as method, is readily applicable, due to its similar origin in history. Thus, melancholia as mood doubly sheds light to the periods of time that will come under examination in the case studies.

To be overcome by a certain mood first requires the access to that mood, which is connected to a specific historical context (ibid.). For example, let us take women demanding equal rights, which in many countries today is a completely natural thing. However, it cannot go unnoticed that it is only natural and possible because of the women who began this movement in the first place a long time ago; who, through their acts paved the way for the mood of freedom of the women today. In the same way, to begin to understand what encouraged the access to melancholy mood in Modernism, we must take a look back to Romanticism and Decadence, as already discussed above, so as to recognise what contributed to the very air the modernists breathed, to echo Benjamin, for nothing exists fully in itself. It is just this type of 'historical air' in which we can detect moods that envelope us that go far back, which Benjamin seems to indicate. Therefore,

“attunements are not *side-effects*, but are something which in advance determine our being with

one another. It seems as though mood is in each case already there, so to speak, like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through.” (Heidegger 2001: 67, his emphasis)

This atmosphere, a concept that will be used in this thesis to signify just this environment into which we are born and that is already semantically rich, is what Benjamin referred to as well (Benjamin 1974). It denotes the space which we inhabit, which carries in itself traces from earlier times.

In essence, mood is not something that we call into being, but rather it calls us into being instead, through which we are able to attribute value and meaning to the world at all (Flatley: 5). If mood determines our relationship with the world, by almost literally creating “the world in which we exist at any given moment” (ibid. 19), then it goes to function as the force behind how we think and feel. How we react is concerned with the particular mood we are in because our Being-in-the-world, in Heidegger's words, is always revealed to us in a particular way, just like the world discloses itself to us in a particular way (Annus 2015). This is indeed noteworthy if we consider the discussion on deep introspection above, as it follows that the way one feels inside is projected onto the external world and vice versa through the very nature of mood. If melancholia is to be identified as a mood, then it follows that the one subjected to it is indeed totalised by it (Flatley: 21). What is thus important to emphasise is that moods are not something we can choose according to Heidegger, which renders the famous slogan, “Choose to be happy”, irrelevant as one cannot simply decide to be in such or such a mood. Therefore, it is important to note that mood is made up of far more than what is going on in one's personal life, for they are collectively formed throughout history (ibid. 19). It is also illustrated in the above discussion where it became evident how the 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes and tendencies laid the ground for the following century.

Mood is closely related to affects in the sense that mood calls forth affects, or it provides “a kind of state of readiness for some affects and not others (i.e., in an irritable mood some things are annoying that otherwise may not be)” (Flatley: 17). Affects need objects to come into existence, whereas moods “seem to come over us without reason” (Brady 2003)(see also Heidegger 1962: 173). The affect theory is a flourishing field today that is growingly used to study literature, society, culture and other fields of research, but since mood and affect are often used largely interchangeably (e.g. see Sharma and Tygstrup 2015), then this study will not aspire to go much deeper into the issue. For it is not the objective to investigate affects in great detail, but rather to analyse mood in a broader sense, as a cultural phenomenon, as stated above. Generally, however, affectivity may be regarded in the following way:

“Affectivity has to do with the **attunement** of our being, the somehow intangible but nonetheless absolutely seminal mode in which we find ourselves energised or discouraged, receptive or hostile, inspired or put back by a given situation. Affectivity in this sense is what tinges or colours the way in which we take part in the environments we find ourselves placed into.” (ibid. p. 14, my emphasis)

I put the special emphasis on attunement, to show the overlapping of the two concepts. It remains that feelings, emotions, moods, and affects serve to influence the way we interact with and respond to the world, corresponding to Heidegger's ideas of *Stimmung*. For example, for Freud, melancholia signifies mourning, while Julia Kristeva suggests that the fundamental feeling of sadness which melancholia forces upon one “leads us into the enigmatic realm of *affects*—anguish, fear, or joy” (Kristeva: 21, her emphasis). In this view, mood is something that is general that overcomes one as an external force that is already found in the particular atmosphere one inhabits and spends their lives in. Since the mood of melancholia attains its interpretations through cultural history, the aesthetic practices that communicate these moods often point to the “complex historical realities [that] gave them their full resonance” (Gumbrecht: 2). For example, if someone were to, after a hundred years, study the literature of 2020s, and pay attention to melancholia as mood, then it will be unavoidable to note the impact of events that coloured the period a certain way, for “atmospheres and moods /.../ affect out psyche” (ibid. p. 4). What should be indeed highlighted is that our physical existence in the world is closely entwined with, and as a result deeply affected by, our encounters with others as well as objects, which we may or may not fathom (Annus: 2015). Thus, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht advocates reading for *Stimmung* that indeed makes for an interesting point of departure in literary studies that I happily implement as method in this thesis, for:

“the idea of *Stimmung*, time and again, has displayed the capacity to reveal new aspects of meaning. Perhaps the adaptability of the concept will make it possible to overcome its current irrelevance and, in future semantic configurations, reveal an unexpected potential for meaning.” (Wellbery 2003).

What Gerard Ronge also notes is Gumbrecht's incentive that aims towards the more liberal use of *Stimmung* to be employed in studying different cultural texts, which enables us, researchers, to creatively utilise it as a tool to examine not only a mood experienced by a subject in a kind of isolated manner, but likewise to see how it can be broadened to analyse historical moments, or periods of time in history (Ronge: 70).

Before I move on to delineate the signs of melancholy representations as mood in literary and cinematic texts, it is necessary to point out what is particular to these modes of art. Each mode has its own set of tools, methods and techniques that are employed to produce certain effects that are able to convey moods. All three case studies are seen to perform as telling examples of “the nature of art's epistemological relationship to life” (Fitz: 433), by conveying a mood, the representations of which can be detected and analysed in connection to the discourse of melancholia.

When it comes to film, I will focus on the film's capacity to show the inner atmosphere by focussing on the body as body language is able to reveal a character's psyche by way of particular camerawork. For example, close-up shots make it possible to perceive a character in a very intimate way, allowing for the smallest details to achieve great power of communication. Sound, colour, sensitivity of the camera and montage also contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of a mood in film. What is shown in the film by way of images, with its added sound effects and colour schemes, requires relatively different methods and approaches in writing. When it comes to film, for Deleuze “the very mode of cinematic form altered the possibilities of thinking and imagining” (Colebrook: 29). “Only with cinema can we think of a mode of 'seeing' that is not attached to the human eye” (ibid.), resulting in way of “reception of data that is not located in a subject“ (ibid.). Films are made of images, and its textuality is made up of audiovisual properties whereas literature's textuality in this sense is more straightforward as it has got to do with the written word. Whatever musicality or special effect or colour must be conveyed by a single tool that is language.

What both modes of art share is the attention on form when it comes to meaning-making techniques. As discussed above, the Modernist period saw a rather experimental renovation of the novel genre with the complex renderings of temporality, fragmentariness, non-linearity, multiple plotlines, plurality of viewpoints and open-endedness and so on, resulting in new ways of narration. Such keywords often characterise cinema as well, where complex films provide challenges in interpretation, which make for fertile cases of study. It will be seen how the fragmentary and weak narrativity will come to mirror the crisis of identity, as well as the crisis of the world, via “a crisis of form, a disruption of narrative, and a decrease in narrativity” (Frink: 135). Therefore, the formal representations of melancholia become curious carriers of meaning, by supporting the overall mood in examples of aesthetic practices, and complimenting it further. In the novels and the film, the way the narrative is shaped will then be examined in order to notice how it works to communicate the mood. In this view, *what* is said or shown becomes as important as *how* something is said or shown, as the narrative is organised in such a way that it starts to perform the crisis. Since those subjected to melancholia are unable to understand themselves, then what happens in turn is that their

“narrative lacks the specific temporal and causal-motivational markers required for coherent storytelling” (Frink: 139). In this sense, narratives are to be seen as affective instruments rather than just empty frames, as Stephanie Frink proposes (see Frink 2015).

In order to examine how melancholia finds manifestations in literature and film, I am going to pay attention, depending on the case study, to metaphors, the tone, rhythm, grammar, colours, sounds and formal expressions. Let us remember that images and objects produce affects that correspond to one's attunement. Aesthetic practices, like literature and film, “allow us to become by creating affects that transform what we take experience to be” (ibid. 126). These signals are going to be addressed so as to examine melancholy responses to the sense of loss, relationship with time and challenges of subject formation, all of which contribute to the generation of the mood in the first place. Therefore, great emphasis is placed on language, together literature and film raise the important question of language's ability to communicate what is essentially incommunicable, as melancholia especially is often thought to be (see Kristeva 1989; Wilczek: 244-245).

In literary examples, I will pay attention to the role of time, how it is written, as the writing mirrors the distinctive ways time is experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I will examine the melancholy response to the ceaseless becoming that underlies subject formation in a world where knowledge of the different layers of the mind becomes clearer, where identity is seen as of plural nature. Text is the vehicle of literary and cinematic creation, the base of the images inherent in art; it is language by way of which we form thoughts and express ourselves artistically. Moods, affects, feelings and emotions are experienced internally and can be exteriorised through language, including body language. It is through language that we think, feel and place ourselves in the world, or at least try to. What becomes expressed, thus, is “the passage of life within language” (Deleuze: 5), through which we also employ our imagination, at the centre of which lies this “allegorical mode of looking” (Flatley: 37); it is this “liberation to imagine how the world might be transformed” (ibid.). Consequently, we find that “the personification of melancholia is situated in allegorical or symbolical spaces” (Middeke and Wald: 1). It is often portrayed in metaphors and other different figures of speech that require imaginative thinking, furthermore, the link between creativity and melancholia has long been noted ever since antiquity. This may be due to the fact that, as established, melancholia is an elusive concept, so it is no surprise that in trying to express it, one might not be able to do it in a straightforward way. As Maarja Kangro has written “being becomes being when it is symbolic, represented and recorded in language” (Kangro 2010, my translation), but for a melancholic it poses great challenges, as will be seen in the case studies.

Lastly, I will be very interested in the meaningful interactions between subject and form. Thoughts come from out of nowhere, the past, present and future mingle into one and become



almost inseparable. There is no true beginning, middle and end. As discussed, melancholics are often found to be in a temporal predicament, subject to the winds of time, which is one of the sources of the very experience of melancholia, which as mentioned, is rather difficult to express. It is often that works that are saturated with melancholy mood result in what may be described as examples of anti-narrativity or weak narrativity. Following the inner monologue, the consciousness available to the reader, the latter discovers that what is lacking is coherence. Such novels are often lyrical, where the central theme is the subject herself: experiences, feelings, thoughts, everything that relates to inner life. Therefore, the sense of melancholia lies in the inability to become what one desires, and what one desires defies adequate communication. Hence the metaphors, the fragmentary form, the non-narrativity. To conclude, let us again recall: “melancholia is not simply depicted in, say, the psychology of a central character; it is *textually performed*: lack of closure with respect to plot is thus in part a formal expression of melancholia’s interminability” (Wollaeger and Dettmar: ix-x, their emphasis).

What becomes apparent regarding the topic of this thesis is that “discourses of melancholic loss often intersect and culminate in art” (Middeke and Wald: 17), which is why it is especially worthwhile to study such cases and see what the types and sources of the representations may be. By noticing how a subject engages with their ideas of self and how the world discloses itself to one, we may find clues about how the cultural and historical context participate in and influence the emergence of the mood of melancholia.

## 2. Modernist Melancholia in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931)

It finds mentioning in nearly every treatise on Modernist melancholia, as referenced above, that the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is heavily saturated with a deep sense of loss, which can be seen as rooted in the cultural context. As pointed out in the introduction, the processes of modernisation brought about a great change in the perception of the world and what it is like to be human in that world, with a particular psychological interest in the internal life, and especially, the darker pathways of the human soul. What had thus far provided orderly structure had fallen apart. It appears that the autonomy of the arts became an important quest for Modernists, indeed, which deserves to be recognised, in a way, as a continuation of the quest that had already begun by the Romantic poets, but in a drastically altered world. The 1920s and 1930s were dominated by especially innovative and experimental writing that aimed to step up against the traditional conventions of writing, in order to achieve creative freedom and express the Modernist ideas.

In terms of the subject matter, the emphasis was deemed important to be placed on the very present moment, one that is gone before it is caught. Such was the influence of the period, which “not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterised by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself” (Harvey: 12). It might be then interpreted that during a time of great change and transformation, one recognises the difficulty to remain grounded, and thus searches rescue in the immediacy of being, in the closeness of reality. In order to find integrity in the spheres of self as in relation to the world, utmost attentiveness was put on one's movements of the soul, as becomes evident in the literature of the period, which moved more and more into the realm of the inner life of an oftentimes suffering subject. Therefore, the change in the general atmosphere brought forth change on the inside of the Modern subject, for mood, in its intrinsic totality, is of cultural and historical origin, through the literary analysis of which “readers encounter past realities” (Gumbrecht: 14). To say that mood, as an “affective atmosphere” (Flatley: 19), is culturally and historically inflected suggests that the surrounding context in which we all grow up in and continue to be formed at one time or another, has a power to precondition us affectively, which is why “*Stimmung* is a collective, public phenomenon, something inevitably shared” (ibid. 22). In essence, it refers to the temporal continuity falling apart, which resulted in an incoherent outlook on the self in the world. From that place of instability, the attempts to generate a definitive sense of anything remained a challenge of the highest order.

## 2.1 Virginia Woolf and Modern Fiction

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) experienced her share of struggles in her life, all of which came to be far too much as evident from her suicide. To be a woman writer at that time posed challenges, which Woolf bravely took on, however, the pressure was not only from society, but also from her father, who is widely cast as a “tempestuous and possibly damaging force in Woolf’s psychological landscape” (Stewart: 133), who embodied “a singularly dark patriarchal archetype of paternal possession, aggression, and suppression” (ibid.). She was not able to write until her father died, until that head of authority disappeared, and Woolf finally knew she could and would write (ibid. 139). To move along the lines of Freud’s theory of melancholia and the split ego, as discussed in the introduction, let us consider what Stewart proposes: “melancholia was an important aspect of her internalised identification with her father *and* the corollary intra-psychic condition which that identification evoked” (ibid. 137). It might be gathered that Woolf’s “psychological disquiet” (ibid.) potentially forms the background of the struggles of self-hood that run through all her works. If she already had a predilection towards the heaviness of the soul, the surrounding world certainly did nothing to alleviate it. She seems to have made use of her disquiet, her melancholia, to produce works that mirrored it by trying to communicate her experiences of the changed world. Thus, what remains is her “ability to construct an artful reality, her ability /.../ was a capability she brought *to* her melancholy, not an ability emerging *from* her melancholy” (ibid. 142, her emphasis), for she could have subjected herself to wallowing in her distress, but instead she faced it and tried to understand it, as in the vein of Robert Burton, though in the form of fiction.

One of her literary endeavours was the widening of the scope of what is it to be human on a specifically psychological level by, for example, utilising the stream of consciousness method to unravel the complex workings of the mind. What she found to be lacking in the novels of her predecessors was expressed as the overall simplicity of subject and form in her essay “Modern Fiction” (Woolf 1984: 157). Having read Woolf’s novels, we might nod with certainty that she worked hard to avoid any form of simplicity, the protest of which was adamantly voiced in *The Waves* when Bernard said: “How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! Also, how I distrust neat designs of life” (Woolf 2016: 171). Thus, against neat designs of life Woolf built her treatment of human nature in novel writing. She did feel overwhelmed by the task, as the essay indicates, when she expresses regret for her own time, a time where accomplishment does not come as easily as in the past, where obstacles have yet to be tackled (Woolf 1984). She brings out the undue attention on the body and not on the soul, and also the rigid scheme according to which novels had been written (Woolf 1984: 158). What she

desired was that writers ask of their characters: “how do they live, and what do they live for?” (ibid. 159), without glossing over any difficulties of human nature, but instead to highlight the presence of “the crudity and coarseness” (ibid.). At the very least, Woolf asked for a more accurate representation of reality, to be written of things that are truly important.

It is in the same essay, where she stresses her interest in the spirit, and connects the fragmented inner life together with the regrettable transience of time – themes that go to produce melancholy mood in her novels. She sets out to “trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (ibid. 161) of her characters, and consequently replicates this pattern in her writing to portray how we experience our consciousness at work. As a result, she becomes able to show, by altering the form, how a Modern subject is thoroughly split, in regarding one's subjectivity as if it were an object, and an estranged one at that (Gumbrecht: 120). As a great example of new writing, she refers to the Russian literature, where she detects the presence of great sadness and “sympathy for the suffering of others” (ibid. 163). She treats the notion of lack as a virtue and not a flaw in writing, when it is used to express authentic life as it is experienced where questions forever outweigh the answers. Therefore, she urges one to understand, even if it brings great suffering, and not take the road of ignorance, whatever bliss it may bring. (ibid.) An ancient Greek writer, Aeschylus wrote in *Agamemnon*, “Wisdom comes through suffering”, a connection that gets repeated throughout history, and also by Virginia Woolf. In order to move further into the deep nature of things, it seems to entail a portion of suffering. Or is understanding itself a form of suffering? Let us leave this philosophical question open, and dive into the waves.

## **2.2 *The Waves* (1931)**

What we have on our hands is a particularly captivating novel and an excellent basis for the analysis of an example of Modernist melancholia. Woolf's *The Waves* can be seen as a plotless novel, or a lengthy prose-poem, where the traditional writing of the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel is replaced by a new, experimentalist modern approach. It comprises of the inner monologues of six characters, preceded by short vignette-like prefaces at the beginning of each chapter. The reader is thus invited into the minds of the characters, who explicitly communicate their fears, griefs, struggles and thoughts on life in vigorous quests for order, answers, meaning and validation. The voices aim to capture what it is like to experience what constitutes the self at different periods in their lives, from childhood to old age, and what is their relationship with other people and the world at large. As it

might be expected, what is paid attention to are the minute details of the mind as it “receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday” (Woolf 2016: 160). Consequently, the soliloquies comment, counter and complement each other, presenting the way they think and how they feel about their self and the surrounding world, which ultimately can be seen as one collective consciousness “working through communal grief toward consolation and hope” (Purifoy: 28).

