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Transformation in Fantastic Fiction: Violence, Trauma, and Catharsis in Selected Works by Elizabeth Hand

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Transformation in Fantastic Fiction:

A Study of Violence, Trauma, and Catharsis in Selected Works by Elizabeth Hand

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Introduction

Much of today's written material, from the news to novels, has defined itself by emulating the ubiquitous violence of today's world. Holding both sensational appeal and shock value, violence, from the global level down to personal violent acts such as rape and murder, is a constant presence in nearly all types of published work. In fact, violence has become almost conventional, in part because of the mindset of a post-World War II generation of artists and authors, to whom violence, war, and death have become a thing of everyday life, with all hope of a peaceable future unthinkable. To some degree this has inured people to the brutality of violence, which in itself is deeply disturbing; a society that has become effectively numb to the true bestial nature of violence is one that will fail to understand its destructive potential. But despite the destructive nature of violence, and society's sensational obsession with it, it can be argued that in its excessiveness there also blooms a certain sentimentality. Every day in America people visit the psychiatrist, participate in charity events for those who suffer, lay flowers at the grave of an unknown victim, and help others who have been impacted by violence or trauma. This is, in essence, a direct reflection of the social reaction to the emotional consequences of violent and traumatic events. And even though we are culturally obsessed with violence, we as individual humans respond to the psychological sentimentality in ourselves and in others.

Violence, then, due to its both sentimental and sensational nature, has situated itself in literature just as it has in all other aspects of society. Sentimental, which can be defined as "expressive of or appealing to sentiment, especially the tender emotions and feelings, as love, pity, or nostalgia; appealing to the tender emotions, in art, literature, or music" ("Sentimental"), is, in this regard, the converse of sensational, which can be defined as "producing or designed to

produce a startling effect, strong reaction, intense interest, etc., especially by exaggerated, superficial, or lurid elements; aiming at violently excited effects" ("Sensational"). While the sensational nature of violence in literature is a *part* of the reason behind why people read and consume it at such a high rate, violence and trauma actually *function* in literature because they appeal to human emotion and *sentiment*, thus giving a work meaning and substance. Some scholars believe that literature, and art in general, is tasked with representing a relatively accurate depiction or translation of issues that exist in society today. If an author agrees with this social responsibility, then he or she should, at some point in their career, seek to understand the nature of violence, in hope of preventing a further degeneration of cultural values.

Even in contemporary fantastic fiction, a genre abounding with instances of transformation and physics-defying feats, violence has a constant presence. But despite the nature of fantastic fiction, and the numerous appearances of the "strange," the "grotesque," or the "other," violence in contemporary fantasy quite frequently has the feel and emotion of realism, despite the fact that it regularly leaves the realm of the normal. The loss of a loved one, for example, is a traumatic affair, and will almost certainly be equally as traumatic for a character in a novel who experiences the same type of tragedy. The way the encounter is delivered to the reader will of course vary greatly from author to author, but the representation of the emotion experienced by the character will, in most cases, ultimately find its ground in realism. Many authors of fantasy shape actual concerns or issues into fictional events and themes, and do not choose to portray things exactly as they are. But in this process, authors of worth *do* address the issues at hand in an honest way; because they also focus upon the emotional value of human reaction to events, such authors are truthful in their representation, specifically in terms of violence as an act with real, transformative consequences.

Elizabeth Hand is an author who deftly accomplishes this feat. Her works "Cleopatra Brimstone" and "Calypso in Berlin," from the collection *Saffron and Brimstone: Strange Stories*, published in 2006, as well as her recent novel *Generation Loss: A Novel*, published in 2007, all demonstrate her unique and uncanny ability to synchronously represent both the sensitive and graphic nature of truly appalling tragedies. This is, in part, because she draws on elements of her own life experience. As a result of the semi-autobiographical nature of her work, as well as the way she carefully toes the line between reality and fantasy, Hand's prose elegantly and effortlessly mimes the emotional and psychological aspects of trauma and violence, giving her stories and characters an authenticity and fullness that not many authors of fantastic fiction are able to achieve.

Born March 29, 1957, Hand is the author of a number of award winning sci-fi and fantasy novels and short fictions. She has won the Shirley Jackson Award, multiple Nebula and World Fantasy Awards, the Mythopoeic Society Award, many International Horror Guild Awards, and the James Tiptree Jr. Award. Hand describes herself as a visionary writer, inspired by outsider artists, who draws deeply on the places she has lived and loved most. Her works often feature complex, troubled female protagonists, such as an entomologist with a fantastic mutation, a traumatized demigoddess, and a punk, rebel photographer, all of whom come to find themselves the victims of violence. And very much about these characters comes from Hand herself: "I was very conscious of writing them…they may not have had my psychology, or my entire background…well, Cass Neary does. Also, Jane certainly has the geeky girl persona, who is into entomology, and that's me. Calypso, too, is like me…I definitely mimed those emotional strata in my own life" (Elizabeth Hand, Interview, 8).

On February 24, 2012, I had the honor of interviewing Elizabeth Hand via Skype; this interview will inform my analysis throughout, and I have included the transcription as a supplement. In speaking with Hand, much of the violence and trauma of her early life was discussed, and it became clear that a number of the terrible events which her characters suffer from were, in fact, experienced by Hand herself:

> In 1979, just a couple of weeks before my 22nd birthday, I was in D.C., and I was abducted and raped…It wasn't something I really talked about, it was just kind of something that happened. Looking at it now, I would say that I was in denial, and trying to push it away…I was a kid. I didn't know it from anything. I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't want to talk about it to my parents or my boyfriend. I just wanted to put it behind me. So later, when I started writing, and getting published, I had not really dealt with anything head on. Although…the characters in my early books and stories were very often traumatized women…in one form or another. *Waking Moon*, which was a novel that had a lot of autobiographical elements, though it didn't deal with *this* experience, *did* have a scene in it where the protagonist narrator has the experience of feeling as though the veil has been ripped away, and she's seeing the world we live in as a terrible, horrible place. (EH, 1-3)

This sense of "the veil" being ripped away is an idea that Hand discusses often, as if she is able to see the terrible and horrible things in the world for the first time, unaware that they had been there all along. It is important to note that this experience does *not* make Hand feel as if she has a license to write about "horrible things happening to men, until the cows come home" (EH, 11) because she was raped. This would be purely sensational, and embracing the baser aspects of violence and trauma. On the contrary, Hand is a writer who does *not* appeal to the obsessive, sensational nature of violence, but rather the sentimental and emotional side of it. In doing this, she is able to deliver to the reader a transformative and evocative account, yet is still able to speak to the real ramifications of violence. As a result, the mood in her description of violence itself becomes almost impersonal at times, but this is deliberate:

> I wanted it to have something in the way of how rape, or violation, or violence, feels: where it's brutal, but there's also a certain detachment to it…but also for me, as a writer, I could write about it without feeling that I was condoning it, or glorifying it, or sensualizing it, or prettifying it any way at all. It's ugly, it's brutal, and I think you want to write about it in such a way that you also want to dispatch with it very quickly, so you can get back to a story which people are going to want to read. (EH, 10)

As a writer, Hand's experience lends her a certain degree of knowledge and emotional insight that only those who have survived these events can possibly access. What this translates to, in terms of her writing, is an authentic account of the results of violence and trauma, both as seen through the eyes of a victim, and from the perspective of the world at large.

In particular, Hand pays great attention to the resulting effects of violence and trauma, focusing upon this "feeling as though the veil has been ripped away." This newly realized perception, which involves being disillusioned to the harsh reality of life, is, fundamentally, a transformation. As the respective plots of Hand's stories unfold, transformations of various kinds occur, on many levels. By analyzing the development of her characters and how they respond to the events of their lives, we are able to see how violence and trauma, two very different forces, employ themselves both physically and emotionally, and nearly always operate as agents of transformation. Much of Hand's work abides by this formula, and it is useful to understand the origins and etymologies of these terms, in order to examine how these concepts function in her stories.