To examine the novel by paying attention how the mood of melancholia becomes apparent on the textual level, I will focus on the nuances of tone in the statements made by the characters and metaphoric images, as well as the form, which is inseparable from what is told. In these aspects, signs and shades of the characters' affective life unravel and can be opened up for analysis. As pertaining to the Modernist period, I will examine how the presence of melancholia becomes evident as a result of the acute sense of loss, which is tightly connected to a Modern subject's cognition of temporality, which find articulation in the characters' deep contemplations.

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By way of fixing the mood of melancholia, let us look at an example as a means of introduction. One of the characters, Neville, ponders to himself in the middle of the *The Waves*:

“The swiftness of my mind is too strong for my body. I fail before I reach the end /.../ I see everything—except one thing—with complete clarity. That is my saving. That is what gives my suffering an unceasing excitement. That is what makes me dictate, even when I am silent. And since I am, in one respect, deluded, since the person is always changing, though not the desire, and I do not know in the morning by whom I shall sit at night, I am never stagnant; I rise from my worst disasters, I turn, I change. /.../ In this pursuit I shall grow old.” (Woolf 2016: 91)

In this example, what is expressed is a failure to go through the entirety of what the mind showers down on one, a failure to fully grasp one's thoughts, a failure to reach 'the end', where the hindrance has been identified ambiguously as 'one thing', or being deluded in 'one respect'. Such an ambiguous identification of the melancholic's condition of the psyche is also made by Freud, to which Jonathan Flatley has also drawn attention (Flatley: 49). In addressing the split ego, where the unnamable loss that is responsible for the state of mourning in a melancholic, Freud describes this very splitting in the following way: “*the shadow* of the object fell upon the ego” (Freud: 249, my

emphasis). The abstract and figurative shadow then functions like an act of darkening, resulting in a blind spot that evades articulation both for the experiencer *as well as* a theoretician, hence the figurative rendering. In a similar way, Julia Kristeva's metaphor of "the black sun" that refers to melancholia also suggests a blinding effect (Kristeva: 147), which is paradoxical in the sense that too much light equals darkness instead. Be that as it may, the crucial aspect is that the agencies of both light and darkness are relevant, as it can also be gathered in the cited passage from the novel. From this follows that the inherent inability to name what remains unknown, but which nevertheless is responsible for the component of desire and excitement next to suffering and disaster, points to the paradoxical nature of melancholia. If that 'one thing' did not produce excitement, if there was only suffering, it would give more ground to suspect depressive melancholia, but in case of *The Waves*, what will be seen is that despite the anguish, there is also a remarkable portion of hope, which will guide this analysis to the perspective of identifying the Modernist type of melancholia as a composite mourning/yearning. Alternating, or concurrent, suffering and excitement, thus, continually serve to reorient a subject, cancelling out any permanent mode of being as "[w]e are for ever mixing ourselves with unknown quantities" (Woolf 2016: 83), which form us over time.

### **2.2.1 Melancholia as a Metaphor and Crisis of Language**

As discussed above, the crisis of language in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century called for the search of new poetic devices that would be better able to express the Modern thought and feeling (Harvey: 20-21). In *The Waves*, the characters gravely question language's ability to hit the mark, even resorting to asking, "but what are words?" (Woolf 2016: 33), signalling what can be considered language's enigmatic unreliability that produces bafflement. The approach to language includes in itself a reaction to the reality of the period, where changes were rapid and profound, and since the resultant melancholia eludes accurate communication, it is no surprise that language lost its power to bring clarity. Therefore, what the characters, or voices of consciousness, draw attention on is the words' "unpredictability, their groundlessness, their refusal to establish the base" (Vandivere: 224). However, the very need to communicate continued, after all, meaning is made through our linguistic nature. This crisis of language then becomes evident, for example, in the pointing out of simple things just to name them in order to affirm their existence, to call objects into being through language (Woolf 2016: 10). In the same pattern, the characters minutely give verbal form to whatever thoughts or feelings they are overcome with, and when it feels impossible, then more often than not, they turn to image-driven expressions that require active imagination. Hence the link

between melancholia and creativity. The breakdown of meaning in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century then gave a new wave of rich use of imagery, an example of which that indicates melancholy mood in the novel will be discussed shortly. It is also characteristic to Woolf that “the glancing insights into the identities of characters are complemented by larger symbols (a flickering lighthouse or moving water) which are allowed to be both temporary and permanent, both 'real' and resonant, both constant and fluctuating” (Sanders: 534).

First of all, let us consider the metaphor of the waves, which permeates the entire book. By the very nature, waves produce a rhythmic movement that is out of human control. This is illustrated in the following observation of lost stability: “London crumbles. London heaves and surges” (Woolf 2016: 20), which points to the external factors that contribute how the characters perceive the world and themselves in it. Waves move to and fro as they will, sometimes forcefully, sometimes even perhaps peacefully. Waves also suggest highs and lows, one can imagine themselves on top of the waves, ecstatic, or under the waves, drowning. This duality of waves' nature and dimensions is characteristic to melancholia's alternating duality, and as the approach in this study is through mood, it can be inferred that it is as out of one's control as the force of waves since one cannot exactly decide to be in one mood or another, the same way one cannot control the waves, or the forces of life. Any effort to tame them results in sorrow, which does characterise especially the first half of the book. The waves also function to depict the shades of melancholia: when the sun shines (a moment of bliss), the waves are as if transparent, but in case of clouds, or even the storm (state of despair) the waves seem impenetrable, harbouring monsters (ibid. 142). Thus, what is conveyed is that the rhythm of life, or movements of life, cannot be altered, but must be endured, must be suffered through, if it be necessary.

Who is responsible for the movements of the waves? Woolf's characters do not know, for it should be mentioned that it is a progressively secularising world, where unknown forces are without source, further mystifying any prospect of absolute meaning. They are moved back and forth by the waves, in ceaseless motion, subject to the constant need to re-articulate their thoughts and feelings as something they did not see before again becomes visible. They are searching for a compass inside themselves, a map on which to pinpoint their location and heave the anchor. But their existence is anchorless, so the quest continues. There are times they get pulled under by the waves, and also at times they are able to see a lighthouse somewhere far in the distance, giving hope to continue the fight that is but the most basic survival (Woolf 2016: 210-211). If we recall Woolf's essay above, then that is what she wants to present, everyday life as it is lived and felt, with authenticity, and with exceptional attention on the smallest things that produce disquiet: “Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is

commonly thought small” (Woolf 1984: 161). To sum up, waves represent the dominant mood of melancholia, which is part of the Modern subject, who cannot reach a safe shore, creating a flux that has no end point, no point of standstill. Thus the metaphor of waves resonates with Deleuze's ideas how “life has no original closed state. Life does not begin from the bounded organism but from flows” (Colebrook: 142).

### 2.2.2 Time and Loss

As a result of the rapidly changing world, the characters become painfully aware of the distance that now has come between people. With the intensification of urbanisation and machines replacing people in the process of industrialisation, it resulted also in the disintegration of communities. One has lost the idea where to belong. One of the characters, Bernard, refers to the widespread individualisation of the modern world as a burden (Woolf 2016: 79) that disrupts a sense of unity. Now, everybody felt the need to be someone, assume their identity and do things for their own end, which Bernard thinks “severs these beautiful human beings once so united” (ibid.). The strive to be *someone* has come to this: “We have tried to accentuate our differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us” (ibid. 97). In this view, individualisation as societal pressure has made them miserable instead of happy. It gets easy thus to get lost in the rush of modern life on “these endless paths, with people pursuing, pursuing” (ibid. 18). In the latter, the repetition serves to draw focus on the intense forward motion of the society, whereas the characters form a group outside of it, feeling like they are unable to go along with it. It is like the 21<sup>st</sup> century up until the virus pandemic, when so many people had access to comforts and means to establish themselves, but still depression took more ground than ever, because what material comfort cannot give is togetherness, for “[c]omfort isolates” (Benjamin 1940: 328) rather than unites people together to take steps towards shared needs. However, it is togetherness that can be considered as one of the antidotes to loneliness, but the bustling city life has made it very difficult to achieve. This is expressed in the novel: “I do not believe in separation. We are not single” (Woolf 2016: 47). With great freedom comes great responsibility, but in a world full of endless choices, how is one to choose and stand by their choice? How is one to know which way to go in a world of deepening distancing and fragmentation? The characters of *The Waves* make efforts to answer the latter throughout most of the novel.

The sense of loss is thus identified as an unavailability of life-structuring sense of order, direction and collective unity which carries over into individual lives in the form of identity crisis as,



for example, the decreasing power of the British Empire created “the erosion of national identity and the loss of long-held assumptions about what characterised their community” (Purifoy: 29), which becomes part of the background of collective melancholia that arose from the period in England. To say something about the larger context leads us to examine the experience of the individual that can be used as a mirror to help us better understand collective melancholia. Thus, what can be noticed is the inability to determine oneself in a world that was seen as fleeting, hence the distinctive time-consciousness that emerged as a reaction to overall sense of discontinuity. Therefore, the world was experienced through a rather specific lens. The acute sense of time passing pained the Modern subject, who found it difficult to connect to the temporal sequence on the most basic level of meaningfully uniting one moment to the next as in the case of Rhoda:

“I do not know how to run minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass that you call life.” (Woolf 1016: 92)

Time then comes to be experienced subjectively, which rendered previously close reality unreal and distant, as a result of which, melancholia became deeply embedded in the Modern subject. By way of shedding more light on the complexity of temporal cognition:

“The past is not just that which created the present in an original productive act or event. It is itself present in the present, inhabits and haunts it. It is formative of the present on a day-to-day basis as objects of desire are embodied and kept alive in the medium of the self. Freud's theory of melancholia defies any concept of time as a linear succession of events in which each moment in time is substituted by another and is in that moment of substitution lost forever. Instead time is spacialized so that the present self can accommodate different times.” (Enderwitz: 176)

This is then how melancholy introjection of the lost object is related to temporality. Time, thus, is lesser associated with clock time, or objective time, but with subjectively experienced time, to an extent that the sound of a clock sucks time dry of meaning, and an imagination of what the hands of a clock could be commences instead (Woolf 2016: 13). The metaphor of the waves perhaps works here as well to allude to a temporal rhythm, where the waves of past, present and future merge together, and one's self-image has got lost somewhere along the way.

This develops into a painful reality for Rhoda, who got completely lost in time: “The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, “Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of

time” (Woolf 2016: 14). This being as if outside of objective time is often interpreted as a marker of Modernist melancholia (see Middeke and Wald 2011, Flatley 2008), although Rhoda remains a rather tragic example since she went on to take her life for reality had become a place of intolerable nothingness for her. Melancholia's black sun torched her entire, but for the other five characters, the setting sun of melancholia seems a more suitable metaphor. Nevertheless, it makes for a powerful example of what this new time-consciousness must have felt like, a sense of being outside reality. In addition, if one was able to arrive at what was considered a stable life, a much sought order, a place in time that did not feel somehow unreal, then there was the fear right next to it, that melancholy sense of anticipated loss, drawing its strength from past losses, as Susan contemplated: “Where can the shadow enter? What shock can loosen my laboriously gathered, relentlessly pressed down life?” (Woolf 2016: 137). Thus, the search for permanence in a disintegrating world is what essentially gave impetus for manifestations of melancholia. The deepening realisation that the world was divided and fragmentary, uncertain and chaotic, brought sorrow and anguish, which is enforced by the repetition of the word 'asunder' that runs throughout the novel. It refers to the anticipated loss, a fear of future loss, of some force becoming active without one's knowledge and then surprising them with an awful breakdown, as “it is always some unforeseen incident, suddenly breaking into order and threatening it, that the sense of loss implies” (Földényi: 303). The novel thus depicts this constant, vigilant standing on the verge of the cliff and looking down into the abyss, without being able to move to a safer distance.

As a reaction to the “temporal homelessness” (Enderwitz: 174), the characters put very much effort into the articulation of the moment that is 'now', which is represented by the constant obsession with time. The very now came to be chased with the intention to pin it down, make it their own, to “recover [my] continuity” (Woolf 2016: 23), as a revolt against its transience, and its vulnerability to the smallest of interruptions. In this, a deeply Modern pursuit of rendering reality as it was experienced finds manifestation: “one moment we're free and the next the wave pulls you under” (ibid. 211). The fleeting nature of time is also conveyed textually, to showcase just the absurd brevity of the moment of bliss that is gone always too soon:

“There! That is my moment of ecstasy. Now it is over.” (ibid. 73)

And attempts at establishing an equilibrium once again continue, thus “the melancholic is condemned to continuous annihilation: his eternity is the eternity of the *right now*” (Földényi: 319), but that eternity is permanently and painfully slipping away.

### 2.2.3 Self-Reflective Search for Identity

*For there is nothing to lay hold of. I am made and remade continually.*  
(Woolf 2016: 94)

I would like to focus now on this subjective way of interacting with oneself, so let us analyse Modernist melancholia on a more intimate level, now that the surrounding atmosphere and the general sense (or senselessness) of the world in the novel have been discussed.

To begin with, much of *The Waves* is concerned with becoming: becoming older, becoming intensely aware of one's movements of the soul, becoming attuned to one's placement in the world, becoming a more rounded subject over the course of time. All of these notions of becoming are minutely contemplated by the characters as they investigate and try to follow their lives along by articulating how they feel about themselves. Mostly, they take deep looks into what they lack, what makes them uncomfortable and what produces emotional pain as Susan described: "I will take my anguish and lay it upon the roots under the beech trees. I will examine it and take it between my fingers" (Woolf 2016: 8). They are sensitive to the changing nature of the world, which produces anxieties in the present, as well as for the future. They are characters who are not certain whether the ground they tread really carries their weight, whether the next step is towards the light or more darkness instead. Essentially, what they do through the inner monologues is meticulously noticing what grieves them, an attempt to give it verbal form, which is a very melancholic practice of intense self-reflection, in order to overcome the source of distress (Freud 1917). The process is that of identifying melancholic loss by way of which, curiously, psyches are formed (Enderwitz: 182). In this way, "evolution itself becomes the condition of the subject" (ibid.), and "the complexity of things becomes more close" (Woolf 2016: 52). Along the way, the characters, except Rhoda, evolve and become "self-aware and self-declaring. Each develops an identity, or self, as he or she responds to the external world" (ibid.).

From the beginning, it becomes clear that all characters look up to their friend Percival, whose voice does not enter into the collective consciousness, but who is often spoken of and set as an example to be aspired to. To get straight to the point, Percival was a symbol of unattainable order (ibid. 25). He was an example of soundness, clarity and simplicity with which he cut through life like knife through butter, with effortlessness the others found impossible to mime in their own lives. Thus, Percival was venerated as a great master of the art of living, and the more he was extolled, the worst the six felt about themselves (ibid.). What the symbol of Percival signified was that life should be easy and without unanswerable questions, and one should be strong, rational and

confident. In *The Waves*, Woolf shows that one cannot live up to such an image, and how the ideals that society sets up only produce more despair and sadness. She shows that the hero narrative (Winterson: XIV) should not dominate over the narratives that are unique to all of us, and that each personal narrative is worthy of pursuing, and contributing to the collective consciousness, or society at large:

“We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road.”  
(Woolf 2016: 103-104)

There are thus these “moments of ravenous identity” (ibid. 101). These moments of confidence are rare and pass quickly in place of which sadness returns, but they serve to insert bursts of much sought after validation. To sum up, the inability to be like Percival results in further loss in an already unstable world, it is the wish to cover up loss, which is really a desire to be whole (ibid. 27). This is also what Fernando Pessoa's character suffered, this melancholy identification with loss: “I was the daydream of what I wanted to be, my dream began in my will, my goal was always the first fiction of what I never was” (Pessoa: 131). It is this juxtaposition of order and chaos that Woolf examines in the novel. *The Waves* illustrates how looking into the mirror with an idea to see someone else, robs one of the chance to see who they are in an authentic way, resulting in a loss of identity and fuelling melancholy identifications.

Bernard is the one who at the end of the book recaptures his life from youth to present old age, while other five monologues fall silent. In this, we may notice how the

“main task of the 'remembering I' is to establish a meaningful connection between the past and his[/her] current situation, i.e., to bridge the temporal and cognitive-emotional gap separating his[/her] different selves, and to establish a coherent narrative” (Frink: 134).

In the novel, Bernard frequently expresses despair at his sense of being lost to himself: “I have been traversing the sunless territory of non-identity. A strange land” (Woolf 2016: 81-82). In the final chapter nine, he rethinks what Percival meant for the group all their lives, from which he finally reaches a “conviction that literary narratives like the “true story” he has spent his life seeking, with their orderly progress from beginning to end, might ultimately misrepresent our world” (Purifoy: 40). Digging in his memory, Bernard addresses the moments when he came to realisations of some

truths, after the laborious conversations with himself, which he now re-experiences and attributes further meaning. What he does, in essence, is tracing his own evolution as a subject, as much as it is humanly possible. Memory becomes a crucial tool to make sense of the complex ways we form into subjects, through active self-reflection. For him, words, language and writing have always been of great importance. Through words he has attributed worth to himself through life, or more precisely, due to his inability to find the right words all his life, he undervalued his worth, recognising his flaws as irreparable. Bernard is trying to step into more authentic contact with himself by addressing his plural nature, which he feels robs him of identity, as he asks doubtfully: “When I say to myself, Bernard, who comes?” (Woolf 2016: 56). Here, we may also consider the metaphor of drop:

“[L]et us begin this new chapter, and observe the formation of this new, this unknown, strange, altogether unidentified and terrifying experience—the new drop—which is about to shape itself.” (ibid. 135)

This seems to signify more specifically the stepping stones of identity formation, a representation of the perceived progress of self communicated in figurative language that suggests complexity of experience, which requires further elaboration. Subject formation is a theme in the novel that is ridden with melancholia from beginning to end since there is that 'one thing' that always keeps the puzzle from completing. However, a new drop in *The Waves* is ultimately something positive, despite its initially fearful observation in the citation above. The forming of a new drop seems to point to an achievement towards greater knowledge of self, however, it comes at a price – of letting go of the previous ideas of self. It also requires one to be able to further nurture that newly formed fragile drop, which seems to contain the unknown, new information about one's self. It is not easy to grow one's self-awareness, or to acquire self-knowledge, for more often than not, this seems to force one to look back into the past and recognise what has went wrong, or what were the ill-perceived ideas of self. This, as we saw, was connected to an unattainable ideal, the symbol of which Percival embodied.

What he discovers as he looks back is these pivotal moments in his past is the following: “It is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am—Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs” (ibid. 199). This is the nature of collective consciousness through which Woolf seems to want to show how we are formed throughout life, through the contact with others; how one cannot be a closed form, and how eventually, this limitless view of one's self that does not fit any clear

definition or conclusion is the very way of existence one should not be afraid of ultimately. To accept that we are many and complex (ibid. 53), cancels out the need to be simple, encouraging a move towards embracing the inherent human complexity, and that the 'one thing' that keeps us from knowing truth is the very thing that forever transforms us.

Near the end of the novel, Bernard thinks he has finally found a steady ground, and a steady sense of self: "The shock of the falling wave which has sounded all my life, which woke me so that I saw the gold loop on the cupboard, no longer makes quiver what I hold" ( ibid. 210). However, it is written in the pattern of a melancholic that this sense will shatter, importantly, from no perceived impact at all:

"I, who had been thinking myself so vast, a temple, a church, a whole universe, unconfined and capable of being everywhere on the verge of things and here too, am now nothing but what you see /.../ Lord, how unutterably disgusting life is! What dirty tricks it plays us, one moment free; the next, this. /.../ Disorder, sordity and corruption surround us. /.../ Once more, I who had thought myself immune, who had said, "Now I am rid of all that," find that the wave has tumbled me over, head over heels, scattering my possessions, leaving me to collect, to assemble, to heap together" (ibid. 211).

He thought himself free of his melancholy nature, but that is not the case as he discovers once again. The question is, does he accept that? Is he willing to see it as a normal part of human nature despite the suffering it brings him? If anything, Bernard seems to have at last acknowledged how the rare moments of exuberant joyousness that penetrate melancholy sadness cannot hope to be the new, and better reality, for life is a flux, there is no end point nor any permanence: "Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and rise and fall again" (ibid. 214). Thus, the only thing permanent is impermanence. What the last chapter represents is a way "to explore not only the way that an individual remembers his past and thus defines himself, but also the experience of the loss of that ability and as a consequence, the apparent loss of the self" (Dick: 38).

#### **2.2.4 Formal Representations of Melancholia**

In this subchapter, the objective is to notice how does the novel formally communicate melancholy mood. Since Modernists were avid reformers of the novel (Sanders: 526), form and content often worked closely together to produce an effect, so let us see what can be said about this in case of *The*

*Waves.*

To start with, Woolf presents us with a very untraditional narrative. What is a narrative? “Narrative seems to appear in almost all human discourse as a means for knowing, acquiring and organizing information, and telling, communicating information to others, and therefore as an instrument for obtaining knowledge and expressing it. From this perspective, narrative can be understood as a means for the transmission and processing of information” (Ruiz Carmona: 7). These functions of narratives is what Bernard begins to question as he asks: “But what are stories? /.../ And sometimes I begin to doubt if there are stories. What is my story? What is Rhoda's? What is Neville's?” (Woolf 2016: 102). He finds it impossible to tell a story, which mirrors the Modernist perception of the world as profoundly incoherent and non-sensical. It is not only a question of form, but it concerns subject matter just as importantly. These seem to be questions that Woolf asked herself when writing this novel, as by writing it she offers a way a torn and struggling subject may be able to convey what they are going through on the inside. To do this, Woolf has written the novel in the stream-of-consciousness mode, where the reader gets an intimate look into the heads of the characters. Here we also have another technique Woolf often uses, namely the sudden switching between multiple viewpoints. By offering us the internal monologues that alternate between different voices, who only tell fragments of their thoughts in mostly trying to communicate what produces sorrow and despair in them, a collective consciousness emerges. In this way, individually experienced melancholia merges together into collective melancholia that speaks volumes about the condition of a Modern subject, and of the era itself:

“Now let us issue from the darkness of solitude,” said Louis.

“Now let us say, brutally and directly, what is in our minds,” said Neville. “Our isolation, our preparation, is over. The furtive days of secrecy and hiding, the revelations on staircases, moments of terror and ecstasy.”

“Old Mrs Constable lifted her sponge and warmth poured over us,” said Bernard. “We became clothed in this changing, this feeling garment of flesh.”

“The boot-boy made love to the scullery maid in the kitchen garden,” said Susan, “among the blown-out washing.”

“The man lay livid with his throat cut in the gutter,” said Neville. “And going upstairs I could not raise my foot against the immitigable apple tree with its silver leaves held stiff.”

“The leaf danced in the hedge without anyone to blow it,” said Jinny.

“In the sunbaked corner,” said Louis, “the petals swam on depths of green.”

/.../

“We changed, we became unrecognisable,” said Louis. “Exposed to all these different lights, what we had in us (for we are all so different) came intermittently, in violent patches, spaced by blank voids, to the surface as if some acid had dropped unequally on the plate. I was this, Neville that, Rhoda different again, and Bernard too.”

/.../

“The tiger leapt, and the swallow dipped her wings in dark pools on the other side of the world,” said Rhoda.

“But here and now we are together,” said Bernard. “We have come together, at a particular time, to this particular spot. We are drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion. /.../”

/.../

“We differ, it may be too profoundly,” said Louis, “for explanation. But let us attempt it. I smoothed my hair when I came in, hoping to look like the rest of you. But I cannot, for I am not single and entire as you are. I have lived a thousand lives already. Every day I unbury—I dig up. /.../”

(ibid. 87-90)

These fragments from different and quickly changing perspectives, which are one of the shortest in the book, illustrate the fragmentary style in which the inner monologues are given, where each character broods over one thing or another, thinking about memories, what they all mean to each other, in which what is clear is that all the characters are turned inwards, trying to claim the moment, or an idea, or a feeling, which always seems to escape. Textually, it is presented like a dialogue, as if they are conversing with one another, but that is not the case. Thus, it is another example of formal representation of melancholy mood, that aims to communicate the impossibility of communication. In the novel, the characters express sadness for the way people have separated from each other in society, which is illustrated by the use of the dialogue form that clearly is not an actual conversation. Additionally, what it can be seen to point towards is the loneliness of the Modern subject, the melancholy isolation as shield against the external world of disorder. Hence, the incoherent manner of conveying us this scene seems to communicate this sense of loss and disintegration discussed above; a lack of order, where causality between what is said is either weak or non-existent. As Andrew Sanders has put down:

“The external and the spiritual world become focused for Woolf in the idea, noted in her diary in 1924, of character 'dissipated into shreds'. Her novels attempt both to 'dissipate' character and to



reintegrate human experience within an aesthetic shape or 'form'. She seeks to represent the nature of transient sensation, or of conscious and unconscious mental activity, and then to relate it outwards to a more universal awareness of pattern and rhythm.” (Sanders: 523)

The stream of consciousness not once stops within a chapter, even though these are different characters that speak, but perhaps it is a way of showing the multiplicity of how one experienced their self as opposed to one having a clear identity, or a melancholic's sense of being bottomless and enigmatic to themselves. The very sense this way of writing gives is that of the rhythm of the waves, thus supporting the central metaphor of waves as melancholia: “a forward thrust accompanied by an undertow pulling in the contrary direction” (Dick: 42). These are very detailed observations of the psyche, displaying the Modern subject's novel interest in the layers of the mind and imparting a new way of reflecting feeling. However small or minute a thought or feeling, Woolf shows how everything is connected and confirms that objective in the novel as well: “I wish to add to my collection of valuable observations upon the true nature of human life” (ibid. 47). As discussed above, Modernity is characterised by chaos and fragmentation, which is mirrored in the form of the novel. Thus, melancholia as a mood is not only discernible on the level of the subject matter, but very much so on the level of the form. The alternating inner monologues display only a fragment of what is going on internally, they shift only to come to a halt evermore. There are no external events that would be outside of the realm of the characters' minds. By omitting these aspects, and concentrating fully on the trains of thought, Woolf showcases the very importance and the great attention that a sorrowful subject invests into trying to make sense of life. Changes in traditional narratives then are seen to be communicating a melancholic's response to the changes in the world.

Furthermore, by interpreting the alternating viewpoints as the rhythms of waves, or waves of melancholia being expressed, it is also important to note how many of these monologues begin with the word 'now'. As discussed above, for a melancholic time has become problematic, the characters find it difficult to experience the sequence of time with ease, to say the least. This is why starting with these monologues with 'now' adds another formal layer that connects to the subject matter. It is a way to address the moment that is fleeting, by saying it, by calling it to be for otherwise time is too transient to experience it, let alone to communicate it. They attempt to construct the sequence by way of mindfully relating the “nows” to each other, which in the end give the novel its formal structure, its textual rhythm. This connects to the idea that it is not only individual voices that remain in their own bubble, but rather, the voices mingle, like waves in the sea, as a result, giving life to the whole of the sea. With the wave-like motions, individuals make up larger systems, and

show how we go through the more or less same feelings and thoughts. The melancholy condition of the Modern subject is inflected with isolation and separation, where the sense of wholeness has fallen apart in all spheres of life. The characters are all different people, but what they share in common is suffering, a deep melancholy mood that is rooted in the particular historical context. If we focus on the time period, as it has been done, then it becomes evident why such notions of anchorless existence were as widespread as they were. To sum up, “just as melancholia arrests the forward momentum of mourning, *textual melancholia* might indicate a narrative that dwells on pauses, digressions, moments rather than momentum—elements beyond the outlines of a single, overriding “true story”” (Purifoy: 40).

### 2.3 Conclusion

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* demonstrates Modernist melancholia that finds manifestations in the reactions to time's fleetingness, which produces sorrow and further fuels the sense of past loss. The soliloquies are accounts of “the evolution of the consciousness” (Dick: 38), presenting records as to how one's mind and soul is shaped over time, and the challenges it entails. The latter renders present time futile and future is shadowed by anticipated loss, which pointed to a grieving/yearning for unity in a world that was seen to be discontinuous and fragmentary. The novel also represents this “double capacity to feel, to reason” (Woolf 2016: 53), which is a very important point as this goes to showcase the 20<sup>th</sup> century subject's split ego, where one regards oneself from the perspective of an object. In case of Rhoda, we saw a tragic example of a melancholic, one who was overcome with waves and did not find a way out. For her, melancholia did not function as an aiding mechanism that helped to cope with these senses of loss, one of which was her own identity. In case of other characters, by way of Bernard's example, it became evident how his melancholia opened up depths of being and seeing, as a result of which, through earnest and honest self-reflexivity, he managed to appear less of a stranger to himself in an otherwise disintegrated world. He wanted to learn to embrace complexity since he realised the different senses of self he contained did not allow simplistic treatment of identity. But as Winterson said, “the compass must be checked and new directions given, [or else] it is not possible to survive” (Winterson: XIII). By tracing the mind, noticing what is there, the characters arrive at conclusions of their inconclusive nature.

The characters sorrowfully reacted to the acknowledgement that “the ecstasy is always over too soon” (Woolf 2016: 73). However, these almost heavenly moments of happiness gave them hope to continue despite the agony that followed. In a way, Woolf seems to have criticised the

Romantic poetry that venerated the experience of vision: “human history is defrauded of a moment's vision” (ibid. 46). Therefore, she shows that a moment's ecstatic vision is painfully brief, yet acknowledging the transformation it brings, lasting but mere seconds next to other moments that make up life. It goes together with her protest against general idealisation of life in fiction that depicted human life inadequately inauthentic. In demanding truthful account of human life, not only what is heroic and/or visionary, but all the in-between, the melancholy yearning for what is yet to be learned, that is as important as the moments of bliss, where everything as if makes sense, only to disappear in the waves.

Through the death of Percival, who stood for unattainable order and simplicity, they were without an ideal, which symbolises the cultural loss of ideals in Modernist arts, but let us remember, “simplifications reduce complex reality to whatever fits into a simple scheme“ (Lewis: 59). This meant that they had been forced to now face themselves, and thus recognise their own complexity without resorting to simplistic conclusions. Revelation can be found at the crossroad of melancholy paradox where themes of birth and death coexist, because when room is cleared of the old, something new can come along (Purifoy: 27). In this, it follows that the mood of melancholia can direct one towards noticing gain in loss, beauty in sadness: “in times of protracted grief—a beauty that brings not consolation but something more akin to exhilaration. /.../ In *The Waves*, then, where narratives fail and communities die, there remains some common basis on which to begin anew“ (ibid. 42). It is the kind of novel “which keeps trying to move through story and language into silence” (Jobst: 64). Woolf masterfully showcases in this novel how she “understands language to function both specifically within the texts and generally in formation and perception” (Vandivere: 221), and further demonstrates “how individuals must continually work to form themselves in a world devoid of linguistic and, by extension, philosophical correspondences” (ibid. 222).

### 3. Postmodernist Melancholia in Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva* (1973)

When it comes to postmodernism and melancholia, it is not that well researched as modernist melancholia. One of the questions, however, seems to be whether “postmodernism /.../ has led to an overcoming of melancholia or whether the concept still holds explanatory power” (Middeke and Wald: 14-15). In this chapter, I will be interested in taking a look into the latter possibility as I will make an attempt to identify melancholia in Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva*. On the one hand, it can be seen as a type of continuation of the earlier period's focus on the distinctive time-consciousness that regards life as innately ephemeral and fragmentary (Harvey: 44), which entails acute experiences of loss and preoccupation with identity formation that lead to the intense questioning of language's ability as well as reliability to communicate. On the other hand, despite the overlapping of themes, the analysis of Lispector's novel will exemplify what is postmodernist in her reactions to the latter that can be interpreted in the analysis of the presence of melancholy mood. According to David Harvey, in the reactions to the disintegrated world, postmodernism “does not try to transcend it, counteract it” (ibid.), but rather “it swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is” (ibid.). Here, then, lies an important distinction already, since the Modernist subject does not exhibit this kind of ability to revel in the chaos, as one still longs for lost order and/or sense of wholeness. In this sense, the postmodernist subject is disillusioned by such a possibility, which affords one to adopt a rather different attitude towards their condition, which I hope to illustrate in this chapter. These points of analysis will be illustrated with fitting examples to distinguish this type from the earlier period's evocation of melancholia.

In the introduction, I provided a short history of melancholia, and hopefully managed to show the link between the ways different time periods influence each other when it comes to ideas, moods, and attitudes, and how they find expression in the aesthetic practices. In view of this, Modernism was influenced by the ideas and aesthetics of Romanticism and Decadence, where the sociocultural circumstances had great impact on the developments of literature, which went hand in hand with the growing sense and exploration of self (Rose: vii). As a result, new and innovative poetic devices were being sought and, in time, established; for instance, the use of fragmentary, open-ended form, complex narration, and emphasis on the internal life. From this perspective, postmodernism is also indebted to what had been done before. For one, it was the valorisation of experimental search for yet novel ways to write fiction as well as the furthering of some of the earlier themes as mentioned above. In the case of the theme of loss in Lispector's novel, and postmodernist literature overall, let us remember that melancholic loss is to be understood as multifaceted, as it is

not only about past loss, but may also concern a the present longing for something that is desired, but is not attainable or even possible to put into exact words, or even an anticipated loss. Even more so as

“[t]he tensions and frictions, however, between the desire for liberation from all melancholic dejection in the face of the abyss of epistemological nothingness and death and a sublime insight gained from the very melancholic grieving have not lost any of their cultural efficacy; indeed, the very tensions and frictions have been more interesting to the artistic mind than more-or-less easy solutions to the problem of loss.” (Middeke and Wald: 17)

Such is the point of departure in the following examination of another experimental novel displaying representations of what I would call a quasi-ironical type of melancholia.

Now, it should be asked more specifically about what can be seen to have contributed into the mood of melancholia in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To start with, the deepening individualist culture that already emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Western societies is certainly a crucial aspect that should not be overlooked, as it further deepened over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a way, a postmodern subject is to a greater extent removed from the sense of community and shared notions of values, meaning, and tradition than a Modern one. This found expression in the form of the distancing of oneself from sociopolitical themes in the Western literature (Talvet, *III*: 398-400). Thus there occurs a perceptible shift in terms of what is the object of experience that becomes the subject matter of aesthetic practices. It is often less about the reality of a historical moment in time, and more about the isolated struggle of an individual, as it is also the case with Lispector's writing in both novels and newspaper columns, “as she repackages political issues through a filter of affective subjectivity that makes knowledge of self into an intersubjective activity” (Gentic: 141).

The very sense of “the inexorably widening gulf, separating us from the past, from the world, from Being” (Wilczek: 241) becomes apparent in that the Modern subject overtly experiences their embeddedness in cultural tradition, history and society (Rose: xviii), or to be more exact, the slipping nature of that embeddedness. Thus, what had been lost could be to some extent identified on at least these broader levels. However, in the second half of the century, Western societies had become in a way more accustomed to the speeding changes in the world, in which the disruption of past order and sense of wholeness were as if already the norm and not something as shockingly new. This might be considered as a potential source of postmodernist melancholia as represented in literature, where the devaluation or inflation of change led to the inventing of experi-

ences. It is where reality and imagination, life and play collide, which in Lispector's novel is accompanied by melancholy mood, where the longing that is projected into the future, yet overshadowed by past loss, does not yield stable and lasting reality as she moves "from one escape fantasy to the next in search of constant stimulation and novelty" (Dickens and Fontana: 392). Here, the agency of time passing continuously superimposes the improvised reality, which is why the present moment comes to be intentionally and artificially lengthened as a response to its fleeting nature, as is also the case in Lispector's novel. What is more, the effects of the Second World War cannot be underestimated in generating trauma and further loss of values and meaning. There was a deep sense of absurdity after two devastating wars in a century full of blood and violence. The postmodern world is then governed by a more abstract and absurd sense of things, one that knows chaos better than order, which determines one's reaction to it, as discussed above. Consequently, the postmodern subject is characterised by a general sense of displacement, from which there emerge the melancholy probings for what is not there, for what is unreachable, without aiming to arrive at any universal knowledge.