Violence, which often occurs *before* a trauma, can be defined as "swift and intense force; rough or injurious force, action, or treatment; an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power" ("Violence"). In the Latin *violentia* (vehemence or impetuosity), and *violare* (violation or improper treatment), violence finds its roots. A fundamental part of violence, then, is the act of violation, which is rooted in the Latin *violationem* (injury or irreverence), as well as

violence's *violare*, and can be defined as "to violate, to treat with violence, outrage, dishonor; to do harm to the person or especially the chastity of; specifically: rape" ("Violation"). In any violent situation, be it rape, a fist fight, or full-scale war, violations occur in many forms, and in most instances directly by way of the violent act itself. In rape, for example, violence is an inherent component of the committal of the act, but several violations occur as well. A victim of rape, while always suffering from physical injury, will likely also experience an overwhelming sense of emotional violation, which can be characterized by fear, terror, unwilling submission, loss of orientation, and extreme emotional and psychological distress. But violence clearly goes beyond the realm of the physical, made apparent by the different forces at work in the act of rape.

Physical or corporeal abuse is only one form of violence. Emotional violence, which very generally consists of confinement, rejection, terrorization, and isolation, is also a large component of almost all violent events. Forcing someone to witness or be a part of an inhumane act, for instance, is certainly an instance of emotional violence. Despite the victim's lack of personal physical injury, a lasting and detrimental emotional toll will be exacted, just as it is in cases of physical abuse. While physical and emotional violence have very clear and obvious differences, there are some acts, like sexual assault, which blur the boundaries a bit, and can be classified either way. Sexual violence, such as rape, harassment, stalking, drug-facilitated sexual assault, child abuse, and sexual exploitation, can result in deeply seated psychological issues, as well as both physical and emotional scarring. When remarking on her own rape, Hand recalls having experienced a form of dissociation:

> She just has this experience of the abyss, which I did experience when I was raped. I had this feeling that I had divided into three: one part of me was on the ground, this catholic autopilot sort of praying, one part of me just blindly submitted, and another part of me

> was up in the air, floating, looking down, and seeing everything that was happening. (EH, 6-7)

Like Hand, some victims are affected so intensely that they suffer a psychological break, which can result in a number of conditions, such as dissociation, schizophrenia, depression, and in extreme cases, the unconscious assumption of the attacker's identity and habits. No matter what the ultimate outcome, however, violence and violation have devastating results, and lasting effects. These products of violence, such as the serious disorders which plague victims after suffering from an event like rape, are most often classified as "traumas."

Trauma, which can be defined as "a bodily wound or shock produced by sudden physical injury, as from violence or accident; an experience that produces psychological injury or pain" ("Trauma"), is the most common effect of violence. Most forms of violence are intensely traumatic for the victim, and they result in a sort of psychic wound, stemming from a terrible experience which causes abnormal stress. Some examples include witnessing community violence, physical and sexual abuse, the violent death of a loved one, war, bullying, and even verbal abuse.

As with violence, trauma can also be broken into several subcategories, most namely physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual. Some experiences, such as rape, encompass the full spectrum of trauma, and result in a range of serious disorders, including chronic depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociation, and anger. More acute effects consist of hyper vigilance, avoidance behaviors, and intrusive imagery, among many other symptoms. In *Generation Loss*, Hand's protagonist Cass reflects on trauma: "It's like having a razor blade clamped between your teeth: you move your mouth too much, your tongue, you smile or talk or kiss someone, you cut yourself open. You could drown if you swallowed that much blood"

(*Generation Loss*, 19). The anxiety and the stress are very apparent in this quotation, which directly follows Cass' rape in *Generation Loss*. The trauma, in fact, is so profound that Cass seems to feel that reopening this wound could be life threatening.

Along with subcategorizing trauma, it is important to differentiate between trauma and violence. Violence is the swift, immediate act; the exertion of injurious physical force; an unjust exertion of force or power over another person. Trauma, however, is the result of violence. Trauma is the wound, the psychological and physiological condition of a person once the experience in question has already occurred. From the Greek *trauma*, meaning "wound," and from the root **tere*, meaning "to rub, turn," trauma has an etymology built of a few different components. Throw, from Old English *þrawan*, meaning "to twist, turn, or writhe," shares the same root, **tere*, with trauma. As well, the Old English *weorpan*, meaning "to throw, throw away, hit with a missile," is the root for modern English's "warp." This etymologic progression is fitting, insofar as trauma resulting from violence does tend to warp the psyche of the victim, and it is this act of being warped, of being *transformed*, that characterizes the effects of violence and trauma so well.

Transformation, a term which encompasses the wide variety of developments that come about as a result of violent and traumatic events, can be defined as: "to change in composition or structure; to change the outward form or appearance of; to change in character or condition: convert" ("Transformation"), and is from the Latin *transformare*. *Trans*-, which means "across, beyond, to go beyond," also shares with both "trauma" and "warp" the root **tere*, "to rub, turn." As well, the definition of transformation contains the word "convert," which is from the Latin *convertere*, meaning "turn around, transform," and is also related to "trauma" by way of the root **tere*. The fact that they repeatedly share this root indicates, at least at the linguistic and

etymological level, that an inherent component of trauma *is* transformation. The close link between the two is quite fitting, then, in that the characters within these stories certainly do undergo a series of transformations as a direct result of the traumas they experience.

The transformations that occur take shape in a multitude of ways. A majority of these changes are also characterized as psychological developments, but they remain, in essence, transformations. These diagnoses, such as dissociation, repression, or even Stockholm syndrome, to name a few, ultimately leave the victim in a different state. This, however, is just one level of change. In addition to impacting the characters within the stories, transformation also affects a change on the level of the audience and their perception of the story, particularly in the presence of violence or trauma. When savagery and brutality are present in a text, so long as they are represented honestly, the work gains an element of gravity and substance which was not present before. This is because violence in literature, while representing sensational violent events, also appeals to the emotional and sentimental side of a person.

Sensational, which can be defined as something which is "aiming at violently excited effects" ("Sensational"), certainly describes one aspect of violence and trauma. But while violence and trauma in both reality and literature are shocking to witness, these same events *in reality* do not "violently excite" people as much as they do in literature. In real-life, violent and traumatic events are, for the most part, intensely tragic affairs. Despite this, the audience deeply *enjoys* literature which contains strong elements of violence and trauma. The explanation to this seeming opposition can be found in the concept of catharsis, originally an Aristotelian term. Here it is defined by Eva Schaper, Professor of Logic at the University of Glasgow, in her article "Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure," which was published in *The Philosophical Quarterly*:

> The traditional interpretation of catharsis attributes to tragedy a therapeutic effectiveness. On this view, a release from unwanted and painful emotions or passions is achieved through stimulation of the same or similar emotions, bringing about an emotional climax unbearable for long, and therefore discharging itself when a certain pitch is reached. The resulting peace and calm is said to be pleasurable. (Schaper, 135)

In this reading and many others, the consistency is that catharsis is a result of "bringing to bear on the mind" terrible and frightening emotions, such as pity, fear, grief, or terror, which in turn stimulate similar emotions within the audience, resulting in "an emotional climax." In this, catharsis brings together sensationalism and sentimentalism. The "emotional climax" is quite similar to the "violently excited effects" that sensationalism results in, but there is also the "bringing to bear of *emotion,*" which is, of course, sentiment.