What becomes especially visible in analysing a type of postmodernist melancholia, is the rather prominent use of irony and a distinct awareness of one's indeterminability, as the novel "typifies the way a postmodernist text self-consciously questions both its own creation and the capacity of language to aid in the quest for knowledge and self-awareness" (Fitz 1987: 434). The notable ontological obsession with words and language (ibid. 421) is also characteristic to the period, which traces back to the "end of the century" writing that built the foundation from which Modernism emerged and, postmodernist writing further continued and transformed. The criticism of the cultural context can still be found and it is powerful in its own ways, where moods of the current world are conveyed implicitly, by way of allusions and undercurrents that are open to interpretation. This becomes visible especially in postmodernist drama, e.g. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which strongly communicates the sense of dissolution of any logic of being. Consequently, postmodernist literature conveys the "celebration of difference and loss" (Middeke and Wald: 14), which will find representation in Lispector's evocation of melancholy mood that is tinged with self-conscious irony in contrast with the portrayed psychological disquiet.

When it comes to the Ukrainian-Jewish roots of the Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector's multicultural background curiously connects her to the very postmodernist feature of ambivalence towards any definite identity, including cultural, as she "can be read and thought as simultaneously personal (autobiographical), local (living in Rio de Janeiro), national (part of a Brazilian experience), gendered (speaking from a woman's perspective), and universal (a sensing being in a process of becoming)" (Gentic: 174). What should also be mentioned is that Brazilian Modernismo shared

much in common with the general ideas in Europe, which called for a search for new poetic devices that had to be distinguishable from past conventions, in order to convey what is specifically Brazilian about it. Renovation of the novel placed renewed attention on form and language, with particular interest in creative alterations on the level of syntax. However, despite the movement's aim in Brazil not being so much of the question of the arts' autonomy, as it might have been in Woolf's Modernist England, but rather of social reform in view, the movement still went to have great impact on the 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian literature, to which Lispector greatly contributed. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

### 3.1 Clarice Lispector and Postmodernist Fiction

The work of Clarice Lispector (1920–1977) is seen to readily mix life with fiction, containing ample reflections of herself, which amount to “perhaps the greatest spiritual autobiography of the twentieth century” (Moser: 5). In this, he indicates “the inner truths she painstakingly unearthed throughout a life of unceasing meditation” (ibid.). For the novelist and short-story writer, Brazilian Portuguese was her mother tongue, although her idiosyncratic use of language in her work and the way she pronounced her s's and r's highlighted her differences, which further added to her foreignness, as it was so often stressed how she was not an authentic Brazilian – forever a foreigner in what she thought of as home (Traps 2015; Moser: 7). The questions of birth and roots thus were constant themes in her work (ibid.).

Her family fled to Brazil to escape pogroms in what is today's Ukraine, as did so many other Jews in Eastern Europe. From the year of her birth, she already experienced loss, of homeland, of belonging, and then she became one of the most acclaimed writers in a country that did not quite see her as one of their own (ibid.). Such a situation is culturally marked. Were she an ethnic Brazilian, would there have been just these themes and struggles in her work? It was a direct result from what was particular to the Jewish situation in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, as well as to Latin America that was the destination of many refugees. Had there not been hatred and violence towards Jews in her birthplace, then in all likelihood she would not have ended up in Brazil. If we were to look at melancholy mood in her work, many themes spring up from her own life that are connected to loss that can also be discussed in much broader contexts. Thus, her examination of the existential condition is tinted by cultural past, in which the mood of melancholia is prominently felt, creating a “poetologico-philosophical context” (Ronge: 71) that will be analysed.

Lispector's work imparts a powerful evocation of indeterminacy, rich with vivid

imagination; a drive to discover different ways of being, ways of seeing. It conveys the “preoccupation with 'otherness' and 'other worlds' in postmodernist fiction” (Harvey: 48), instead of seeking for something absolute: “I don't want something already made but something still being tortuously made” (Lispector: 6). The postmodernist melancholia of Clarice Lispector is often found in the making of parallels with the Platonic ideas of the real and copy, in which her ontological interest in possible selves, possible worlds, where life and fiction mingle, becomes visible:

“I reach the real through the dream, I invent you, reality. /.../ I am alive. Like a wound, flower in the flesh, the path of sorrowful blood is opened within me.” (Lispector: 67)

“Each of us is a symbol that deals with symbols—everything a point of reference to the real.” (ibid. p. 73)

She freely imagines the ways of being, for example, by comparing human feeling to those of flowers: “Now I shall speak of the sadness of flowers so as to feel more of the order of whatever exists” (Lispector: 49), as she expresses her longing to be in communion with life. To achieve this, she undertakes explorations into life as something that is unbounded, where imagination is the driving force of the attempt to uncover possible meanings, leading to play and improvisation. But it turns out to be a great effort, as the speaking voice's melancholy yearning for something other seems to be for an existence that is yet to be born, and it can only be born through linguistic interaction. Hence, her aesthetics call the attention on the innovative use of language, and disregard of coherent plot as Lispector revels in fragmentary form, in which she rebels against traditional modes of subject formation. It is indeed curious that one of her “most memorable characters undergo mystical quests for self-awareness and authenticity of being. In undertaking these quests they find themselves mysteriously impelled by the anarchy of language toward a Nirvanalike state of inner awareness beyond the speech act” (Fitz 1987: 422). What Lispector seems to be most interested about is precisely what lay beyond language, beyond thought and feeling; her characters suffer as much as they revel in these pursuits that are coloured with melancholy mood. In *Água Viva*, she presents us a quest for self-formation that becomes intertwined with the very elements of temporality and language, as she masterfully conveys “the itchiness of being in the skin of people struggling to make sense of and make peace with things they cannot begin to understand” (Traps 2015). It is her use of irony that brings lightness into the otherwise serious themes, which are “lyrically rendered yet ironically self-conscious commentary on the evanescent relationships among language, human cognition, and reality. In focusing on these metafictional issues, the novels and



stories of Clarice Lispector exemplify the kind of writing described as “postmodernist”, writing that takes as a primary subject the nature of fiction itself, the process through which it makes its statements” (Fitz 1987: 420). Hopefully, this introductory summary into her style and points of interest is of help since this novel is far from the easiest to analyse, as it is also implicated in the novel:

“I know that after you read me it's hard to reproduce my song by ear, it's not possible to sing it without having learned it by heart. And how can you learn something by heart if it has no story?” (Lispector: 74)

### 3.2 *Água Viva* (1973)

This short but incredibly dense novel was published only a few years before the author's death, a work on which she almost gave up, but fortunately, owing much to Olga Borelli, it came together in the end (Moser: 314). The novel had two previous titles, firstly, *Beyond Thought: Monologue with Life* and secondly, *Loud Object*. What sets apart the earlier versions from *Água Viva* is mostly the artistic effort that finds concentration in the final version, which is also shorter almost by a half, and also steps were taken towards a higher degree of fictionalisation of essentially autobiographical content (ibid. 316). Indeed, she has been said to be “her own greatest protagonist” (Fitz 1987: 420).

The novel presents an account of the protagonist's, or rather, the speaking voice's inner conversations with herself, where thoughts and feelings emerge in a seemingly improvisational manner, where different ideas, feelings, and sensations fuse together, yet all of which ultimately refer back to the central yearning: to rise above and overcome the raw contours of all existence, to touch the very substance of life itself. The novel thus showcases a mind intensely at work, a mind focused on focussing on itself in order to lay claim on something bigger, or “the incommunicable kingdom of the spirit, where dream becomes thought, where line becomes existence” (Lispector 2014), as it stands in the words of Michel Seuphor, whose citation Lispector has chosen as a motto for the novel. There is no knowing who exactly is the speaker, what she looks like or where she is, for mostly, the external world holds no ground in it. Rather, she conjures objects on the screen of her mind's eye instead of actually moving around and coming into contact with them. The reader encounters the abstract space of a consciousness, a presence of an intimate voice, who is well aware of her reader following her following herself along.

By way of fixing the mood of melancholia, let us look at an example as a means of introduction into what is to follow. What we are working with is a voice that chronicles whispers of the mind, and then diligently takes them into pieces, like unwrapping boxes of gifts. There is this anticipation of reaching something, of the potential of opening up new areas of meaning behind what constitutes ordinary reality. At the very beginning, the voice utters:

“Hallelujah, I shout, hallelujah merging with the darkest human howl of the pain of separation but a shout of diabolic joy.” (Lispector: 3)

Here, the act of rejoicing and joy are concurrently experienced with pain and anguish. The intensity of these affects becomes visible in the use of verbs 'howl' and 'shout'. Is it desperation or exaltation then? Both are characteristic to states of a melancholic that include bits of each other, hence melancholia's bittersweetness. In addition, one immediately notices a strangeness in syntax, which destabilises what is exactly being said, thus the adequacy of communication gets compromised right from the get-go. One of the ways to interpret this is that one is simultaneously crying out from pain and joy as reactions to some 'separation'. It will become evident that the multilayered reference of separation, which we may as well interpret as loss, is a prerequisite for transformation, *as a result of which*, paradoxically, (re)birth becomes possible, as will be discussed in more detail below. In this sense, it is the melancholy identification with loss that contributes into the formation of a sense of self, one's very subjectivity. From this follows that loss and gain are inseparable, as are joy and pain, making it possible for both to co-exist. She then goes on to state her desire which is to interrupt the sequence of time by confronting its fleeting nature in trying to capture the very present moment, or what she calls the 'instant-now'. To do this, she makes great effort to evade objective sense of time, or clock time, by lengthening the moment of 'now' which then transforms into a mode of subjectively experienced time. Thus emerges the character's distinctive time-consciousness where the present time becomes a space of exploration, which lead to yet other pursuits of knowledge.

### 3.2.1 Melancholia as a Metaphor and Experimentation with Language

Let us consider what lies behind the leitmotif of the novel, which is also its title. The direct translation of *água viva* corresponds to 'living water', which has been interpreted as 'the stream of

life', which is also the title of the first English translation of the novel. These images are able to communicate the melancholy acknowledgement of one's inability to tame time, or detect the particle of life in the flow of stream of time that symbolises all existence, which are topics that the book is concerned with to a great extent. Lispector herself commented on the semantics of the title as “a thing that bubbles. At the source” (Moser: 318), in which case, what we might consider is a metaphor of an unfindable spring to symbolise the melancholy longing of the character. Namely, a spring denotes a place where groundwater flows out from the ground and is known for especially pure quality. It has often been thought of as a mystical and holy place, and due to Lispector's tendency towards the mystic (ibid. 14-15), this interpretation can be seen as potentially all the more meaningful. Therefore, what the speaking voice of *Água Viva* seems to be in search of is the purity of the experience of life when she says:

“I who long to drink water at the source of the spring” (Lispector: 11)

The source of the spring can also be thought of as “the creating unconscious of the world” (ibid. 77) that brings everything into existence in a new-born way, which is indicated by the purity of the spring water. In this search for the spring, there becomes evident the speaking voice's desire to pull away from surface thinking and feeling to be able to journey towards what she identifies as the unknown through exercises in imagination, which aim to land at the original source from which what she calls 'the flow' emerges. This wish to discover the source, which may as well be further interpreted as the real in Plato's sense, is hindered by the endless encountering of *faux*-springs instead. What permeates the book is the anguished yearning for what is found to be unreachable. The voice's efforts to reach the unreachable illustrate her inner conflict, where some pain constantly lets her know that something is missing, producing angst, but which can only be spoken of figuratively, which showcases the inexpressibility of melancholy mood. Here, life and fiction merge as Lispector once said: “And I'm nothing more than potential—I feel a fresh spring within me but cannot locate its source” (Moser: 107). The use of the word 'potential' points to an experienced lack that translates into the incapability of joining with the flow of life. Therefore, the metaphor signalling melancholia is not only pertinent within the realm of the novel, but likewise in the writer's own life.

In her experimental use of language, Lispector seems to be profoundly interested in what is yet to be said, realised and expressed, so much that it becomes the guiding force of the writing itself, or what might be called a “playful labour” (Burton: 18) as the character tries to painstakingly address her sorrow, which she lightens up with self-conscious irony at times. For her, writing is like

a portal into the potentiality of all things, resonating with postmodernist interest in the possible worlds, where language's "roughness and novelty" (Moser: 354) are carefully cultivated, so that a peculiar effect is reached as the shifts in language ultimately are expected to result in some kind of illuminations. Thus, she sets out to discover meaning through the one and only tool we have to make sense – language. By the act of extending language itself, she stretches it so as to reach new territories of thought and feeling, in order to uncover what is hidden (Moser 2014: xii). What the speaking voice claims to believe in is that "life begins only by writing at the extreme point of language's necessary failure" (Negrete: 9). Curiously, she is not afraid of this failure, like Woolf's characters were, but instead welcomes it, which is not to say it lessens anguish per se, but this embracing of necessary failure of language does seem to manage to mellow the dark side of melancholia. As a result, what is unknown, impossible and strange is as if brought closer to the subject where it loses a little bit of its power to instil further despair: "And when I think a word is strange that's where it achieves the meaning. And when I think life is strange that's where life begins" (Lispector: 76) for what remains the bottom line for her is this: "I don't want to have the terrible limitation of those who live merely from what can make sense. Not I: I want an invented truth" (ibid. 15).

One of the ways Lispector experiments with language is through destabilising the conventional grammar as well as punctuation marks. Even though it is translation that is the basis of this analysis, the unconventional quality of her language can still be experienced. As Lispector's biographer has said, "no matter how odd Clarice Lispector's prose sounds in translation, it sounds just as unusual in the original" (Moser 2014: xi). Her way of using language in this distinctive way sheds light on the very impermanence of things that may appear and/or are accepted as permanent. By doing this, she illustrates the fragility of structures that humans depend on, and likewise, how limited conventional language is when it comes to this complex search the nameless character in the novel has undertaken. What she intends to create through language is "pure vibration with no meaning beyond each whistling syllable" (Lispector: 5), but paradoxically, it is still some hidden truths she hopes to unearth that would at last bring her relief. It seems to be so that she understands that one can only have the potential to reach them in the state of being as if unconscious while awake, which is what through this manipulation of language she seeks to cultivate (Marting: 443). To cease to be human, a creature chained to its consciousness: "Animals fascinate me. They are time that does not measure itself" (ibid. 42).

The obsession of the voice to go beyond feeling and thought, or "that which is 'outside' or 'beyond' language: the unrepresentable, the semiotic, the Other, the Real" (Marting: 443), runs through the novel. Indeed, the voice utters: "[e]ach of us is a symbol that deals with symbols –

everything a point of only reference to the real” (Lispector: 73). Thus there is a “deep longing for the prelinguistic Thing” (Wilczek: 243), and writing about it only results in a Platonic pickle: “I am transfiguring reality—what is it that's escaping me? why don't I reach out my hand and take it? It's because I only dreamed of the world but never saw it” (Lispector: 58). It is the constant reminder that what she sees is not the real, which is disappointing, as her melancholy longing does not find fulfilment, at the bottom of which is suffering. In the novel then, we can detect Lispector's postmodernist disillusionment of any available ways of seeing as the speaking voice follows herself along in an improvisational writing, but

“[s]ince language is born of loss and has nothing that is truly its own, it must, in order to live, “incorporate” everything: it seduces, it moves, it wounds, it anesthetizes, it overwhelms – it seems to have all the powers. However, in its constant shift from seemingly absolute masterly and mesmerizing magic to the consciousness of its own essential emptiness, it alternates between manic triumph and melancholy.” (Wilczek: 241)

This is especially apt in capturing the function of language to compensate for an internal emptiness, or void, by approaching it in novel ways, which is what Lispector is seen to be doing in *Água Viva*. To sum up, “the apotheosis of difference, the acceptance of the void in any process of linguistic or symbolic signification accentuated by postmodernism, could not fully do away with melancholia” (Middeke and Wald: 17). In *The Waves*, Bernard looked for a perfect phrase, a Modernist pursuit to relate the experienced reality as best as they could. However, in Lispector's novel, the character has no such ideas, but rather dreams of going beyond language, to encounter the *it*, pure life itself.

### **3.2.2 Postmodernist Distortion of Temporality**

When it comes to postmodernist sense of time, we should ask whether there is something particular to the time-consciousness in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that would set it apart from the Modernist sense, which was characterised by the mourning of the passing of time as it considerably added to the sense of loss. What has been proposed is that what the technological developments brought forth in the second half of the century, propelled forth by the late capitalist culture, resulted in the sense that “time has been accelerated to the point of obliteration” (Dickens and Fontana: 394). From this it follows that time as such had become simply obscure, as if cancelled altogether, where a unit of an instant, for example, concerning the progresses of communication and transport

(ibid. 393), was even more ephemeral than ever before. The “postmodernist experiments with time and time-consciousness” (Middeke and Wald: 7) spring from the sense that the unit of time had suffered such extensive inflation. According to David Harvey,

“the collapse of time horizons and the preoccupation with instantaneity have in part arisen through contemporary emphasis in cultural production on events, spectacles, happenings, and media images. /.../ The effect, however, has been to re-emphasize the fleeting qualities of modern life.” (Harvey: 59)

Perhaps this helps to paint the background to why Lispector seems to try to, in essence, demystify temporality by looking for a way to embody it, and this entails artistic distortion. She targets the instant as a vessel of the flow of life that she desires to enter, but discovers that entrance to be enigmatically blocked.

In the novel, the nameless voice is seen to direct her attention on the present moment, or this instant-now. For instance, she calls it the “untellable instant” (Lispector: 4), the “perishable instant” (ibid. 18), and the “unpronounceable instant” (ibid. 72). These perceptions signify her problematic interaction with temporality, the transient enigma of which attracts the melancholy subject rather than calls forth mourning, making for a clear distinction with Modernist melancholia. Therefore, the voice sets out to do the next:

“Let me tell you: I'm trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant-now so fleeting that it's already gone because it's already become a new instant-now that's also already gone. Every thing has an instant in which it is. I want to grab hold of the *is* of the thing. These instants passing through the air I breathe: in fireworks they explode silently in space. I want to possess the atoms of time. And to capture the present, forbidden by its very nature: the present slips away and the instant too, I am this very second forever in the now.” (ibid. 3,4)

What she tries to do then is to embody the moment that is now, become one with particles of life itself that the instants bring into existence as for a melancholic “living eternity follows from the human capacity to create time” (Földényi: 317). This calls for meditations on the instant, which as if serve to lengthen the present moment, in a similar manner as the author approached the use of language by way of stretching it in unusual directions as a way of going deeper into the nature of things:

“In this instant-now I'm enveloped by a wandering diffuse desire for marvelling and millions of

reflections of the sun in the water that runs from the faucet onto the lawn of a garden all ripe with perfumes, garden and shadows that I invent right here and now and that are the concrete means of speaking in this my instant of life” (Lispector: 10-11)

Hence, the experimentally ontological approach to temporality, as well as the language, is part of her central improvisation that is writing towards an opening, towards light, to penetrate and enter into the spheres that are invisible yet always in and around us. In verbalising time, the speaking voice hopes to come into contact with the flow of life, the vehicle of which is deemed to be time, for ultimately, “[m]ore than an instant, I want its flow” (ibid. 10). By chasing the units of the instant-now, the voice says: “I want to feel in my hands the quivering and lively nerve of the now” (ibid. 13). Time is then explored as not only a spatial dimension, but also regarded as if it was a physical object. However, the voice does not manage to experience this flow, save for a few moments of elevated states, where for a brief time melancholy heaviness subsides, and beautiful lucidity emerges. Ultimately, what can be seen to convey melancholia when it comes to the present units is that she is telling of “the instants that drip and are thick with blood” (ibid. 16), shedding light on how she is attuned, which points to the voice's heaviness of the soul. Therefore, what is the impetus for articulating these instants is a heaviness.

The idea of grasping the instant is suggestive of the belief in the transformative power of the new present that each moment as if presents as a gift – a blank canvas, free from past. However, “[n]othing is more difficult than surrendering to the instant. That difficulty is human pain. It is ours” (ibid. 43). With this statement she identifies herself with the collective level, and unites thus with the 20<sup>th</sup> century notions of painful time-sensitivity. Time and loss were prominent themes in the last chapter, and as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, these concepts are not without agency when it comes to postmodernist melancholia. To illustrate the sharing ground, Lispector's character also, like Susan in *The Waves*, projects her sense of loss into the future in the form of anticipated loss, which sheds light on the painfully experienced fragility of human life, especially in the world that is dominated by fragmentation and discontinuity. However, let us look at an example that showcases how *Água Viva* contrasts with the previous manifestations of melancholia:

“The calm sea. But on the lookout and suspicious. As if a calm like that couldn't last. Something's always about to happen. The unforeseen, improvised and fatal, fascinates me.”  
(ibid. 47)

This idea that one is fascinated by something that could potentially demolish the calm is indicative

of a new element in the discourse of melancholy mood. Perhaps it is this deconstructionist tendency of Lispector once again that looks at destruction as a potential source for something new to discover, as what becomes clear is that “the question of meaning is not merely a thematic problem but a technical one /.../ its artistically poised uncertainties” (Fitz 1988: 33). According to Fitz, this deconstructionist practice simultaneously aims “to organize, or “construct”, itself into a stable, coherent and verifiable system of meaning” (ibid.), which is precisely what Lispector can be seen to be doing through her idiosyncratic use of language.

In conclusion, there is a yearning for an understanding that surpasses the past, language, time, in essence all “thinking-feeling”, which is represented by the voice's explorations into the present time as a way to claim the source of all life, the *is* or *it*, as she says. By the end of the book, the voice realises how she is destined to forever chase the instants, so that the novel cannot have an end just like she cannot arrive to a lasting equilibrium, to be free of her melancholy despair: “Ah this flash of instants never ends. My chant of the *it* never ends? I'll finish deliberately by a voluntary act. But it will keep going in constant improvisation, always and always creating the present that is future” (Lispector: 86). Ultimately, “[t]he melancholic is condemned to continuous annihilation: his eternity is the eternity of the *right now*” (Földényi: 319).

### 3.2.3 Subject Formation as Ritual and Celebration of Disharmony

To begin with, the melancholy subject and her tone inflect the novel with an intense mood:

“There's a thing inside me that hurts. Ah how it hurts and how it screams for help. /.../ What saves me is the scream.” (Lispector: 79)

Screaming out equals with writing about the pain, for the very act provides a dumping ground outside oneself (Kristeva: 97). Here, we may gather the melancholy condition in its traditional description: an oftentimes painful existence that is produced by an unknown agent. Targeting the pain by letting out the scream in the form of self-reflective writing manages to bring some relief as it can be interpreted from the use of the verb 'save'. What is more, to be melancholy is regarded as “getting lost in the harmful essential shadows” (Lispector: 64), which brings to mind Woolf's emphasis on the necessity of suffering through to understand. The essential shadows of melancholia push Lispector's character to write what she is writing at all. As discussed above, the experimentation with language is hoped to illuminate a road to some knowledge, or truths that are yet inaccessible.



Throughout the book, the voice is ceaselessly consumed by extremely self-aware and self-reflective contemplations that seek to understand who she is and what is the world: “We desperately try to find an identity of our own and the identity of the real” (ibid. 73). In trying to bridge the void inside herself, the voice in the novel confesses to using words as bait to reach into the depths of being (ibid. 15), but the problem arises already in the beginning when she says: “I suffocate because I am word and also its echo” (ibid. 9). To counter this paradox, she tries to bring herself to a state “where language structures the unconscious and seeks to name the ineffably unstructured” (Marting: 443). It is a complex labyrinth of the self, and the bouncing off the walls produces anguish as she cries out: “I no longer want to be I! but I stick to myself and inextricably there forms a tessitura of life. May whoever comes along with me come along: the journey is long, it is tough, but lived” (Lispector: 15).

The speaking voice's practice of using words as bait is a way to experience her selfness from a new angle, which is not limited to any distinct identity, but rather indicates a longing towards a broader sense of existence. Surprisingly, it is precisely the disharmony, the disarticulation that she seeks, rather than any rational truths or meanings in her endeavours to understand, which distinguishes Lispector from Woolf, and previous melancholic types: “And I want disarticulation, only then am I in the world. Only then do I feel right” (ibid. 75). This paradox is expanded upon in the following segment:

“the way this thinking-feeling can reach an extreme degree of incommunicability—that, without sophism or paradox, is at the same time, for that man, the point of greatest communication. He communicates with himself.” (ibid. 82)

Thus, communication is found in miscommunication, harmony in disharmony, and articulation in disarticulation. To add to this, she says: “I want the profound organic disorder that nevertheless hints at an underlying order” (ibid. 20). This dichotomy of order and disorder is part of the melancholic condition (Földényi: 305). Furthermore, it signifies the “universal sense of loss that melancholics feel” (ibid. 303). What the logic of the speaking voice proposes is a celebration of the way how we say things in the way that do not necessarily say what we want to say, but in this “malfunction”, we may end up conveying something important that cannot be said in clear articulation. In this respect, in exactly saying what we can say, and not focusing too much on what we cannot, there lay the possibility for new meaning, a point of contact with one's deeper self, as the voice says: “But if I don't understand what I'm writing it's not my fault. I must speak because speaking saves” (ibid. 77). If melancholia was not saturated with paradoxes enough already, Lispector's representation of

postmodernist melancholia takes it to yet again another level. In Woolf's example, the strangeness was seen as source of further perplexity, whereas in *Água Viva*, it is welcomed, seen as part of language's potential of discovery. Achieving strangeness and disarticulation are then utilised in the attempts to overcome the void to "confront the chaos of existence by struggling with language until it yields to her the authenticity of being that she demands" (Fitz 1987: 425).

The melancholy longing to be something other, to escape the anguish, finds representation in figurative rituals of death and birth. These are self-conscious processes of self-creation, symbolic attempts at renewal. But before we come to these, let us try to address what could be seen to underlie the evident pain of the speaking voice. What needs to be taken into account is Lispector's tragic Jewish background that seems to be at least partly accountable for the sense of loss the novel imparts, but let us not forget that it is part of the shared history of the Western world, and an important notion when we talk about generations of moods. What can be seen to foster the sense of loss in the second half of the century, becomes more abstract, more individual-centred, where intriguingly, the attention is rather directed on the "ways to fill the hole that loss has opened in our world with something meaningful" (Wilczek: 240). This is not to say that past loss has no agency, it is simply more hidden, more symbolic in texts, which might be one of the reasons that references to it may be less readily seen in postmodernist writing. It is as if this notion of loss left one more traumatised in the first half of the century, but when it comes to the second half, then the extent of exposure to trauma throughout the entire century resulted in different aesthetics and reactions, which are testimonies to the capability of the postmodern subject to "bear[ing] the burdens of liberty" (Rose: viii), which nearly demolished a type of Modern subject.

In the novel the voice presents us a hint: "I come from afar – from weighty ancestry. I who come from the pain of living" (Lispector: 10), to which she adds, "And I no longer want it" (ibid.). She also ironically asks at one point, "how does a race die out?" (ibid. 41), which can be seen as a direct link to the situation of the Jewish people in the past. These examples convey the desire to be free from past, overcome it, and her readiness to take it into her hands. However, the past is "both too painful to cut and too painful to keep" (Trigo: 27). Thus, there is no one identity she can attach herself to any more, instead there are many selves, plurality of identities, which distinguishes her from Woolf, whose background was connected to a specific place and specific national identity, which also serves to distinguish the types of melancholia present in their writing. This background can be seen to form the undercurrent of loss and pain in *Água Viva*, as exemplified in the following: "I have the mysticism of the darkness of a remote past. And I emerge from these victims' tortures with the indescribable mark that symbolizes life" (Lispector: 32). The figurative birth is thus desired in the face of the growing despair, but how to be born once one is already in the world?

Through a figurative death, Lispector suggests. It is metamorphosis that the voice indeed pines for, self-formation as a ritual. Concerning death and birth, there is a play of darkness and light that are the flip-sides of melancholia, where it becomes essential to learn “how to feed from the force of darkness” (ibid. 35) in order to survive. In case of undergoing a figurative death, the use of irony lets the reader know that it is of ritualistic nature, and not serious thoughts of suicide. It is exactly this postmodernist self-irony that brings dark humour into the otherwise humourless melancholia that we remember from Woolf's example. For instance, it becomes visible in this:

“I think I'll now have to beg your pardon to die a little. Please—may I? I won't be long. Thank you.

...No. I didn't manage to die.” (ibid. 58)

In a way, “[t]he postmodern is closer to the human comedy than to the abyssal discontent” (Kristeva: 258-259). The presence of irony in the face of distress suggests a slightly different affective response to melancholia, a more varied and complex, inviting in even more paradoxes.

Wanting to be born anew then is regarded as a possibility to breathe existence into a version of oneself that does not yet exist, to fulfil a longing, because birth refers to a potential pure beginning in which the instant, or “the instant's this-ness” (Negrete: 9), becomes imbued with a new force of life. The sense of melancholia in the novel lies in the inability to become what one desires, and what one desires defies adequate communication. Therefore, the voice in the novel asks the reader's help when she gets “the feeling I'm about to be born but can't” (Lispector: 29). She then reaches out of the book, asking for the reader's help:

“You who are reading me please help me to be born.

Wait: it's getting dark. Darker.

And darker.

The instant is of total darkness.

/.../

Marvelous scandal: I am born.

My eyes are shut. I am pure consciousness. They already cut the umbilical cord: I am unattached in the universe. I don't think but feel the *it*. /.../ I hear the hollow boom of time. It's the world deafly forming. /.../ And this existence of mine starts to exist. Is that time starting?” (ibid. 31)

In this moment of birth, she imagines what it is like to enter into the world, as a way to go beyond knowledge, as a way to experience the transformation of being. This illustrates the speaking voice's longing to become anew and enter into contact with the source of all life, which here is rendered through the process of writing, "in which the writing voice is both born and gives birth" (Negrete: 15). What such type of subject formation is suggested to entail is the following: "To create a being out of oneself is very serious. I am creating myself. And walking in complete darkness in search of ourselves is what we do. It hurts. But these are the pains of childbirth" (Lispector: 39).

In this self-writing through death and birth, the voice creates "a verbal space, calling for an absent answer to ever-changing questions" (Marting: 443) as she confronts the darkness inside herself. She accepts that chaos is part of the order: "Oh, how uncertain everything is. And yet part of the Order" (Lispector: 57). The voice reaches the conclusion that we are forever transformed in the nows of our lives, and the quest for knowledge is fruitful as long as it is continued: "Whatever will still be later—is now. Now is the domain of now. And as long as the improvisation lasts I am born" (ibid. 87). Indeed, she seems to arrive at a thought that this figurative dying and being born is the essence of all life, it is *the* flow, and so whatever questions we may have unanswered should not be of such great source of sorrow, as "we will never be able to decide whether we should feel that infinity is a cage or, in fact, freedom" (Földényi: 325). Like Woolf's characters, who at the peak of some moments felt extreme elation, so does the Lispector's character experiences moments where anguished melancholia transforms into an explosion of miraculous joy; it is when thinking that is the source of angst comes to a complete halt:

"And there's a physical bliss to which nothing else compares. The body is transformed into a gift. And you feel that it's a gift because you experience, right at the source, the suddenly indubitable present of existing miraculously and materially. /.../ It is instead just the grace of a common person turning suddenly real because he is common and human and recognisable" (ibid. 80)

But as the instants pass, one becomes once again unrecognisable, as this desired serenity disappears, for these rare moments of extreme lucidity are not here to stay, and the come-down of ecstasy is difficult. The voice does not want to give in, does not want to sink down in despair again, as she protests: "I'm going to stay very happy, you hear?" (ibid. 86). This almost rebellious irony which Lispector makes use of effectively shields the voice from falling into severe melancholia, and by intimately encountering herself through this self-reflexive self-writing, she addresses the very

thing that pains her, through which she forever emerges anew.

### 3.2.4 Formal Representations of Melancholia

What Lispector created with *Água Viva* was something entirely novel in Brazilian literature (Moser 2016: xi), an “abstract masterpiece” (Moser: 76). This subchapter seeks to analyse the potential formal representations of melancholia. In the novel, the speaking voice “performs narrative and emotion simultaneously in the process of storytelling” (Frink: 141), the latter of which was discussed above. In this symbiosis of form and subject, what is created is a complex and highly intriguing piece, which is “neither a Dada poem nor a linear cohesive account of any situation except the very passing of instants, unmediated by characters or situations” (Negrete: 3).

Firstly, one of the most telling aspects is that there is no plot in this novel, which made the author anxious to publish it (Moser: 318-319), since she realised that what she had written was a work that did not look like a regular novel. This doubt finds expression also inside the text: “This isn't a book because this isn't how anyone writes” (Lispector: 6). She emphasises how there is no story to written (ibid. 74). If Woolf tried to show how there is no true story of one's life, Lispector echoes the postmodernist disposition in proposing the impossibility of any story at all. This is not a redoing of what was previously done, but a cancellation and profound suspicion of any structures. The voice's melancholia lies primarily in the unattainable yearning, which is tinged with past loss that inhibits the desired sense of freedom. There is no beginning or end, but only the indeterminable middle, which might be taken to represent the truly melancholic condition; a buoy in the middle of the sea, where no land can be seen. What she thus creates is the immediacy of the words that are all there is without anything else to provide context, because for a subject overcome with melancholy mood can experience no other context than the mood itself. In this respect, *Água Viva* resembles *The Waves* as both are predominantly lyrically instead of narratively oriented. In Woolf's novel, we had six voices relating their internal monologues, presented as a dialogue textually, but it was clear that they did not speak to each other directly. In Lispector's novel, what the speaking voice seems to long for, is the reader's presence, a rhetorical dialogue, that can be interpreted as the voice's reaching out from her despair of loneliness (ibid. 75), as a way not to be alone in her pursuits: “What I write to you has no beginning: it's a continuation. From the words of this chant, chant which is mine and yours” (ibid. 41).

What is also apparent is the novel's fragmentary style. These are bits woven together, but the seams are showing, and they are intended to be shown. By this I mean to point to the fragile way

the fragments work together, which are separated from each other by gaps, which point to “the dispersion of meaning” (Marting: 435). The gaps thus in *Água Viva* might serve to illustrate the holes in the pursuit of self-knowledge in the very present moment, or also they may symbolise the lags between the instants, or the melancholy abyss itself. If the voice could only “surrender to the flow of life” (Lispector: 61), as she desires, there would be no gaps, is what I would like to propose here. Therefore, the discontinuity and inconclusiveness of thought is performed on the formal level, producing “a compendium of diverse fragments” (Marting: 436). *Água Viva* includes in itself “the hint of invertebrate floating” (Moser: 318), in which the form and subject matter become inseparable as each perpetuate each other, and thus produce melancholy atmosphere. To exemplify:

“This is the word of someone who cannot.

I direct nothing. Not even my own words. But it's not sad: it's happy humility. I, who live sideways, am to your left as you come in. And the world trembles within me.

Is this word to you promiscuous? I would like it not to be, I am not promiscuous. But I am kaleidoscopic: I'm fascinated by my sparkling mutations that I here kaleidoscopically record.

Now I am going to stop for a while to deepen myself more. Then I'll be back.

I'm back. I was existing. /.../”

(Lispector: 27)

This cryptic form that presents the reader pieces of meditations shed light on the chameleon-like nature of melancholia, where joy and despair, lightness and heaviness alternate, as the voice obsessively tackles the themes discussed in the above subchapters. And her method to achieve this form is answered in the novel as well: “I direct nothing. Not even my own words” (Lispector: 27). Therefore, the form mimics the speaking voice's mind, as “[t]he pulsating, fragmentary form conveys the actual experience of being alive, moving through time, better than any artificially constructed perspective could” (Moser: 321).

If the passages that are composed in a fragmentary form interrupt the flow, then it goes to show how Lispector's character cannot achieve her longing to be one with the flow of life, which seems to be a dominant source of melancholia for her. There is incoherence even *inside* the small passages, which showcase the intensity at which her thoughts are passing, that are full of contradictions, and as discussed above, it was contradiction she desired.