In some early interpretations, catharsis is limited to works of Greek tragedy. Recently, however, many scholars and thinkers have begun to examine catharsis as a mechanism which operates not only in works of tragedy, but across the majority of the arts. In an examination of how catharsis is able to operate across a variety of mediums, Schaper posits:

> It seems implausible that Aristotle himself would have wished to reserve catharsis for tragedy…that a catharsis of emotions is requisite for tragic enjoyment [only] stresses the difference between emotional reaction to life and emotional reaction to art…the difference does not lie in a safe distance from what is happening, but in the understanding which a work affords whilst yet shaking us profoundly…tragedy is not unique…it is not only from tragedy that we derive the kind of enjoyment which is incommensurable with the emotions we would feel towards "the same" or "similar" situations in life. (Schaper, 138, 40)

Schaper argues that grief, terror, pity and fear—the essential ingredients for catharsis—are emotions which nearly any form of art can arouse, not just tragedy. If what gives catharsis its power is "the understanding which a work affords whilst yet shaking us profoundly," then it is entirely *plausible* that it be applied to other forms of art. In literature, for example, this "understanding" is indeed possible. The work must be mimetic, for one, in how it portrays

action and emotion. *Mimesis*, which can be defined as an "imitation of the real world, as by recreating instances of human action and events" ("Mimesis"), is crucial to catharsis. A work must also be able to evoke emotions such as pity and compassion when portraying a tragic event. As the audience witnesses the misfortunes of the protagonist, they form a bond, of sorts, with the character. The character then responds to these calamities, and he or she will most often turn to violence, accompanied by feelings of either revenge, anger, or the need for retribution. Here the "emotional climax" occurs, in that the reader is able to identify and entertain the "same or similar" emotions, and is in fact excited by the provocation of these feelings. The audience must then witness the eventual failure of the protagonist, because in beholding his or her end they are made to confront the frightening reality of pursuing a similar path, and acting upon "negative or unwanted emotion or passion." As a result, these emotions are "purged." And because we are seeing representations of life *objectively* through the medium of art, we are also able to "understand" and "enjoy" these portrayals. It is not just tragedy that can achieve this, Schaper argues, but any art which represents actual life and draws upon these emotions.

In addition to the reading of catharsis in which the negative emotions are "purged," many scholars interpret catharsis as a *clarification* of these feelings. Donald Keesey, author of the widely read *Contexts for Criticism*, speaks to this more recent idea of the intellectual and revelatory benefits of catharsis in his essay "On Catharsis and Some Recent Interpretations." In his analysis, Keesey claims that mimetic art "makes endurable the realization that events of the outward world do not correspond with the desires of the heart, and thus, in its own particular way, it does what all religions do, for it gives a rationality, a meaning, and a justification to the universe" (Keesey, 196). These interpretations claim that an artist or author, by way of *mimesis*, is able to evoke certain emotions within an observer, emotions which, like the previous analysis,

shake us "profoundly." The audience enjoys this imitation and the experiencing of these emotions "because in it [they] can recognize that towards which [they] feel so violently, thus setting [them] free to enjoy not pitiful and terrible events, but their adding up to more than just these events strung together" (Schaper, 139). The intellectual understanding gained from this process ultimately allows the audience to *clarify* their negative passions and emotions by way of witnessing violence or trauma, objectively and rationally, through the medium of art. In short, a work of art that both mimes reality and elicits the aforementioned emotions has the power to evoke a cathartic response. However, in its imitation of reality, art, as mentioned in the definition of *mimesis*, must mime events of the *real world*; art must be honest. As well, the emotions and actions being imitated must be represented truthfully; we must be offered an *honest mimesis*, else the audience will not be able to identify with the characters, and will relate to none of the emotions being mimed. "The mimesis, the purifying effect of the tragic art, removes the conditions that would cause bewilderment and pain, and leaves something that is orderly and significant, and therefore a source of pleasure" (Keesey, 199). With the almost incomprehensible amount of violence and trauma plaguing the world today, it is understandable that people enjoy an art which puts a form on the negative emotions evoked by violent and traumatic events. And whether it purges or clarifies, this structure and form found in mimetic art is what gives direction to these terrible emotions, and thus gives purpose, for a short time, to the perceived occasional meaninglessness and harshness of life.

If violence and trauma are the agents by which a transformation takes place *within* a work, then catharsis is, above all, the transformation of the *reader*. Hand's characters all come to be the victims of violence and trauma and then, in a reversal of roles, go on to become killers themselves. The reader, having witnessed these events through the eyes of the character, first

feels pity, terror, and grief at the horrible events which have befallen the character, and then, ultimately, enjoyment of the morally questionable revenge that follows. It is important to note that despite the fact that these characters are exacting revenge, the revenge which occurs is *not* romanticized: "I did not want there to appear to be anything sensual, or seductive about it. I wanted it to have something in the way of how rape, or violation, or violence, feels" (EH, 10). None of Hand's violence, in fact, exhibits this quality, and this is intentional; to romanticize, glorify, and celebrate violence itself is tantamount to condoning these violent acts of revenge and passion, as well as their progenitors. Hand instead focuses heavily upon the psychology and emotions of her protagonists, which allows the reader to understand the psyche of her characters, despite their tendency toward the same types of violence to which they initially fell prey. In some respects, because Hand has lived through these experiences, and had the "veil" ripped away, she is able to portray violence and trauma as the sensitive, transformative issues that they are, and as such is able to use this sentimental connection to deliver to her reader an understanding of these events. This deep emotional understanding, while tragic, terrible, and the cause of grief, fear, and pity in the reader, serves to bring the reader closer to the victim-character, offering a level of connection not previously realized. The mechanism of catharsis is, then, a large part of what gives violence and trauma in fiction some of its transformative power. Like the characters in Hand's works, who undergo a transformation as a result of their violent suffering, the empathetic reader will also undergo a transformation, via a catharsis.

The principal aim of this analysis is to examine how violence and trauma, in Elizabeth Hand's literature as in life, are forces which result in transformation. This transformation extends to several levels as well, but occurs primarily in her characters. In the three works to be examined, violence and trauma are the *causes* of a transformation, or a mutation, which results in

a drive for revenge, among many other things. The grounding of these events in their real-life counterparts allows Hand to speak to the sentiment surrounding violence and trauma, as well as the real consequences involved, and without overly sensationalizing or celebrating it. By examining the ways in which transformations function, on both the realistic *and* fantastic level, we are able to see how Hand's narratives, despite being works of fantasy, manage to feature strikingly mimetic portrayals of violence and trauma. While these transformations occasionally escape the realm of the "real," they are understandable from a psychological point of view in part because Hand has been through the actual violent and traumatic events which she writes into her stories. As a result, both the events themselves and the way the characters react to them are genuine in their representation of human emotion.

Cleopatra Brimstone

Elizabeth Hand's "Cleopatra Brimstone," first published in 2001, is the lead story in her collection *Saffron and Brimstone: Strange Stories,* and is a tale replete with elements of violence and trauma, as well as instances of mental and physical transformation, and exertion of power and control. In the opening moments of the short story, before the plot even takes solid shape, the protagonist, Jane, is raped. Prior to the occurrence of this crime, the reader is quickly ushered through the strange beginnings of Jane's life, and within a few pages meets the attractive, introverted Jane, now a young woman with a deep interest in entomology. As this short, yet strikingly mimetic and smooth description of her college life unfolds, a sense of normality is established; Jane, most nights, can be found "beneath the glare of a small halogen lamp, entering data into her computer, scanning images of genetic mutations involving female Shark Moths exposed to dioxin, corresponding with other researchers in Melbourne and Kyoto, Siberia and London" (Saffron and Brimstone, 5). But in a moment of stunning adherence to the reality of violence, Hand shatters this normality. Immediately following "London," the paragraph ends, and the next sentence begins: "The rape occurred around ten o'clock one Friday night in early March" (*S&B,* 5). Like violence in real-life, Jane's rape comes with no warning, and catches the reader entirely unprepared, leaving him or her imbalanced; in this regard, the form of the literature mirrors the way violence normally functions as a swift and intense exertion of force or power. In life, violence is jarring, and has an almost physical impact on the human consciousness.

Hand's choice to reveal the rape in this way, then, is an effective tool for capturing the immediacy of violence in reality, and is a testament to author's honesty in her representation of

the emotions that encompass such an event. As well as honesty, though, the timing of this sentence, and the decision to introduce the rape in this way, lends the act a certain sense of believability, even beyond the way in which it mirrors the swiftness of real-life violence. This level of believability is achieved through specificity. In this instance, the time, date, and month are mentioned: "The rape occurred around ten o'clock one Friday night in early March" (*S&B*, 5). These concrete details, while seemingly unimportant, are vital in enabling the reader to believe in and identify with the protagonist, and it is this device, along with the way Hand encapsulates the immediacy of violence, that gives the rape scene some of its power.

As Hand begins to describe the rape, numerous kinds of violence come into play, and from multiple perspectives. To begin with, there is the psychological terror involved with being someone or something else's prey: "She never saw him. He was *there*, she knew that; knew he had a face, and clothing; but afterwards she could recall none of it" (*S&B*, 6). From the perspective of the attacker, part of the thrill and arousal lay in the act of physically capturing his victim, while remaining undetected. As well, it is about power and control: "He said nothing at first, just grabbed her and pulled her into an alley between the row houses, his fingers covering her mouth, the heel of his hand pressing against her windpipe so that she gagged" (*S&B*, 6). This is also an instance of physical violence (his hand against her windpipe), which both empowers the attacker, and causes fear and loss of orientation in the victim. "Try to get away" (*S&B*, 7), the man whispered to Jane. From the victim's perspective, terror and fear lead to desperation and surrender: "She thought desperately of what she had read once…not to struggle, not to fight, not to do anything that might cause her attacker to kill her. Jane did not fight" (*S&B*, 6). Instead, she submitted to her attacker, and allowed the rape to take place, rather than provoke him to committing further violence. Additionally, this attack contains a strong element of violation, and

not just in the physical sense: the attacker "pushed her onto the dead leaves and wads of matted windblown newspaper, yanked her pants down, ripped open her jacket and then tore her shirt open" (*S&B*, 6). Here, in addition to the act of forced intercourse, Jane is exposed and humiliated; this is clearly an example of violation, which may be defined as causing "harm to the person or especially the chastity of," or "dishonor" a human being. And this violation serves only to compound the effect of the violent act, adding unnecessary shame to an already horrific experience.

As the rape takes place Jane undergoes a psychological break, something which many rape victims suffer from. In Solomon M. Fulero and Lawrence S. Wrightsman's recently published *Forensic Psychology*, which is a seminal text in the field of psychology, a victim reflects on the moments of her rape: "Early on, I realized the way to make the pain less was to separate my mind from my body and not permit myself to feel" (F&W, 165). This separation of mind and body can be categorized as a defense mechanism for surviving a brutal experience, and this is exactly what Jane does. But for Jane, who has already begun her own fantastical transformation, this division of mind and body *also* marks the beginning of a mental transformation. As the story progresses, this fragmentation will impact a much more significant change, but at this point in the narrative, it appears to be more of a defense strategy, as it would be in reality. At the moment of her rape, she "divided into three parts. One part knelt nearby and prayed the way she had done as a child, not intently but automatically, trying to get through the strings of words as quickly as possible. The second part submitted blindly and silently to the man in the alley. And the third hovered above the other two, her hands wafting slowly up and down to keep her aloft as she watched" (*S&B*, 6-7).

The first part of her being, the praying child, kneels and begs for salvation from a higher power. This infantile display, with Jane seeking both comfort and escape by pleading with a force that she knows will not come to her aid is indicative of the complete helplessness that she feels. In the face of abject terror many humans will revert to this condition, this fetus-like metal state, in an attempt to ward off all negative emotion by isolating the body and mind.

The second part of her, which is the present-time submission, speaks to the logical portion of Jane's being. She submits "blindly" and "silently," doing all that she can to assure she will not anger her attacker. As well, "She remembered that she ought not to struggle" (*S&B*, 7), which is a sign of some coherence, and her attempt to ensure that she survives this encounter; whatever rational portion of Jane's psyche remains can be found in this segment of her now fractured mind.

It is the third part, the unfeeling butterfly hovering above the scene, which indicates a lasting change in Jane. Reversion and highly logical action are quite normal reactions to violence and trauma. But in some cases, victims experience what is known as dissociation, which is defined as "the separation of a group of mental processes or ideas from the main body of consciousness, so that they lead an independent existence, as in cases of multiple personality" ("Dissociation"). As Jane's persona cleaves into three parts, the reader becomes aware of a portion of the protagonist's consciousness that was previously unknown, if in fact it ever existed at all prior to the rape. What this translates to, in Jane's arc in the story, is a new element of mental and emotional detachment which was not present before. Finally the rape ends, and the man leaves the scene. Jane flees, "yanking her ruined clothes around her as she lurched from the alley and began to run, screaming and staggering back and forth across the road…towards the brightly lit Michigan Avenue intersection where the subway waited" (*S&B*, 7, 6). As well, "the

praying girl and the girl in the air also disappeared" (*S&B*, 7), signaling Jane's return to reality, and the temporary quieting of her fragmented psyche.

But even as violence pervades and alienates, it also elicits both pity and compassion. Despite bearing witness to the beginnings of Jane's internal transformation, the reader remains sympathetic, likely due to the author's honesty in representing the actual brutality and inhumanity of rape, and the way in which Jane herself is rendered helpless and vulnerable. Moreover, bearing witness to an act of violence is most certainly a traumatic experience in itself. Seeing this rape, and reading about it (insofar as the reader is emotionally invested in the character and is then forced to watch them be subject to this trauma) is more than enough to evoke an empathetic reaction in the reader, and to allow for understanding if any hardships arise in the course of her recovery. This is essential to the mechanism of catharsis, which requires the arousal of pity, compassion, and even grief. And Hand's mimetic delivery of the details of the rape do accomplish the evocation of these feeling, which enables the formation of an emotional bond between Jane and the reader.

As the violent act ends, so begins the onset of trauma. Jane is rushed to the hospital, and she refuses to allow the authorities to call her parents, indicative of the immediate rush of shame associated with an act of violation. As well, as Jane is driven home from the hospital, she exhibits signs of paranoia and extreme anxiety, worrying that the officer escorting her may actually be her attacker, who now knows where she lives. Once inside her apartment, Jane suffers from effects that are quite common among rape survivors, such as the feeling of bodily disgust that came over her, so she "flung off her clothes, and stuffed them into the trash." (*S&B*, 8). She then showers, changes into a new outfit, and buys a train ticket for home. It is interesting that Jane has a change of heart, once the shock of her attack begins to wear off;

instead of keeping her rape a secret, Jane chooses to seek comfort and safety in the familiar setting of a childhood home. She forces herself to remain composed while she rushes from her apartment, and it was "only after she arrived and told her parents what had happened did she finally start to cry" (*S&B*, 8). This immediate stoicism is rather common as well, though it is usually only an emotional front and an attempt to suppress the actual underlying mental state. The result of this is, in most cases, a future emotional paroxysm of sorts. With this delayed emotional breakdown, Jane, even after finally opening the proverbial floodgates, "could not remember what the man had looked like" (*S&B*, 8). All of these effects are characteristic of the acute or crisis stage of rape trauma syndrome, a diagnosis which encompasses the wide range of physical and emotional reactions to rape; some of these include "denial, shock, and disbelief...changes in sleeping and eating patterns… helplessness and dependency …guilt, hostility, and blame" (F&W, 166-7). Unlike its precursor, trauma lasts much longer than violence; while a violent attack may endure for upwards of a few minutes, trauma can persist and incapacitate victims for months and years to come. In fact, some victims never recover, leaving them emotionally and psychologically handicapped, and powerless to ever reach a degree of normalcy which would enable them to interact with society as they once did.

After the rape, Jane lives with her parents for three months, at which time they insist she attend therapy and see a counselor. This is a conventional next step for many victims of violence, aimed at bringing the issue at hand to the surface so that it can be met head-on and dealt with accordingly, rather than let the victim repress the negative emotion and ruminate to the point of obsession. Jane, however, is of a different mind, positing that the "rape was something that had happened to her, but it was over" (*S&B*, 8). As cited above, denial is a reaction intrinsic to the first stage of rape trauma syndrome, and is exactly what Jane is suffering from. She refuses to

talk about her experience; "It was fifteen minutes out of my life…That's all. It's not the rest of my life" (*S&B*, 8), Jane argues, to the dismay of her therapist, who "thought Jane would suffer later if she did not confront her fears now" (*S&B*, 8). What Jane is doing is termed "minimizing," which involves her making light of the issue at hand, and her not taking it as seriously as her therapist and others think she ought to. Minimizing is an oddly apt choice of behavior for Jane, however, as it foreshadows the coming physical and magical transformation in her, as well as the method by which she will transform her victims. For the time being, though, this minimizing behavior indicates negative progress concerning Jane's mental state of being. "But I'm not afraid" (*S&B*, 8), she responds, "*because lightning doesn't strike twice*" (*S&B*, 8). She cannot face the reliving of her rape, and will remain in denial unless she finds an outlet for the emotion which has accumulated as a result of her not dealing with her trauma.