## Conclusion

Lispector's evocation of melancholy mood contains elements of modernism as well as postmodernism. What connects her to Woolf is time-sensitivity that generates sense of loss, which consequently renders the world as fleeting. As a result, language is experienced to fail due to its inability to fix an instant, and thus penetrate life itself. However, what postmodernist melancholia adds to the discourse of melancholia is an important aspect of irony and play, which is employed in the representations on the level of meaning, language, self and time. Her use of language gives ground to take note of her slightly deconstructionist tendency (see Fitz 1988), as she herself says that she is after disharmony and disarticulation. As we saw in Woolf's chapter, the melancholic subject is desperately after a truthful articulation, a "perfect phrase that would fit this moment right now" (Woolf 2016: 48). Postmodernists are thought to be disillusioned by such a possibility, which explains Lispector's inclination towards miscommunication that is more in line with her outlook on the world; failure as source of profound potential. As Wilczek has put the connection between postmodernism and melancholia: "It is melancholy that instigates postmodernity to explore cracks, gaps, fragments, waste, antinomies, aporias, in which the inescapable truth about our illegible and sinister world is hidden" (Wilczek: 260).

The obsession with the instant-now represents Lispector's ontological curiosity of its inherent nature. The speaking voice in the novel self-consciously explores experimental living through language that opens up different ways of existence. Her interest in possible worlds and possible selves serves to free the subject from external atmosphere, as she enters into the realm of imagination. But whatever one can imagine or call into being through articulation results in disillusionment as one falls back into "reality", and this produces melancholy anguish – for despite all the playfulness and portions of humour, one still has to face what there is despite the probing of possible worlds. This motion of constantly falling out of daydreaming then culminates and creates the desire for rebirth, a new slate, only to be discovered that what it brings is a moment of bliss, and one is still subject to the eternal becoming where one cannot be in control despite the efforts of concocting what is longed for – something other, not yet born. Her sympathetic humour is what "acquires a purifying value and shields the reader from the crisis" (Kristeva: 229) as well as herself, in which sense, Lispector's representation of self-ironic melancholia differs from Woolf's predominantly mournful melancholia. However, this is not to say that Lispector undervalues melancholy condition, for how she achieves the lightness is by a different set of aesthetics, in which case it becomes possible to shed light on the mood from another angle.

Her experimental use of language showcases postmodernist aesthetics that allows a renewed

perspective in the discourse of melancholia, by inviting in a quality of comedy. The speaking voice also as if steps out of the novel when addressing the reader as she follows herself along, by asking for a companion on her road, an accomplice in her birthing of improvisations. If all that Lispector arrives at is an inkling, a presentiment of something profoundly important, it is already an achievement. Lispector shows that melancholia does not need be only dark and heavy, but her search for lightness “through the strength of the narrator's affirmation of self, the text makes a positive statement about how we might better understand and conduct our lives” (Fitz: 434). It is where anguish is realised as a drive of life, to continue the quest and accept the unalterable flux of becoming. To end with:

“Reading Lispector is like being handed a world on fire. Or rather, a number of blazing worlds that at any moment could explode and level everything around them. And yet they are worlds you choose to hold, because their melancholy holds a certain depth of meaning.” (Vidal 2015)



#### 4. Cinematic Melancholia in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011)

In this chapter, I will opt for a rather different take by moving from the manifestations of literary melancholia to the realm of cinematic melancholia. Such an examination of different media will help to identify another shade of melancholy mood, which will be analysed once more as a deeply cultural and post-postmodernist phenomenon. As discussed in the introduction, film as an independent medium utilises a whole different set of tools in portraying its subject matter. However, the difference between this chapter and the previous ones does not only lay in what is particular to cinema, but just as importantly, it is the exploration into what is distinct to a type of depressive melancholia. Since films are often thought to be “generators of theoretical content” (Grønstad: 91), which is true of any field of aesthetic practice, then it will be seen how cinema can aid in the opening up of another perspective to the discourse of melancholia. In this chapter, I will focus on the use of metaphor and meaningful depiction of body language when it comes to representations of melancholia, as well as possible sources and nature of a sense of loss, the related identity crisis and formal expression of melancholy mood in the example of film.

Nowadays, it is quite the common practise to identify melancholia as synonymous with depression, without making difference between the two. On the one hand, it is no surprise since the fact that “[w]e live in an era of depression” (Lewis: 46) is certainly alarming and worthy of much more attention than it is now receiving. On the other hand, the cultural history of melancholia shows that besides its interpretation as an illness, there are numerous other ways to examine the phenomenon, some of which can be seen as precisely serving to counter major depression, as there are different varieties of melancholia that we can detect and examine. Furthermore, the history of the concept has also shown that “[i]f we really feel the need to understand the concept of melancholy or depression, then that is possible primarily on the basis of examining an individual's interpretation of existence and conduct of life” (Földényi: 294). What Földényi means is that to be able to examine the concept in a larger context, we should direct our gaze at an individual, for it is the individual suffering that can bring us face to face with how melancholia is experienced, and potentially, why. This is inherently connected to the communal context, where ideas of these points of examination are born and come to be expressed, explicitly linking different moods with the realm of specific atmospheres, for “moods and atmospheres, Heidegger writes, condition our behaviour and feelings in everyday existence” (Gumbrecht: 9).

Making a clear distinction between depression and melancholia is indeed difficult, and it is not the objective of this study to settle this problem. Let us just briefly consider what is of importance to note before we move on to the analysis of the film. According to Vermeulen, “[w]hile

depression is undeniably associated with popular culture and the mass media, melancholia seems to reference the more lofty domains of cultural theory, literature and the arts” (Vermeulen: 254). Therefore, while depression seems distinctly related to the clinical diagnosis of society, melancholia is open to analyses in cultural theories, philosophy and anthropology that help us guide the interpretation of aesthetic representations of the mood in question, instead of too readily ascribing pathologies. What is more, depression and melancholia do share a common ground as in one sense, depression can be viewed as simply the result of severe and progressive melancholia (Kristeva: 9), or as in the words of Földényi, “[m]elancholia is an opening; depression—a closing in” (Földényi: 299). By this 'openness', the Hungarian thinker signals the melancholic's ability to make use of this mood to gain some deeper insight, whereas the condition of a depressed person potentially hinders such a possibility (ibid.). Therefore, the two concepts should not always be treated as if they were the same, especially in examining aesthetic forms like film and literature, where the researcher is more close to a cultural investigator rather than a clinical psychologist. Due to this, what is often preferred in this chapter as a compromise is the notion of a composite “melancholy/depressive” (Kristeva: 10), when examining a darker type of the phenomenon – depressive melancholia.

Since this study is interested in how different periods of time produce distinctive moods, let us discuss the sociocultural context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to shed light on melancholia. One of the aspects that seems to have deepened mental illnesses, such as depression, at least pre-pandemic, is the enforcement of the so-called 'happiness culture' (see Ehrenreich 2009), whereas the growing experience of loneliness and isolation are on the rise. This is especially the case in the US, a country that has great power of influence in the whole world, where happiness is largely advocated as a choice that one can simply make – which it is not, as discussed in the introduction. As a result, this forced positivity gravely isolates and undervalues those who suffer from melancholy/depressive moods, and who are then given unconstructive and inadequate feedback from the society. This welcomes the harmful suppression of feelings instead of trying to work them out in an environment that is understanding and supportive instead of too ready in placing shame. Such a social situation can be grossly paralleled with the way melancholia was perceived during the Middle Ages, as a sin of acedia, as mentioned above. In the largely secularised world of today, if one cannot choose to be happy and 'just get over' whatever crisis one is going through, which often is by default underestimated and thus diminished, one becomes even more isolated in their depression, therefore, the rise of growing loneliness and deepening depressive moods are thus indeed gravely concerning (Lewis: 46). What the so-called toxic positivity does is that it gives the signal that hiding problems is better since one gradually loses hope to be understood. Although, it does deserve mentioning that with the current COVID-19 virus pandemic, humankind seems to be taking a slow turn, with mental

health topics receiving the amount of attention they finally deserve, or at least move towards broader acknowledgement in the societies of today's world. In turn, becoming aware of the problem, the sources also start to become more visible. Thus, it does seem like we are on the threshold of starting to publicly take off our masks – while keeping the medical mask on –, but it is too early to say anything about the consequences now that we are in the middle of it.

What seems to set apart depressive melancholia from the previous types is the growing despondency (Vermeulen: 254), rather than grief, despair and/or sadness. It is today's “indifference and lack of orientation” (Middeke and Wald: 15) that guides the examination of the 21<sup>st</sup> century melancholia, and indifference here does not signify ignorance, but rather an affective dullness, “a devitalized existence” (Kristeva: 4). Even though materially, many people have never had this level of comfort, then from the perspective of mental health and social estrangement, the tendency for depression is still on the increase today.

#### **4.1 Lars von Trier and Film Aesthetics**

Danish filmmaker, Lars von Trier (1956 – ) is known for his darkly psychological and experimental films that show his interest in the themes in today's world that are complex and uncomfortable. He is not afraid of crossing any lines, which is evident from his practice of setting the viewer face to face with rather intimate, and/or even horrendous themes and situations, making him “perhaps art cinema's foremost rabble-rouser” (Grønstad: 162). Through his films, he often explores themes like violence, depression and taboos, created in a style where “the provocateur and auteur come together” (Badley: 2). In exploring dark themes in his films, “[v]on Trier likes to say that everything in life scares him except the content of his films. Directing, therefore, has been a means of harnessing his demons, of shedding light on dark corners” (Brooks 2018). Knowing his background one is afforded a clearer sense behind his tendency to make just such films: it is a therapy of sorts and a way to safely discover what is scary and painful. In case of *Melancholia*, the shock factor is much lower than in his other films, for portraying a depressed person is not as shocking as, for example, showing the struggles of nymphomaniacs or serial killers at work, not mentioning the display of uncomfortable graphics. In addition to that, this film puts von Trier in a different light, as his cynical side might be seen taking the back seat as he manages to portray “the profoundly ethical dimensions of our aesthetic experience of cinematic moods” (Sinnerbrink: 113).

Lars von Trier as “Scandinavia's foremost auteur since Ingmar Bergman” (Badley: 1), stands out with his recognisable style as an art film director. It is evident that he likes to explore “the

theme of sacrifice and beauty in defeat, the priority of subjective experience, the Nietzschean inversion of normative values, the powerful gesture of an ending with its performative or “magic realist special effect”, and the overwrought affect of the whole (ibid. 19). We should also be interested in what is meant by film style. Namely, it “refers to the technical process involved in making a film and therefore it represents the use of cinematic elements such as composition, cinematography, editing or sound” (Ruiz Carmona: 10). Von Trier's image is more often than not dominated by dark colours, gloomy atmosphere, and controversial subject matter, the communication of which is highly nuanced when it comes to camerawork. He also frequently uses the same actors in his films, which contributes another element that works to bring visual unity to his overall style of filmmaking. According to Manovich, “[c]inema [has been] understood, from its birth, as the art of motion, the art that finally succeeded in creating a convincing illusion of dynamic reality” (Manovich: 175). To create this illusion films relate experiences by involving different senses simultaneously, which is one of the reasons film experiences can be so powerfully immersive. Indeed, for example, sound will play an important role in *Melancholia* as “sound fills space with reverberation, its meaning is perceived to reside in the image, even though it may “come” from elsewhere. Thus, sound “stands for” the space implied by the image, since listening pulls one in, while seeing creates distance“ (Elsaesser and Hagener: 148). Without further ado, let us make contact with melancholia in *Melancholia*, and see what cinematic techniques von Trier has used in his brilliant evocation of the mood in question.

#### **4.2 *Melancholia* (2011)**

In one sense, it is a brilliant example of an apocalyptic art-house science fiction film, which follows the planetary collision of Earth and another planet, which bears the name Melancholia. But to analyse the film only from that viewpoint would not suffice, for just as importantly, it is a powerful and multilayered evocation of psychological crisis, conveying melancholy/depressive mood, as the main character's, Justine's progressive decline expectedly culminates in a complete mental breakdown following her disastrous wedding night. She is then taken care of by her sister's, Claire's family, where she gradually recovers, emerging somehow calm and changed, while at the same time, others are about to lose their mind due to the looming catastrophe that threatens to wipe out all life. Let us then examine the film by paying attention on how melancholy/depressive mood is represented and what is suggested of its nature as well as sources.

By way of fixing the mood of melancholia, let us begin with the analysis of the Prologue, which is shot in slow-motion throughout the nearly eight minutes of it, where the themes and the mood of the film become established. In the opening image, von Trier shows Justine's face in a close-up shot. Her pale face expresses morbid dullness, which is amplified by the colour scheme and low-key lighting that contains an array of brownish colours that call to mind a desert's lifelessness. It is accompanied by the dramatic soundtrack, the prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Furthermore, in the same image, birds are seen falling from the sky, which is deemed "an apocalyptic sign" (Sinnerbrink: 95). The use of these devices of colour and sound are composed in such a way that bring forth sensations in the viewer, conjuring a sense of artful tragedy, for to watch the opening sequence without the music would be a completely different sensory experience. By using such an emotionally dramatic tune, the sense of a looming apocalypse is presented through a sonic filter that directs the way viewers experience what is visually seen on the screen. To juxtapose tragedy with a sublime feeling creates semantic ambivalence, which resonates with melancholia's paradoxical duality, when it comes to its flip-sides of despair and joy. By the aesthetic expression of the mood, von Trier provides "an aesthetic transformation of these emotions in a manner that sublimates their negative affective valency towards poetic experience and symbolic meaning" (ibid. 101). Thus, the relationship between sound and image is certainly meaningful, as "[t]he soundtrack is allowed to bear the truth" (Vernallis: 9), which means that music, inherently, is such a powerful vehicle that is able to carry over the mood of the film in a more nuanced manner. To think of how melancholia connects to Wagner's tune, then it is both the lifting component as well as the ominous effect that unite, and together they communicate the promise of transformation through destruction.

Furthermore, it is not only the apocalypse of the physical world that is conveyed, but also an internal one, regarding Justine's mental condition. As the extra-diegetic music is repeatedly used throughout the film, as if to cue the viewer's attention on a semantically charged moment with the objective to point back to what was shown in the opening sequence, so as to afford it heightened emphasis, music can be seen as a trigger that activates the viewer's senses and aids them in ascribing meaning to what they see. This layered use of repetition again draws a mystical link between the two different bearers of melancholia, Justine and the planet, and the potential exchange and shared element of destruction between the two, which will become more and more evident over the course of the film.

#### 4.2.1 Melancholia as a Metaphor and Body Language

Firstly, the rich metaphor of the planet Melancholia could be interpreted as an embodiment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century sense of anticipatory apocalypse, for there is the increasing knowledge of the harm humanity has done to our home planet, which has resulted in the shared guilt that has accumulated, producing despondent helplessness. Another way to look at it is as the representation of the increasing experience of depression in today's world, conveying a general mood in the world. It is perhaps important to note how the planet Melancholia is depicted as considerably larger than the Earth, illustrating the strength and scope of its activity in human lives. In this view, the ominous planet serves to bring attention to melancholia as a warning of the potential it has developing into deep-seated depression that brings world-shattering destruction, both literally and figuratively, for an inner collapse renders the external world devoid of meaning in return. From this it follows that Melancholia is something that revolves around the Earth, coming closer and closer, circling around one, sending one deeper into sadness, and consequently, leading one to major depression (Kristeva: 9; Lewis: 46). Therefore, the metaphor is also highly symbolic of Justine's internal crisis, as above all, the planet is suggestive of the human condition by functioning as an external representation of how a subject is feeling, effectively mirroring Justine's subjective experience with it. This multi-level metaphoric agency of the planet Melancholia facilitates the creation of melancholy/depressive mood that carries all throughout the film. If one is not convinced that Melancholia indeed figures as a representation of melancholia as a concept, then this doubt is eradicated when Claire googles 'melancholia' to read about the planet, but of course, it is articles on melancholia as a depressive condition that pop up on her screen, solidifying the semantic link that has already been established. Thus, the film “visualises an ontological and individual sense of collapse and decay” (Sticchi: 7).

To elaborate, let us take as a basis the idea that von Trier links melancholia as a human condition to the intensity of an external destructive force. This can be translated over into the sense that Justine feels as if attacked by the mood she is totalised by, since she is unable to verbalise what she is going through. The great collapse that she is shown to suffer in Part 2 is thus visualised by the collision of planets, signifying the experience of total psychological annihilation she suffered, as it finds a parallel with the central end-of-the-world theme. The film then effectively showcases how “the pathology is reflected in the world and the world in the pathology” (Power and White 2012). As a result, the planet carries multiple narrative functions, signifying both physical and psychic levels. In this depiction of the totality of depression, von Trier succeeds in creating an authentic evocation of the illness that is very difficult to do. The medium of the film has the advantage over literature to make use of this kind of audiovisual symbiosis in a very direct way, whereas in the

written word readers are free to imagine what they read, and imagination is subjective.

Another potential metaphor that would be interesting to point to is the possible suggestiveness of the Pillars of Creation, an area in the Eagle Nebula, that is shown in a scene where the wedding participants went outside to light the Chinese lanterns. The Pillars of Creation is where the gravity has directed the enriched material of the death of other stars, from which new stars are born, and even though the birth of stars is not limited to that area, it is an iconic site where it is seen occurring (Hubblesite 2015). The photographs taken of the area are rich with miraculous colours, indicating the area's activity, which are inspiring to look at. What this potential metaphor might suggest may be paralleled with the myth of the Phoenix, to give a better sense of the proposed idea, where through destruction, rebirth takes place. As we saw in the previous chapter, a symbolic death may facilitate a rebirth, figuratively, just as it may here. This evocation of hope which the metaphor of the Pillars of Creation seems to signal, is supported by another element of hope, namely the Chinese lanterns, which the wedding guests equip with good wishes. At the background, Wagner's tune is playing, cueing the viewer's attention to the significance of the scene. The latter is an example of how affectively charged symbolic elements can be used in close connection in the same scene so as to deliver a more powerful and uniform effect of an idea across. Even though Justine has been a mess, she brightens up in the scene, as her burden momentarily seems to lighten, which is visually exemplified by the lanterns as they float in the air, light as feathers. What all this might seem to predict is Justine's possibility of emerging anew, as she kind of does in the second half of the film, where she has as if risen from the ashes, occasionally revelling in quiet joy that is quite difficult to explain. Nevertheless, it seems to be so that von Trier connects death with rebirth, just as stars are born from the stardust of previous stars. Thus, in the face of apocalypse, aka depression, there is a life that goes beyond, symbolising the humble hope of a melancholic, who has nothing else to hold on to.