When a chance opportunity arises to housesit for a friend of the family in London, Jane hastily elects to go on the trip. "Moving to another residence or even another city is not unusual" (F&W, 168), for victims of violence; instead of going back to school, where Jane would have to walk the same street and face constant reminders of her attack, she opts for the anonymity of a new city, in a new country. But by relocating, Jane is effectively withdrawing from her friends and family, putting distance between herself and any reminders of her rape. This, along with her behavior thus far, demonstrates that Jane, despite her assertions, is not coping with the attack whatsoever.

It is on the plane to Heathrow that the fantastical transformation in Jane begins to be made manifest. As she looks in the mirror, she notices that three long, intertwined hairs have grown into each of her eyebrows, beginning at the inner-edge near the top of the bridge of her nose and arcing back toward her temple. As a child Jane had once noticed these same hairs, but

she quickly plucked them out, and until now they had never regrown. Curious, "she touched one…It was stiff yet oddly pliant; but as she ran her fingers along its length a sudden *surge* flowed through her…her gasp turning into an incontrollable yawn, the yawn into a spike of such profound physical ecstasy that she…clutched the sink, and, shuddering, climaxed" (*S&B*, 10). With this sexual experience, the change in Jane begins. As well, Hand's story dismisses the rules of realism, and with this break the reader witnesses the beginnings of the metamorphic transformation of Jane, from a shy, nervous, and anxious creature, into a sexual predator and, ultimately, a killer. Curiously, alteration of sexual behavior and appetite is a natural condition in rape survivors, who reported that "they did not enjoy sex…as much as they had before they were raped" (F&W, 168). Jane, who would be a virgin, were it not for her rape, also undergoes a change in her sexual appetite, though in the complete opposite fashion. Instead of repressing her sexuality, Jane elects to explore it. She demonstrates this by again masturbating, multiple times, by way of touching her new, transformed eyebrows. But despite this erotic experimentation, as Jane travels around London it becomes clear to the reader that she has not fully overcome her traumatic experience. Travelling through town on simple errands, Jane finds herself walking "a few strides behind a family, her head down, trying not to look as though she was following them" (*S&B*, 13), indicative of the fact that she still fears public places, and is afraid of being alone. Instead of seeking professional help, Jane attempts to immediately restore a sense of normalcy to her life, and manages to land a volunteer job at the Regents Park Zoo in London.

Her confidence slightly repaired, Jane decides to discover London's nightlife. As she wanders around the streets aimlessly, she experiences some minor claustrophobia and disorientation, although she remains coherent and in control. Making a spur of the moment decision, Jane decides to head into a club with an unmarked door, in a back alley. Gaining

admission, she weaves her way through the mass of bodies rhythmically pulsing to the electronic music in the strobe-lit dark. Overwhelmed, Jane searches for an exit, but accidentally stumbles into a room:

> The glitter of halogen light on steel, distorted reflections thrown back at her from curved glass surfaces; the abrasive odor of isopropyl alcohol and the fainter tinny scent of blood, like metal in the mouth…And bodies: everywhere, bodies, splayed on gurneys or suspended from gleaming metal hooks, laced with black electrical cord and pinned upright onto smooth rubber mats. (*S&B*, 25)

But Jane, instead of fleeing, "stared open-mouthed, neither appalled nor frightened but fascinated by the conundrum before her: how did *that* hand fit *there*, and whose leg was *that*…the sheer *fluidity* of it all enthralled her…her brow tingled, warmth flushed her from brow to breast…" (*S&B*, 25). Jane is quickly discovered and thrown out of the building and the club, but it is incredibly telling that Jane's reaction to a stunningly graphic display of human corpses was fascination, rather than horror, as would be expected. The fact that "warmth flushed her from brow to breast" speaks to a developing erotic enthrallment with death, as well as to the continuing transformation occurring in Jane. Beginning with her denial in therapy, and then on to her relocation and withdrawal, her timidity and anxiety in public, her sexual metamorphosis, and now her fascination with morbidity, Jane is imbalanced, and nowhere near being a stable and recovered victim of a vicious trauma.

It comes as little surprise that Jane, shortly after this encounter, undergoes an aesthetic transformation which both mirrors and foreshadows the physical mutation yet to occur. The following day, Jane heads to the market, intent on purchasing clothing that will enable her to blend in with the crowds at the club. She visits a barber as well, and chooses to have her head shaven. This drastic change in appearance is extremely uncharacteristic of Jane, yet she seems to enjoy it; "in the mirror a huge-eyed creature gazed at Jane, like a tarsier or one of the owlish

caligo moths. She stared at it, entranced" (*S&B*, 29). Here, Jane in fact desexualizes and defeminizes herself, attempting to physically reinvent her appearance; the shaved head, too, is about power, toughness, and masculinity. She erases the evidence of her former identity in favor of a more exotic, strange being, dressed in "hugely baggy pants…screaming orange with black trim, and a matching windbreaker (*S&B*, 28); in essence, Jane has fully embraced her transformation, and has discarded the "part of her [that] submitted blindly and silently to the man in the alley" (*S&B*, 7), her former self. She has become, in essence, the woman with "her hands wafting slowly up and down to keep her aloft as she watched" (*S&B*, 7). Having never overcome the pain of the trauma, Jane's psyche remains, to this point, fragmented. Here, however, with this development, Jane is beginning to assume the form of the winged, exotic creature, and she continues to explore the depths of this new found self.

Wearing her new gear, and looking "beautiful but vacant, faintly ominous…with her white skin, huge violet eyes and hairless skull" (*S&B*, 32), Jane returns to the punk club, and meets an attractive young man. He asks her name, and in keeping with her new identity, she answers "Cleopatra Brimstone" (*S&B*, 35), which is the name of a beautiful and subtly colored species of butterfly, "a harbinger of spring, often emerging from its winter hibernation under dead leaves to revel in the countryside while there is still snow upon the ground" (*S&B*, 15). As she assumes this title, Jane consciously becomes the winged creature. She leads the young man to her apartment, where, once they are naked, "she place[s] the cuffs around each wrist, and his ankles, fasten[s] the nylon leash to each one, and then [begins] tying the bonds around each bedpost…'Try to get away,' she whispers" (*S&B*, 36). The adoption of this phrase, verbatim, from *her* attacker in her rape, is quite chilling. This indicates the extent of Jane's psychological break, as a result of trauma, and as well quite clearly displays the effects of violation upon a

person. In victims of violence, most namely sexual and psychological violence, numerous physical and emotional violations occur. One violation with lasting effect is that of the actual image of the incident, and "many [victims] re-experience the attack over and over again in their minds" (F&W, 166). This image haunts the victim, violating them as frequently as every day. In some instances a transference occurs, and the scenario is relived and reincorporated into the victim's daily life. Violation, as discussed, shares a common root with the Old English "to warp." Jane, who of course adopts her attacker's catch-phrase (a transference), and then and distorts the scenario, plainly demonstrates how very warped she has become as a result of her rape and the violation involved.