When it comes to cinema, it presents enormous challenges to create an effective and moving evocation of psychological states since what the camera first and foremost captures is the surface of things, and to penetrate that outer surface it must make use of other devices and techniques, which are indeed richly found within the medium, as already illustrated to some extent. One of the ways film can convey an internal state, besides the meaningfully connected visual metaphors and suggestive sonic landscape, is to focus on the body language of the subject to make evident what they go through on the inside. We must firstly ask, then, what is a cinematic body? According to Mette Ingvartsen,

“a cinematic body is a representational body – a body that fills a position in a respective narrat-

ive, but at the same time also a specific position within the image. I also understand the cinematic body as a vehicle being used to transfer sensations, a catalyst of expression /.../.” (Ingvartsen 2007)

Thus, psychological processes come to be communicated visually through the extreme focus put on body language, as a non-verbal form of communication. It is a method that greatly differs from the approach in literature, as we saw in previous chapters, where the writer invites the reader *inside* the character's mind and lets them witness the characters' attempts at articulating how they feel and what they think. In *Melancholia*, however, representations of embodiment are made use of to substitute the verbal expression of the experience, for Justine only manages to say a few cryptic lines throughout the entire film regarding her internal crisis. Therefore, in order to communicate through the body language, Lars von Trier makes effective use of close-up shot, which is “infused with expressive subtlety” (Grønstad: 105), to signal the emotion of a character, making the employment of close-up one of the strongest narrative carriers throughout the film. Justine's facial expression is then constantly zoomed-in on, placing the viewer intimately in contact with what her body language imparts, focusing on her dull and/or pained countenance during the wedding when she is alone, as well as when she is smiling – only to show how forced that smile is. By doing this, von Trier makes manifest how the “bodily details clearly emphasize the materiality of the physical experience” (Rimmon-Kenan: 247). We may see this as another aesthetic reaction to melancholia, which in the film is best portrayed by showing the physicality of the experience, whereas in literature, the emphasis is rather placed on the internal monologue in order to communicate it. Thus, the viewer is frequently forced to interpret her state of mind through her facial expression since no verbal information is given. Here von Trier's technique becomes clear, he is adamant to show an embodied experience of melancholia rather than telling or explaining it, so the viewer is invited to partake in the creation of meaning in the film. To sum up:

“The idea of the body as sensory envelope, as perceptual membrane and materialmental interface, in relation to the cinematic image and to audio-visual perception, is thus more than a heuristic device and an aesthetic metaphor: it is the ontological, epistemological and phenomenological “ground” for the respective theories of film and cinema today.” (Elsaesser and Hagener: 11)

Next to indicating the subject's mood by her communicative countenance, Justine's gravity of condition is made palpable also by showing the frequent closing of her eyes, even when she is



among the guests. This seems to communicate her intolerance for the present reality and her very desire not to be there. By closing her eyes, she escapes what she cannot tolerate, showing that reality is unbearable to her. She cannot bring herself to be part of what is going on, the objective reality suffocates her, so she escapes to an inner world, a subjectively experienced little bubble. In this sensation, the viewer is as lost as she is, floating through the wedding, sensing the undercurrent of destruction. In literature, the same thing would be perhaps communicated by one's inner dialogue to show a subject withdraws from other people into their own internal world. In the film, one could use the voice-over to show what a character is thinking, but von Trier prefers ambivalence and inconclusiveness, he gives only an inkling, and not an answer; because silence can be louder than a scream. Thus, the viewer is conveyed and also made to feel the same confusion, lack of clarity and anxiety as it is suggested that Justine is feeling. In this sense, this embodied melancholy/depression is made as physical as possible for the viewer themselves, as “[a]t the limit, film and spectator are like parasite and host, each occupying the other and being in turn occupied, to the point where there is only one reality that *unfolds* as it *enfolds*, and vice versa” (ibid. 11).

#### 4.2.2 Sources of Melancholic Loss

In this subchapter, the objective is to notice and analyse the representations in the film that seem to point to the aspects that contribute to the 21<sup>st</sup> century sense of loss that may be seen to fuel the melancholy/depressive mood that *Melancholia* powerfully communicates.

What the film seems to strongly contradict is the idea that rational knowledge is unerring, as it eliminates a healthy dose of doubt from the human mind. The self-proclaimed role of the harbourer of such unwavering knowledge in the film is credited to Claire's husband John, a scientist, who is very assuring and confident that his calculations are correct in predicting that *Melancholia* would end up passing by the Earth. He ridicules those who are fearfully doubtful of his conviction, in which he thinks of himself omniscient, fully trusting in human knowledge, which is what von Trier explicitly brings into critical light. As John discovers in the end of the film that he has been indeed wrong, he is unable to come to terms with the scope rational knowledge has failed him, thus he commits suicide through overdosing on pills. Pills his wife bought in fear in case the collision was going to become the reality, which John had thought silly. Hence the film criticises human arrogance that has lost humility before the great unknown that is the world as well as the fragile order we have constructed on which our sense of safety is built by “revealing the fragility and finitude of life on Earth” (Sinnerbrink: 95). What von Trier suggests is that too much power

brings with it a destructive effect when one realises they are not as powerful as they think they are. In a very direct sense, it is the loss of the order man has constructed that is seen to come crashing down at one point. This idea is also voiced when it comes to today's world's fondness with money and materialism, which consequently results in loss of moral and humanity. For example, Justine's boss tries to coax a tagline out of her, for she works as an advertiser, during the wedding, which the bride intends to ignore, but in the end steps up against him by ironically presenting the tagline in the form of rather fitting criticism against people like her boss, who only think of making money off people: "How do we effectively hook a group of minors on our substandard product preferably in a habit-forming way?"

Through the evocation of apocalypse von Trier reflects the sense of loss that is already in today's world, where the strength to fight the battles of everyday life has diminished, referring to the widespread depressive moods. The sense of loss is represented in a two-fold way: the collision of the planets results in the loss of the physical world we call home, which is predicted in the prologue, and runs through the film as an ominous undercurrent till the actual apocalypse takes place. But the loss of the world is also subjectively felt for Justine, as she is shown to be emotionally removed from active life. Melancholic loss in its nature defies communication (Freud 1917), which finds manifestation in Justine, who experiences moments of great anxiety during her wedding, without knowing the underlying cause, as a result of which she expresses being scared of her own sacredness. In this sense, "nothingness ensconces itself in those who dread: in the end, the melancholic comes to fear his own personality most of all" (Földényi: 311). This unnamable fear, or even dread, "does not have a specific cause, and since it relates to everything, it blurs the world" making everything look homogenous" (ibid.). It is clear that Justine feels estranged from herself and from the world, which translates into her losing any clear sense of meaning or knowledge, as a result of which she becomes disillusioned of the seemingly orderly way humans structure their lives. Indeed, "it requires a melancholic consciousness to reflect upon and give expression to this particular sense of loss, that is, lost time and the anticipation of loss" (Middeke and Wald: 5), the role of which Justine carries. If we take a look back at Freud's ideas of melancholia, then let us remember, it is not only the self that has become empty of meaning for the melancholic, but the world itself, too (Freud 1917), which causes them to lose all meaning. In case of Justine's representation of depressive melancholia, her portrayal of dull despondency exemplifies the type of melancholic who has succumbed to idea that all meaning is lost, which results in the anticipation of the apocalypse rather than an attempt to construct meaning, as was the case of Woolf's and Lispector's characters. Therefore, von Trier presents an allegory that aims "to capture the apocalyptic cultural-historical mood of the present; to critique the vacuity of a naïve rationalist

optimism in the face of the contemporary “crisis of world”” (Sinnerbrink: 102).

### 4.3.3 Crisis of Identity

In the prologue, the viewer learns that the collision between the planets is inevitable, as it was suggestive of Justine's psychological collapse as well, since the planet Melancholia and Justine are consistently linked together. Let us then trace the unravelling of Justine's crisis of identity in the film in order to examine the type of melancholy/depressive mood the film artfully communicates.

To start with, Justine's wedding has been built up in such a way that each event contributes to the accelerating downward-spiral that results in total disaster by the end of the night. Through the focusing on Justine's body language, especially her facial expressions, it became gradually clearer that she was internally suffering from something, but she was under the pressure to mask her real feelings. Because she was forcefully expected to be over the moon, she managed to put on a small show in the first half of the wedding, as she giggled and smiled to cover her actual rather depressive state. The latter became painfully clear as she took every chance she got to escape to another room or outside, the camera zooming in on her face, which communicated utter despondency as she quietly tried to survive each moment. Thus, von Trier emphasised the contrast between how she appeared among the guests and how she carried herself when she was alone, which was drastic to say the least. From an oblivious perspective, she should have had much to be happy about – she is getting married, the wedding is decadent, her boss offers her promotion in his wedding toast and so on. These are one of the ideas of success in today's world, but for Justine, they have become empty of meaning, and she cannot feel the happiness that is expected of her for “[b]eing grounded is a precondition for happiness—which is not to say its fulfillment” (Gumbrecht: 120), and grounded was she not. To make matters worse, her happiness was constantly drawn attention to in order to once again confirm to the viewer how very far she was from it, while the guests were ignorant of it. For example, Justine's father said to her that he had never seen her so happy, which illustrated how little even the closest people know each other and how deceiving one's facade may be. Although, ironically, at this point Justine was not able to hide her suffering that well anymore, so perhaps what von Trier aimed at was to showcase how people have become willingly blind to the suffering others. At one point, when the wedding has turned into an evident disaster, Justine does not hide her despondency any longer, which is where she had a brief dialogue with her sister's husband John:

*John: You better be goddamn happy.*

*Justine: Yes, I should be. I really should be.*

John then asks of her to make a deal with him that she be happy, to which Justine reacts with a pained expression because, as discussed above, one cannot simply snap out of depressive mood, one cannot simply decide to be happy. These repeated little scenes where her happiness is made the central topic showcase the very essence of toxic positivity, the function of which is not to help the other, but rather to quickly get over with an uncomfortable situation, which does not result in the suffering subject feeling better, but even more devastated instead. It is the blind assumption that happiness is the only way of life, just like “we equate dancing with being alive, and being alive—without any real justification—with happiness” (ibid. 115). Consequently, what is conveyed is strong criticism towards the 21<sup>st</sup> century ignorance that fosters falling into deep-seated depression, as what is found to be more important is the maintenance of the illusion of happiness rather than dealing with what is difficult and uncomfortable.

However, if we take a look at what is socially accepted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then it will become evident how Justine's depressive mood resonates with a much larger context, from which it follows how her crisis of identity is at least partly situated in society's rigid expectations of how one should lead their lives. Through showing how Justine cannot go through her own wedding, which is a very detailed and structured ritual, as it was seen in the film, it is communicated that she has come to lack “the capacity for affective engagement and meaningful social agency” (Sinnerbrink: 105). In this respect, the film also showcases how “[b]eyond a certain point, order is not merely practical neatness but an intolerable prison” (Földényi: 305), as it seems to be the case with Justine. At one point during her wedding she manages to communicate: “I'm trudging through this grey, woolly yarn... it's clinging to my legs... it's really heavy to drag along”. This symbolic rendering of how she feels calls to mind the tendency to convey melancholia in metaphors as it lacks any straightforward way of communication. This exact small description of how she feels is also visually represented in the prologue, which now acquires even more communicatory power as it finds repetition in this specific context. Thus, through her crisis and inability to correspond to what is expected of her, and the lack of help she receives, von Trier brings attention to the sociocultural level in the form of critique. By showing how Justine does not find support, not from her fiancée or family, or anyone – as even when she expresses her deepest sense of fear to her mother, she tells her how we are all scared and that she should just forget it –, von Trier exemplifies the isolation of a depressed person. He juxtaposes the ignorance of Justine's severely worrying condition with how trivialities were afforded high importance, like the small wedding game where guests had to predict the number of

beans in a bottle, which translates over into a judgement of how no one seems to care about the real things. This way of using contrasts seems to be von Trier's technique to emphasise what he thinks of being more important. What seems to be a clear message at the end of the wedding is that there is no supportive environment for one who is feeling as if outside of objective reality, like it was the case of Rhoda in *The Waves*, who felt like she was outside the loop of time, where no one could rescue her. Thus, in a single night, Justine loses her husband-to-be, her job, her parents' support, and what she wins is everyone's disapproval. The camera has by then recorded her downward spiralling as if to show what can lead one to complete mental breakdown, and von Trier has made an excellent job at it.

In the beginning of Part 2, Justine is depicted in complete stupor, or full-blown depression, where she has reached the point where doing daily tasks has become impossible. Her condition is again connected with the planet Melancholia, as young Leo, her sister's son, shows her the planet on her tablet computer, and says: "Look! There's a planet that has been hiding behind Sun and now it passes by us", which seems to be a telling reference to what Justine is going through. Her melancholy nature, which was mentioned by her ex-fiancée, that she did not understand gradually led her to major depression, which the emergence of the planet Melancholia figuratively represents. Soon enough, the planet can be seen in the sky, now that it has come out behind the Sun, in which melancholy/depressive state has been made doubly visible. The gloomy colour scheme supports the evocation of the mood, adding isolated heaviness to the atmosphere of the film, which in turn harmonises with Justine's condition, thus emphasising it further.

Following her breakdown, Justine gradually seems to recover. Her countenance no longer communicates suffering, and the viewer is perplexed as to what changed. One day she is simply feeling better, in which case the lighter melancholy mood is continued to be experienced that seems to foster Justine's understanding of herself. Her lightness of feeling is represented in her taking pleasure in the sudden snowfall as she and Claire pick berries in the garden, which is the first time in the film she seems to express authentic joy. Thus, it is a pivotal point in her recovery. Her moment of inner lightness is thus further supported by the weightlessness of the spontaneously falling snow. In the medium of film, such small elements speak volumes, and are carefully put together to deliver a certain effect, as in the mentioned scene. She is then seen to be in a considerably better state, although it is never communicated in words as to what changed. One of the ways to analyse this is that following her failed wedding night, she let go of what was expected of her, as she was abandoned by everyone except her sister. Now that she emerged from the breakdown, as if a Phoenix from the ashes, she begins to make contact with the outside world again. Enigmatically, she seems to be in the middle of quiet cultivation of thought that the viewer will not

know of, but can derive from her at times curiously smiling countenance that the camera is keen on highlighting in close-up shots. The viewer will notice the drastic change she has underwent somehow since during the most of the film, her facial expressions communicated subdued agony, which presents great contrast with how she carried herself now. In this, Justine exemplifies the idea that “in order to overcome destructive sensations we need to reach a final catharsis or to assume a distant point of view” (Sticchi: 2). Through her breakdown, she regained direction.

The link between her and the planet now attains another shade of meaning, as she claims to “know things”, as if she has access to some mystical knowledge, which is linked to the planet somehow. But what does it mean to know things? In Woolf's and Lispector's novels, true knowledge was found to be unreachable as it was with great effort sought after through ceaseless attempts at verbalisations. However, Lispector's character voiced this sense of knowing things, and also proposed a reason that can be attributed to Justine's way of not explaining it further: “I feel that I know some truths. Which I already foresee. But truths have no words. Truths or truth?” (Lispector: 47). Therefore, knowing things is more than a feeling than a concrete thought. In von Trier's film, Justine is rather taciturn, as expected, so we must examine her closely. At one point, Justine is shown lying naked on a riverbank, transfixed on the planet, as if flirting with it. This enigmatic and confusing scene strengthens the connection between the two, but does not tell anything particular about it. Von Trier does not seem to be interested in making things simple, which is certainly a merit, as this is what makes the interpretation so interesting. In one sense, it illustrates the anticipated loss of the apocalypse, even a welcoming of the apocalypse, which is in track with depressive melancholia and the 21<sup>st</sup> century sense of doom. What supports this view is that Justine expresses no anguish or sadness for the looming end of the world, there is no grieving for any loss, which is clear as Justine is shown beaming with a big smile looking at the planet while others in the same scene are shown fearful, a drastic play of contrast once again.

Justine and Melancholia, in which the planet symbolises the enigmatic phenomenon of melancholia itself. Namely, she was so transfixed by the planet for she shared the notion of melancholia that the planet metaphorically carried in the film that by entering into contact with such a powerful force, in this double manner, she arrived at peace with herself and the world. Hence, it explains why she managed to stay calm in the face of the looming death. In a way, “this film shows that those who struggle the most with mental health problems are sometimes the strongest calming force for others when the world comes crashing down figuratively or, as is the case in this film, literally” (Zamorano Osorio). Indeed, her nephew calls her “Steelbreaker”, which is paradoxical since Justine appeared to everyone else an irredeemably weak person. It is really this acceptance of life that Justine now emanates, as she has rejected the material world and is finally as if “stripped of

all worldly baggage” (Power and White 2012), including the ideals society has created; a coming back to something primal. Thus, *Melancholia* takes the viewer from an absolute meltdown, the worst of the worst, to a form of serenity, even in the face of doom, in which there lay “an acceptance of the finality of all things” (ibid.), with which we all must arrive at peace sooner or later, for we are finite beings in this place called Earth. In being able to accept the inevitable doom, there also seems to reside the notion that “in the courage to face death, there appears a possibility of freedom” (Gumbrecht: 122).

There is a bright side in the face of our most difficult struggles, and beauty even in a state of melancholia, however, this is not to diminish the gravity of mental illness, but rather a peek into an alternative point of view. And if we take this end-of-the-world metaphorically, then maybe it instils hope that after depression there is perhaps a new beginning? With films like that, there are no direct answers. In this way, the film is not necessarily devastating in all its entirety, as the ending can also be viewed as empowering and beautiful.