With what follows, the realization of another aspect of Jane's new metamorphosis occurs: "with a moan he came, struggling helplessly…At the same moment Jane gasped, a fiery rush arrowing down from her brow to her breasts…[and] immediately he began to grow smaller. Jane reared back, smacking into one of the bedposts, and stared at the figure in front of her, shaking her head" (*S&B*, 36, 7). Jane's initial response, as she witnesses the young man shrivel up, is fear, and a fear not unlike her initial reaction to her rape, or discovering the strange, braided eyebrows she had as a child. "'No,' she whispered. 'No, no'" (*S&B*, 37). As the man shrinks smaller and smaller, disappearing almost completely, Jane is forced to witness the miracle of her power. "She saw something crawling between the folds of velvet. The length of her middle finger, its thorax black, yellow-striped, its lower wings elongated into frilled arabesques like those of a festoon…with indigo eye spots, its upper wings a chiaroscuro of black and white stripes" (*S&B*, 37). This fascinated, awed description entirely erases Jane's fear of her actions, and her power. Rather, she is entranced by the creature she has created, and she quickly captures the rare butterfly, and then "grab[s] a vial of ethyl alcohol…pour[s] a few drops onto paper,

open[s] the jar…[and] slip[s] the paper inside…the butterfly did not move again" (*S&B*, 37). Without any apparent remorse, Jane kills, mounts, and pins the rare specimen, disposes of the young man's clothes and wallet, and then returns to her "normal" life. This succession of events, from the physical, self-imposed transformation, to the magical metamorphosis of the young man, heralds the full onset of Jane's warped and hybrid nature, and as well displays Jane's apparent addiction to the power of her own sexuality, and her own power in general. This immersion into the id, into the sense of control and lust that only power can offer, is representative of Jane's complete degeneration into a predatory killer. As mentioned earlier, Hand does not romanticize or glorify the violent revenge in any way, nor does she condone Jane's use of violence:

> I wanted it to be a very ambivalent story, in that she's no better than he is, she's become somebody who is also doing terrible things, actually doing worse things than her assailant, because he didn't in fact kill her, and she turns around and becomes a serial killer. That is deliberate… I am not somebody who would react that way to a violent act. But I wanted to think about it and to explore it, and I wanted readers to be made uncomfortable by it. I didn't want it to be read as a revenge fantasy…what [Jane] does, really, is a terrible thing. And she does it repeatedly… But I very much did want the reader to feel complicit in the crimes, because that's where I think it gets really interesting, and becomes a literary experience. (EH, 4, 5)

While Jane is certainly a sympathetic character, and does not see herself as a villain, the reality of the situation is that she is committing murder. This makes the reader feel uncomfortable, and even complicit, yet he or she continues to sympathize with Jane because the bond established earlier allows the reader to *understand* what brought Jane to this point, and is excited by this development. Again, this is necessary for catharsis, in that the reader will entertain similar emotions within themselves, and reach and "emotional climax" by watching the violent and transformative events of the protagonist's night-life. And Jane continues in this manner, enticing young men back to her apartment and then having sex with them until they morph into butterflies. She refines her methods as well, deciding to administer morphine to her victims while they are

still in human form, so that once they turn into butterflies, she will be able to capture them without causing damage to their delicate bodies.

As her predatory exploits continue, so does Jane's normal life. She still works at the zoo, and chooses to increase the frequency of her volunteer sessions to three times a week. In this environment, mounting and pinning specimens that have died, Jane begins to establish a friendly relationship with her boss, David Bierce. As this friendship develops, he becomes more interested in the beautiful Jane, and the language of the story, as it relates to David, begins to change: "David Bierce's gaze sharpened, his hazel eyes catching the sun and sending back an icy emerald glitter" (*S&B*, 44). The words "icy" and "sharpened" immediately prompt the reader to be wary of David, especially in respect to Jane, whom the reader is still very fond of, even after witnessing her transformative powers and penchant for violent vengeance. David's essence, as it were, subtly revealed in pieces by Hand, slowly becomes that of something hard, and unforgiving. In another scene Jane describes David, noticing that "the harsh light [made] him look gnomelike, his sharp features malevolent and leering" (*S&B*, 43). "Sharp" is again associated with him, as well as "malevolent" and "gnomelike," leaving the reader with a rather threatening picture of David.

It is not until David makes physical contact, however, that any real danger is associated with his character. While eating lunch with him, Jane nervously begins to tear the paper label from her ale bottle, and David reaches out to pull "[her hand] away from the bottle, letting it rest against the table edge. She swallowed: he kept his hand on top of hers, pressing it against the metal edge until she felt her scored palm begin to ache" (*S&B*, 44). This display of physical dominance, even sadism, from David is unexpected, to both the reader and to Jane. Until now Jane has operated with no challenges, and has met no opposition. But this forceful, physical

contact, interestingly enough, causes Jane to revert to the state which she entered while she was being raped, and with David's hand over hers Jane can "feel herself floating, and see a dozen feet below her own form, slender, the wig beetle-black upon her skull, her wrist like a bent stalk" (*S&B*, 44). Jane, here, is once again dissociating, a technique which she used previously, in order to survive her rape. What this signals is that David seems to evoke fear in Jane, which is an emotion Jane appeared to have left behind when she achieved her physical transformation. But something about David's primal nature is frightening to the still delicate Jane.

A few days later David asks her to lunch again, and despite their previous encounter, Jane accepts the invitation. As they sit to eat, a lock of his hair falls to brush against her neck, and her reaction is powerful and significant: "beneath the wig her scalp burned, as though stung by tiny ants; she breathed in the warm acrid smell of his sweat and something else, a sharper scent, like crushed oak-mast or fresh-sawn wood. Above her brows the antennae suddenly quivered. Sweetness coated her tongue like burnt syrup" (*S&B*, 51). David's connection with the natural in this description is quite strong. Here even his scent is described as "sharp," and his character continues to develop into something more bestial and powerful. This description of David also likens his aroma to that of "crushed oak-mast." Mast, or fruit and nuts that have fallen from trees, is a useful food source for farm animals and other lesser animals on the food chain. When a forest is undergoing the phenomenon called "masting," all the trees in the forest seem to synchronize their reproductive cycles, which results in an abundance of food on the ground. This plethora of edibles attracts all types of prey animals, and, in turn, a large number of predators. The way Hand uses this phenomena to describe David is quite subtle and effective; it both establishes the deeply natural roots of his character, and likens him to a predator. Not only is David's "crushed oak-mast" scent enticing to Jane, it foreshadows just how much higher on

the "food chain" David may well be. Jane realizes this on some level, though perhaps only in the most primal depths of her mind, indicated by her dissociation. However she also remains somewhat attracted to David, even enchanted with him. As they lunch together, David riddles Jane with questions about her love life and practically forces her to drink a second glass of wine. When she tries to refuse, David's prying becomes physical, and "under the table, she felt a sharp pressure on her foot. She wasn't wearing her Doc Martens today but a pair of red plastic jellies. David Bierce had planted his heel firmly atop her toes; she sucked in her breath in shock and pain, the bones of her foot crackling as she tried to pull it from beneath him" (*S&B*, 53). This second display of physical dominance from David subtly indicates a reversal in the roles of the story. Jane finds herself pinned, literally, by David's foot, a position she is not accustomed to, being that she herself has been the one doing the pinning and mounting lately. But as Jane is made the victim once again, it is interesting to witness her reaction. Surprisingly, Jane's "antennae rippled, then stiffened, and heat burst like a seed inside her" (*S&B*, 53). The word "seed," in this quotation, connects again with the idea of oak-mast. Jane, in her role as the animal of prey, has consumed the "crushed oak-mast," the fruit, the fallen nut, and it is this seed, this representation of David, which is bursting inside of her. And like the prey animal, her enjoyment of this morsel partially blinds her to the greater dangers surrounding David. But she still retains some of her instincts, and when he releases Jane's foot, "the wine ran down her throat [and] she could feel the heat thrusting her into the air, currents rushing beneath her as the girl at the table below set down her wineglass with trembling fingers" (*S&B*, 54). She is clearly stimulated by this encounter, indicated by the fact that it is the "heat" thrusting her aloft, the same heat which is associated with her moments of pleasure. Though by examining the latter half of Jane's reaction, it is obvious that she is still also fearful of David's power.

Following this, David convinces Jane to let him walk her home. Oddly enough, Jane finds herself "wishing someone else would appear [on the path], so that she'd have an excuse to move closer to David Bierce" (*S&B*, 53). In rape trauma, many victims isolate themselves, and shun human contact. As they begin to recover, victims will begin to reintegrate themselves into society, and become comfortable in social situations. Jane, it seems, has come quite a long way in that regard; while she was terrified to leave her flat a few weeks ago, Jane is now confidently venturing around London, and wishing to inch closer to a man with questionable motives. Though Jane is clearly still experiencing some side-effects of the trauma, such as the tendency to dissociate at any sign of physical discomfort, she is starting to achieve some sense of normalcy. But, being that she is so fully immersed in her power and her own mutation, she elects to ignore the ominous aura surrounding David, and quickly dismisses the obvious danger in favor of trying to "catch his oaky scent again" (*S&B*, 53). It is as if she logically fears David, yet is instinctually attracted to him. Her mind is screaming at her to get away, yet the transformation that has occurred in her is driving her to ignore these protests from her subconscious.

As they reach Jane's flat, David manages to make his way inside despite Jane's hesitance. Jane, like many criminals who go on long streaks while remaining undetected, gets complacent; the ecstasy of creating and owning these specimens becomes such a powerful force that Jane carelessly leaves her newly acquired mounts in the bedroom on display, and when David makes his way into the bedroom, he notices the incredibly rare specimens. "'Are these *yours*?' He marveled, his gaze fixed on the butterflies. 'You didn't actually catch them'" (*S&B*, 54)? Jane immediately panics, wondering if this will give her away, but David leaves:

> She raced to the windows and pulled all the velvet curtains, then tore the wig from her head and threw it onto the couch along with her glasses. Her heart was pounding, her face slick with sweat—from fear or rage or disappointment, she didn't know. She yanked

> off her sweater and jeans…[and] stood in the shower for twenty minutes, head upturned as the water sluiced the smells of bracken and leaf-mold from her skin. (*S&B*, 56)

Again, David presents a confusing dilemma to Jane. She certainly desires him, as is made obvious by her erogenous reaction to his presence. But she is also fearful of him, and the reason for this conflicting emotion does not appear to be clear to Jane, who reacts with frustration. Once she is able to remove his "smell" from herself, Jane immediately discards her fear and worry, and returns with enthusiasm to her pursuit of men. This time, however, she selects a man who slightly resembles David.

Once Jane successfully woos her target and gets him back into her apartment, she seduces him and manages to get him into the handcuffs. But in "her haste to get [him] inside she had forgotten to latch the front door" (*S&B*, 60), and when she finishes sleeping with and transforming the man, she hears "a sound: soft, the rustle of her kimono falling from its hook as the door swung open…It was David Bierce" (*S&B*, 60-1). As David enters the room, the scent of mast, once again, and "oak and bracken swelled, suffocating, fragrant, cut by the bitter odor of ethyl alcohol" (*S&B*, 61). Here, David's character is fully revealed by his aroma, or his essence, and the fact that the word "suffocating" is used is indicative of his true intentions in this situation. "He forced her gently onto the bed, heat piercing her breast and thighs, her antennae bursting out like flame from her brow and wings exploding everywhere around her as she struggled fruitlessly. 'Now. Try to get away,' he said" (*S&B*, 61). In a stunning reversal, Jane is again violated, although the outcome is left unwritten. As well, when Jane was raped in the beginning of the story, she immediately dissociated, as a defense mechanism. But in this instance, not only does Jane no longer dissociate, she instead seems to experience the sexual and erogenous response that occurs when she is having sex.

From the innocent child to the highly sexualized and predatory character now calling herself Cleopatra Brimstone, the protagonist in Hand's short story undergoes enormous changes. As a result of the violence and trauma of her rape, which she never dealt with, Jane's transformation manifests both physically and emotionally, and leads to her eventual psychological and sexual metamorphosis. The fragmentation and reversal of her psyche, then, are the agents by which Jane becomes Cleopatra Brimstone, and the catalysts for her change from an innocent young girl into a cold-blooded killer.

It is interesting to further examine the number of levels upon which violence and trauma operate. To begin with, Jane undergoes a transformation because of violent and traumatic treatment, and in *response* to this, Jane turns to violence. The violent acts which she commits are themselves transformative, as it relates to her victims. In a way, this mirrors the circular cycle of violence in reality, in which violence begets itself. As well, even though the violent acts she commits are elegant, lovely, and artful, they are still wrong. Jane certainly had other options, yet she eventually becomes a more dangerous predator than her attacker. To this end, Hand does not endorse what Jane is doing: "I didn't want to do that with 'Cleopatra Brimstone'… as a writer, I could write about it without feeling that I was condoning it, or glorifying it, or sensualizing it, or prettify it any way at all. It's ugly, it's brutal…I didn't want it to be read as a revenge fantasy" (EH, 10, 4). Hand's prose, and her honesty in relating the way in which violence and trauma *feel* and operate, certainly achieve the goal of delivering a story which contains, yet does not condone, revenge and violence. As well, and because of its honesty in its "imitation" of reality, this story is a *mimesis*, which is a necessary requirement for catharsis. The human mind, however, certainly *does* entertain and condone these ideas of revenge, and the like. But to witness revenge and its consequences in this setting, in which they are not glorified or

romanticized in any way, the reader is "shaken by the terribleness and pitifulness of events" (Schaper, 139-40). These elements, such as the pity and terror involved in witnessing her rape, along with the "stimulation of the same or similar emotions" as Jane turns to violence, result in the reader identifying with the character. By way of this bond, the reader instinctually *wants* Jane to exact her revenge upon all men, thus receiving a frightening reminder of human frailties and desires. But by entertaining these emotions through the medium of art, objectively, and with the knowledge of the horrible costs of this revenge, the reader is able to "purge" similar instinctual desires from their system, as well as intellectually clarify the emotion they felt as they witnessed the events of the story unfold.

Calypso in Berlin

"Calypso in Berlin," another short story in Hand's collection *Saffron and Brimstone: Strange Stories*, is an elegant and traumatic work which captures the devastating struggle of a long-lived mythological creature's doomed attempts to love mortal men. Hand's protagonist is the nymph Calypso, the same famed jailer and mistress of Odysseus from book five of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Nymphs, in Homeric literature, are immortal creatures, and most often resemble very beautiful women. As well, nymphs are closely connected to nature, and in most instances they possess the ability to manipulate the natural world, to cause organic structures to come into being or disappear, and have a primal, animal sort of attractive quality, which lures unwary men into their homes and beds. In most literary references, a nymph is also a truly powerful creature with the ability to perform feats of magic, although this magic is usually a more innate and latent power than most other literary depictions of magic, such as that of the traditional "wizard" or "mage."

In Hand's rendition of the Calypso myth, the nymph Calypso is still alive, living undiscovered in today's world. While a life of magical ability and superhuman power may seem enticing, as it surely did to many humans throughout history, it is, according to Calypso, a life fraught with deep trauma, sadness, and even despair:

> This is what happens to nymphs: they are pursued or they are left. Sometimes, like Echo, they are fled. We turn to trees, seabirds, sea foam, running water, the sound of wind in the leaves. Men come to stay with us, they lie beside us in the night, they hold us so hard we can't breathe. They walk in the woods and glimpse us: a diving kingfisher, an owl caught in the headlights, a cold spring on the hillside. Alcyone, Nyctimene, Peirene, Echo, Calypso: these are some of our names. We like to live alone, or think we do. When men find us, they say we are lovelier than anything they have ever seen; wilder,

> stranger, more passionate; elemental. They say they will stay forever. They always leave. (*S&B,* 189)

To be either pursued or left, as a rule, is a truly lonely life, and one bound to be filled with sorrow and longing. Calypso shares with the reader that nymphs, despite thinking they like to live alone, actually enjoy contact with humans. But this contact and interaction can often lead to the diminishment of the nymph's power, and to her eventual reabsorption into the natural world whence she came. As a result of this troublesome condition, nymphs, throughout literary history, have been finding ways to ensnare the men they come to love and need, or else eventually wither and die.