#### **4.4.4 Formal Representations of Melancholia**

In this subchapter I will examine the way the film formally makes melancholy/depressive mood manifest. Firstly, it is divided into three parts: Prologue, Part 1 and Part 2. After the non-diegetic prologue, the viewer is thrown into the imminent diegesis of the film, which starts in *medias res*. What thus should be commented on is montage, which links shots meaningfully together, but the semantic-causal links in the film are rather weak, leaving the viewer in a perplexed state when it comes to Justine's visible uneasiness. As discussed above, she was unable to say what was wrong, so it was precisely this state of anxious unknowingness, as intensified by the shaky handheld camera filming style, that was formally replicated to carry over the mood of melancholia as if a physical sensation (Elsaesser and Hagener: 11), which is famously an incommunicable state, but von Trier manages to make it palpable. In this impossibility of communication, there are semantic and temporal gaps almost all through Part 1. What the film then formally conveys is distress, danger, and anxiety, the reasons of which are never directly explained, but perhaps only hinted. Therefore, what we have on our hands is rather “a collection of fragments rather than a coherent narrative” (Rimmon-Kenan: 244), which is emblematic of illness narratives, and *Melancholia* is an excellent example of a depression narrative.

*Melancholia* is an example of art cinema, which profoundly differs from classical narrative films. The former are characterised by “disassociated perception, “saturated” affects or emotions,

and open-ended reflection oriented towards “higher order” meanings” (Sinnerbrink 2016). In case of von Trier's film, the affective representation of melancholia does take centre stage in the way close-up shot is utilised, as discussed above, and the film does remain open-ended despite the apocalypse that took place in the end. What the film director sets out to do is merging the form and the subject (Wenaus: 138), much like in the previous literary examples. For example, he employs repetition as a narrative technique to make the viewer notice the significance of an object or a scene as he employs the Wagner's tune as a cue, or when he places Justine repeatedly in a situation where she is rejected or abandoned during her wedding night to make a point. Music is a signal throughout the film, it works to unite the human melancholia to the unknown forces that creates it; it conveys lurking danger, underlying apocalyptic feeling, permeating melancholia. Both of these examples address melancholia, as they work towards making it the central theme in the film. It is intrinsic that cinema “functions through doubling, the doubling of reality, of narratives, of characters, of bodies and of image and sound” (Ingvartsen 2007). Von Trier, thus, doubles elements in such a way that produce a unified effect, as he succeeds in conveying the general mood of depressive melancholia in the film.

Another aspect that should be targeted is von Trier's employment of time-image. The use of slow motion in the Prologue works to give the viewer extra time to take in what is being potentially communicated. The alternating images virtually recap what is going to happen in the film, which is itself rather incoherent, but it is exactly the Prologue that gives the film its coherency where it is otherwise lacking. The use of slow motion, or what we might call a deceleration in narrative perhaps, conveys the state of depression when time disappears, and nothing matters anymore: “time has been erased or bloated, absorbed into sorrow” (Kristeva: 4). Therefore, the meaningful use of time-image in *Melancholia* serves to “open up aesthetic experience” (Sinnerbrink 2016). In the previous chapters, we saw how time was obsessively focused on by the characters in their contemplations. Time as if provided a space in which to assume one's own agency so as to acquire a sense of control in an otherwise chaotic time-space. In the film, a particular time-consciousness is visualised not verbally expressed, targeting Justine's mental state, as it is represented from an external perspective, by the method of slow motion in the Prologue, where links between the planet and Justine were directly made through the associative montage.

To sum up, film's systems of narrative and style “present the audience with cues, patterns, and gaps of information that shape and orientate the comprehension activity undertaken by the spectator” (Ruiz Carmona: 9). The film begins and ends with the depiction of annihilation, giving a uniform sense of the mood the film aspires to create. The opening image first pictured Justine, and thus linked her with the attacking planet, the association of which is further emphasised in the film



by the use of sound as cue. At the end of the film, the prediction of the prologue is carried through, as the three – young Leo, Claire and Justine – come to face the planetary collision, but only Justine is meaningfully linked to the planet throughout the film. Thus, melancholy/depressive mood in *Melancholia* works as an overall theme and powerful undercurrent, which is supported both by the plot and style, creating a uniform pattern in which an internal crisis is made felt and present on the screen.

## Conclusion

*Melancholia* portrays a darker type of melancholia, where despondency and dull despair find more accentuation than other affects that were previously linked with melancholia like anguish, sorrow, despair and sadness. This speaks volumes about the 21<sup>st</sup> century where information overload has desensitised one, a numbed-out type of melancholia, where interest in life has receded and dull yearning for authentic connection has taken the place. However, the film also goes to show, despite its rewarding treatment of the number one mental illness today that “we can appreciate the reason for a completely negative perception of existence and its surprising conceptual and moral strength” (Sticchi: 7). It is very true of melancholia, when we consider its source to be related to the context of a particular time, in which case the mood functions to suggest telling aspects about today's world, what is wrong with it, and how one survives it. It questions the rational-scientific knowledge that is hailed as the ultimate truth, as well as the money-driven mass culture that has lost human touch. Empathetically, the film also encourages “to understand that the world is full of both danger and opportunity—the chance of great happiness as well as the certainty of death“ (Echrenreich: 91).

Von Trier's film is important because it manages to depict depression for what it is, in an authentic way. The style and narrating techniques play together in harmony and give birth to a powerful, sensory loaded evocation of an illness, which makes life very difficult for so many people around the world. It is partly a jumpy, anxiety-ridden film, but on the other hand, it is also deeply poetic and invigorating, especially in the second half of the film. The end of life on Earth can be seen both directly and metaphorically, nevertheless, both approaches illuminate further Justine's crisis of identity, both the struggle and the letting go.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study was to open up the concept of melancholia by closely examining its manifestations in literary and cinematic examples. In the introduction, I addressed melancholia's elusive nature, which often finds more succinct expression in the form of metaphors as it would if it were directly targeted. Thereby, I also proposed a rendering of my own – the setting sun of melancholia – to shed light on the two aspects of the concept, as it was seen to signify the existential oscillation between both the light and darkness, death and birth. For after the sun sets, it is hoped to rise up again.

The introduction continued with taking a look into the evolution of the concept in cultural history in order to take notice of how melancholia was closely intertwined with the historical and cultural sensibilities. In the aesthetic practices of Romanticism and Decadence, melancholia was found to be deeply embedded in the subject's sense of the self and the world, some of the sources of which were found to be present in the current context of the periods. As it was discussed, these periods greatly influenced the Modernist age, where the deepening awareness of one's own subjectivity together with the disintegrating world gave birth to a type of literature that, as its central content, presented the inner crisis of the subject. It was pointed out how the melancholy outlook on life came to be expressed not only on the level of content, but also on the level of form, as the latter mirrored and became inseparable of the former.

To establish a conceptual network that would guide the study from the beginning to end, notions of time, loss and subject formation were introduced and analysed in connection to melancholia. It was discussed how the melancholic's experience of time is problematically subjective since one has become separated from the objective time in the external world. This was found to produce a conflict, where the internal and external world appeared incompatible. Due to this particular time-consciousness, temporal continuity was disrupted, which generated a sense of unbridgeable loss that reflected the past and anticipated the future, resulting in an anguished present. Such a condition brings forth a desperate search for truth, meaning and identity that evokes grief for the past and/or longing for something that cannot be named. Therefore, through intensely self-reflective contemplations on their suffering, the melancholic creates and recreates themselves in ceaseless verbal formulations, facing the abyss inside themselves, hoping to push aside the veil of darkness.

In the last section of the introduction, mood, or *Stimmung*, drawing from Heidegger's philosophy, was presented as a method to be used in the case studies to analyse the representations of melancholia. In essence, mood was taken to be something that is total, and which determines the

way one meaningfully interacts with themselves and the world. By delineating a historical context in the beginning of each case study, the attention was given on what could be seen as potential sources of melancholy mood that gave birth to the different types of melancholia, as the examples were found to enable us to „encounter past realities“ (Gumbrecht: 14). In this, Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history helped to guide the idea of seeing moods as rooted in the atmospheres, or the close collective realities we inhabit, that are already preconditioned in some way or another by our shared historical past. It thus followed how melancholia can be examined as a cultural phenomenon, which resonated with the Heideggerian philosophy of *Stimmung*, the use of which Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht advocated for to be used in the research of aesthetic practices as a potentially fecund method of analysis.

In the case studies, three types of melancholia were examined, the potential sources of which were linked to larger sociocultural contexts of a given time period.

In Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, modernist melancholia was characterised by the sorrowful mourning for the lost past, or an unnamable object, where time was experienced to be intolerably ephemeral. In this view, the present moment felt painfully fleeting, which further contributed to the already disorderly and fragmentary sense of the self and the world. The pursuits to find truth and meaning took the form of painful and effortful processes, in which the melancholy self-reflection became the preferred method to try to make sense of things that were inherently bottomless. This exemplifies the 20<sup>th</sup> century subject's split ego, where one regards oneself from the perspective of an object which they do not understand. This very split nature of the melancholic was addressed as a formative process by Freud in his later research, where he found the melancholy identifications to be part of the development of the psyche. Woolf's characters were desperately in search of their identity throughout the book, which kept forever evading them, but at the same time, through these failures to detect clear sense of self, it was also noted how this pattern keeps on repeating, which rendered the longing to tell a story, and thus ascribe clear meaning to life, futile. In a way, this discovery served to free Bernard of his obsession to reach some sort of destination that really does not exist.

In Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva*, a variety of postmodernist melancholia was identified as a quasi-ironical type of the mood, which shared the modernist subject's time-sensitivity when it came to the fleetingness of the present moment, bringing despair. However, the postmodernist subject imparts a clear idea to be free from past. Thus, there is no element of longing pertaining to past, but instead, it is the present that becomes a newly interesting ground to probe the ontologies of time, reality and truth. This type of melancholia seems to be more ready to explore what lies beyond thought and feeling, as opposed to revolving around what is already in the world. Thus, the melancholy

longing to become one with the very essence of life in Lispector's novel, rather than any concrete identity, set forth the innovative use of language that sought to pry open the unknown world the speaking voice desired to enter through her linguistic and imaginative improvisations. The quasi-ironical melancholic possessed the self-awareness that enabled her to approach her anguish with a portion of humour, which adds a new layer into the interpretation of melancholia, and an important point of separation in comparison to Woolf's novel.

In Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, manifestations of a depressive type of melancholia were analysed. It was pointed out how in the medium of cinema internal states may be much more difficult to convey than in literature, where the reader is provided access to the intimate minds of the characters as they minutely brood over endless thoughts and feelings, as in the last two examples. However, it was brought attention to how the cinematic body is highly capable of communicating intense moods like depression, as the camera followed along the suffering subject's body language, in a way that was highly suggestive of the psychological state. Von Trier demonstrated how film is able to communicate an inner crisis with keeping the verbal expression to a bare minimum, and instead made use of devices like sound and colour to mirror an internal state by way of creating the corresponding atmosphere. The film managed to shed light on the depressive type of melancholia that was mostly characterised by dull and passive despondency, in case of which the subject had become disillusioned of the structures of life that were desperately clinged on and extolled in the society one did not feel any part of. Thus, by linking Justine with the attacking planet Melancholia, an epitome of a literal as well as metaphoric apocalypse, von Trier illustrated the complete succumbing of the melancholic to an anticipated loss, referring to the irreparability of the world as it was. Although, despite the severity of depressive melancholia, an undercurrent of psychological strength of a suffering subject allowed one to see life in its natural fragility, without the desperate attempt to fight against it.

The differences between the identified types – mournful, quasi-ironical, depressive – illuminated different aspects of melancholia that were directly related to the corresponding historical contexts. The loss of clear values, meaning and order in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century left the subject shocked, for the filter of fragmentation rendered the self and the world painfully incoherent. In the second half of the century, the chaos and fragmentation had become more deeply ingrained in the world. Thus, without the factor of shock, one grew more interested in the possible worlds and selves, giving way to explorative experimentation in aesthetic practices that used language as a tool to reach what lay beyond, hence the melancholy yearning for what does not yet exist. In the post-postmodernism, the access to high level of comfort and deceptive safety have not ruled out depressive melancholia, but on the contrary, those who do not share in on the values to which society at-

tributes meaning, may not receive the support and understanding they long for. What the examples shared in common was the unanimous demonstration of the melancholic's fundamental failure of language. Whether it was about the questioning of language's ability to communicate in *The Waves*, or searching for this necessary failure of language to reach the beyond in *Água Viva*, or ceasing to be able to speak at all as was the case in *Melancholia*. All three examples thus mirrored the attitudes and tendencies present in the world that fuelled melancholia, and each cultural context left its distinctive mark on both the analysis of the concept of melancholia as such as well as the analysis of the representations of melancholia in literature and film.

Manifestations of melancholy mood in literature and film differ to a great extent. For one, literature cannot attract all the senses simultaneously as film does. In literary examples, writing itself became a means to attribute coherence to the world that was slipping away from grasp in Woolf's and Lispector's novels. In a way, it might be proposed that self-reflection is done by the camera in the film, while in literature it was the subject who did it through internal monologues. Despite the differences in literature and film when it came to communicating psychological states, both mediums showed similar techniques in formal representations of melancholia. In all three cases, the gaps in the narratives and weakness of causality were presented through a fragmentary form, where any sense of definiteness was purposefully broken, which led the sequence becoming disrupted.

Time and again, it was noted how melancholia defies any direct approach, which not only makes it difficult for a subject to express their experience with the mood, but it was also a constant challenge to analyse the representations. Indeed, Clarice Lispector's character wrote that what she wanted to communicate was as impossible as “trying to photograph a perfume” (Lispector: 47). It was the aim of this study to analyse this very process, and I hope the result is meaningful, as much as it can be.

In conclusion, none of the characters arrived to the point where they got answers to the questions that so profoundly pained them, indicating the inconceivability of the prospect of any definite closure. However, by turning to face their suffering, they became more aware of who they are, how they relate to the world, through acknowledging their losses, and their fragmentary selves. They made contact with the inherent complexity of all things, from which there is no escape. Curiously, in the end, it did not produce further deepening of melancholia, but rather, a kind of soothing took place. This is where my research stops, and the enigma of melancholia takes over.

## Kokkuvõte. Melanhoolia kirjanduses ja filmis

Antud magistritöös uurin melanhoolia kujutamist kirjanduses ja filmis, kus pööran tähelepanu laiemale ajaloolisele ja sotsiokultuurilisele kontekstile, kompamaks seoseid teatud tüüpi melanhoolia esilekerkimise, tajumise ja poeetilise väljendamise vahel.

Sissejuhatuses toon välja melanhoolia kultuuriloo, milles arutlen, kuidas nähtust aja jooksul on tõlgendatud ja mõtestatud ning milliste erinevate valdkondadega on seda seostatud. Arutlusest selgub, kuidas melanhooliat ei tarvitseks pelgalt mõne isikuomase kalduvusena uurida, vaid, toetudes Walter Benjamini ajaloofilosoofiale, pakun välja, kuidas tähtsust võiks omistada ka meie jagatud ajaloole. Sellele, kuidas keskkond, kuhu sünnime ja mis aja jooksul muutuseid läbib, meid vormib ning kuidas me oma ajastust, sellele eelnevast ja selles leiduvatest hoiakutest ja meeleoludest lahutamatud oleme. Seega asungi melanhooliat uurima kui kultuurilist nähtust, tuues lühidalt välja peamised melanhoolia tõlgendamisviisid alates antiikajast kuni renessansini, ning seejärel peatun juba pisut pikemalt romantismi, dekadentsi ja modernismi perioodide olemusel, suhtel ja poeetilisel väljendusel seoses melanhooliaga.

Kontseptuaalne võrgustik, mille abil melanhooliat juhtumiuuringutes avan, kätkeb tähelepanu toomist melanhooliku problemaatilisele suhtele ajaga ja sellega seonduva kaotus- ja/või kaduvustundega, mis mängib suurt osa viisis, kuidas subjekt oma isedust ja ümbritsevat maailma tajub. Valulik ja kannatusi valmistav tõdemus, et miski on kadunud või kaotatud võib tekitada nii leinamist kui ka igatsust millegi nimetamatu või kättesaadamatu järele, mida võib näha reaktsioonina oleviku kurvameelsust tekitavale kaootilisusele. Melanhoolik loob ja taasloob pidevalt arusaama enesest, vaagides sisemist mustendavat põhjatust seda kuidagi sõnastada püüdes või muudmoodi läbi keele väljendades. Igatsetud teadmine jääb aga alati kättesaamatuks, kuid püüdlemine selle suunas ei kipu väsima. Seetõttu on eneserefleksioon melanhooliku põhiline tööriist, et end ja maailma enesele pisutki vähem võõramaks muuta.

Juhtumiuuringutes identifitseerin melanhooliat kui meeleolu või häälestust, Heideggeri *Stimmung*i mõistes, mis on otseselt seotud sellega, kuidas maailm subjektile avaldub vastavalt sellele, milline on tema meeleolu. Jonathan Flatley sõnul, kes samuti toetub Heideggerile, on meil võimalik siseneda meeleoludesse, mis juba eksisteerivad meie ümber, mille puhul tuleb taas osutada Benjamini ajaloofilosoofiale. Järeldub, et ainuüksi meeleolu kaudu võime suhestuda ümbritsevaga tähenduslikul moel. Toetun siinkohal osaliselt Hans Erik Gumbrechtile, kes on võtnud sihiks uurida kirjandust keskendudes meeleolu avamisele.

Analüüsipeatükke on kolm. Alustan modernismi melanhoolia analüüsiga inglise kirjaniku

Virginia Woolfi teoses „Lained“ (1931), kus identifitseerin leinavat melanhooliatüüpi. Järgmisena uurin postmodernistlikku melanhooliat ukraina-juudi juurtega brasiilia kirjaniku Clarice Lispector teoses „Água Viva“ (1973). Viimasena analüüsin depressiivse melanhoolitüübi kujutamist taani filmikunstniku Lars von Trieri filmis, mille pealkiri vägagi mugavalt ongi ei midagi muud kui „Melanhoolia“ (2011). Peatükkides uurin, kuidas väljendub melanhooliku suhe aja ja kaotuse-/kaduvustundega, tema sundmõttelisi end pidevalt taasloovaid enesepeegeldusi, metafoore ja muudmoodi silmatorkavat keelekasutust ja ka olulisi hoiakuid keele suhtes, ning viimaks viise, kuidas melanhoolia vormilisel tasandil väljendust leiab.

Kokkuvõttes toon välja uurimise käigus leitu ja võrdlen omavahel analüüsitud kahte teost ja filmi. Püüan ka vastata, mida võiks melanhoolia puhul näha nii valguse poole püüdlevat kui ka pimedusse laskuvat.

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*Paula Taberland*

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