Hand opens the story with a few terse, yet telling lines: "Yesterday, he left. I had known he would be here for those seven days. Now, just like that, they were gone" (*S&B,* 188). These three sentences function on a multitude of levels, the first being to establish straightaway a mood of sadness, of longing, and of what it feels like to be left alone, after having enjoyed the company of a lover. This tone is sustained throughout the story, and comes to generally color the character of Calypso, though most often in an endearing way. The end of a relationship, granted that the relationship itself is worthy of remembrance, is a trying time for anyone, mortal or otherwise. As well, Hand, by crafting her opening in such a way, once again delivers to the reader a likeable female character, and a means to establish a bond with her. In the face of whatever violence or trauma that arises, Calypso remains a sympathetic character simply because the reader is made to identify with her struggle, just as he or she did in "Cleopatra Brimstone." As well, the author again illustrates, through cunning use of form, the actuality of trauma. As she did with Jane's rape in "Cleopatra Brimstone," Hand does not build up to the account of the traumatic event. Rather, she simply and plainly states it, and only then goes on to explain the

particulars. This, again, mirrors the way trauma functions in the real world; in life there is no segue into trauma, so why have one in literature?

Calypso, originally a character in Homer's *Odyssey*, was Odysseus' captor and lover. By drawing on this backstory, Hand provides both a very rich and very painful past for the character Calypso. In Hand's story, Calypso remembers her time with Odysseus, and recalls with bitterness the seven years they spent together on the island of Olygia:

> When Odysseus left, he was suspicious, accusatory. The say he wept for his wife and son, but he slept beside me for seven years and I saw no tears. We had two sons…When Hermes came to give me Zeus's command to free Odysseus, I was in my little house on the island, weaving scenes into tunics for Odysseus and the boys. They were little then, three and five. We stood on the shore and watched him go. The boys ran screaming after the boat into the water. I had to grab them and hold them back, I thought the three of us would drown, they were fighting so to follow him. It was horrible. Nothing was as bad as that, ever; not even when Philip left. (*S&B* 189, 191)

This firsthand account of Calypso's reaction to Odysseus' departure, while being crafty and subtle on the part of Hand, serves as a device by which the author can illustrate the timeless trauma of Calypso, and the pain with which she lived over the years. To have her lover taken away from her, and to have to hold her two sons back from following their father is a truly heartbreaking event, and one that Calypso certainly does not forget. It seems, in fact, that she learns from the experience: "Over the centuries there have been others. Other lovers, always; but…After a few years I'd grow tired of them—Odysseus was an exception—and gently send them on their way" (*S&B*, 190). But as Calypso continues to reflect upon the effects of this tragedy, it becomes clear that because of this trauma and violation, by both the Gods and Odysseus, Calypso has been forever stained by this encounter. This *mimesis* of real, human emotion, like those she experiences when Odysseus leaves, is again the foundation for a catharsis, even though Calypso is not a mortal creature.

As she continues to find and discard lovers, she claims that as "they grew older they interested me less, because of course I did not grow old" (*S&B*, 190), which continually serves as a reminder of her loneliness in her near-immortality. As a result of this constant exposure to trauma, and her initial violation by Odysseus and the Gods, Calypso is arguably "warped," morally deluded, and incapable of feeling remorse. A portion of the blame for these characteristics can be assigned to her condition as a nymph, which likely involves a sort of "natural logic," or animal logic. But the majority of Calypso's violent inclinations and lack of guilt stem from her initial trauma, and the way in which it "warped" her, to the point of committing murder. For example, as she continues her description of her less-important lovers over the years, she reveals that "some didn't leave willingly. I made grasshoppers of them, or mayflies, and tossed them into the webs of [spiders] that follow me everywhere I live" (*S&B*, 190). Once again, Hand gives us a female character who kills people, yet once more we sympathize with this character because of the circumstances she finds herself in.

One of Hand's strong suits is her ability to describe nature, and to subtly weave it into the disposition and demeanor of her characters. Calypso, for example, in the first moments of the story, "stepped into the yard to gather a handful [of leaves] and pressed [her] face against them, cold and wet" (*S&B*, 188). This odd scene, while startlingly beautiful, speaks directly to Calypso's communion with nature, and her deep emotional and physical ties to the natural world. In keeping with her character as a nymph she respects all that is of the earth, and both embraces and loves those things which keep her rooted in her own identity. Additionally, it is in the character of nymphs to take male lovers, and to submit to them, despite the fact that are more powerful than the men they seduce. When thinking about how she and Philip, her current moral lover, have sex, she remembers that he "liked to hold my wrists in one hand and straddle me"

(*S&B*, 189), which demonstrates both Philip's need to dominate her, and her own readiness to submit. While this may appear to be strange, it is actually quite fitting with Calypso's character, for two reasons. First, she clearly submits willingly, made obvious by the fact that she later states that "the sex was good" (*S&B*, 190); Calypso enjoys being with him. And second, it is in the nature of nymphs to be feared. Were a mortal man aware that a magical creature was seducing him, he would likely react with fear, and would almost certainly try to flee. Odysseus, who was rescued by Calypso and then taken captive, never had the opportunity to leave her on his own, which resulted in seven years of his "weeping there as always, / wrenching his heart with sobs and groans and anguish" (*Odyssey*, 5.93-4). So to be with mortal men, and without an island on which to keep them prisoner, Calypso must lie about her very nature, and must allow men to dominate her and force her into submission, thus giving them the illusion of control and power. And this too is made relevant by the fact that Calypso's name means "the concealer" (*S&B*, 189). She must hide everything about herself, from her nature to her own desires, in order to continue to conceal her true identity and to participate in the kind of life she wishes to enjoy.

As their relationship grows, Calypso begins to sketch the naked Philip while he sleeps. He, of course, would object to this, so Calypso reveals to the reader—in decidedly contemporary jargon—that "after we fucked he'd fall heavily asleep; I might doze for a few minutes, but sex energizes me, it makes me want to work" (*S&B*, 190). The fact that sex "energizes" Calypso speaks directly to her status as a non-human, and enhances the elemental, natural quality of her character. It also displays passive behavior on her part, though it is rather understandable given her namesake. In fact, the decision to paint and sketch him while he's sleeping is actually an instance of Calypso reclaiming a degree of dominance, and acting against Philip's wishes. She continues to draw and paint him obsessively, claiming "he was perfect for me" (*S&B*, 190). But

as this imagined perfection is described through the eyes of Calypso, it becomes clear that her obsession lies in another telling element of Philip's being:

> He was in his early fifties but seemed as ageless as I was, as though he'd been untouched by anything, his time in the Middle East, his children, his wife, his ex-wife, me. I see now that this is what obsessed me—that someone human could be, not merely beautiful, but untouched. There wasn't a crack in him; no way to get inside. (*S&B*, 190)

This quotation abounds with references to Philip's purity, innocence, and impenetrability. Calypso uses the word "untouched" more than once to describe the smooth quality of his skin and the nature of his being. Compared to her, someone who's been "touched" by time, lovers, tragedy, and more, Philip is almost virginal in her eyes. This imagined purity only excites Calypso, driving her to the point of obsession. As well, he appears impenetrable to her, with "no way to get inside," indicating that she is in fact trying to penetrate his very being, to perhaps discover some shred of his humanity in order to break the spell she finds herself under. "But I never grew tired of Philip," (*S&B*, 191) she admits, and continues to paint him in this manner for seven years.

Philip, however, has a wife and children, and Calypso complains that "no one could see the paintings, of course, which killed me" (*S&B*, 191). So Calypso instead paints him in secret, keeping the paintings well hidden from Philip and the public, because she was "afraid of losing him" (*S&B*, 191), should the paintings ever be seen. This directly reflects the actions of Penelope, Odysseus' wife, who would unravel the shroud she was weaving in order to delay choosing a suitor: "by day she'd weave at her great and growing web—/ by night, by the light of torches set beside her,/ she would unravel all she'd done" (*Odyssey*, 2.115-7) Calypso makes this connection as well, resulting in a small epiphany; "I was thinking about [Penelope] unraveling her loom each night and it suddenly stuck me: this was what I did with my paintings

of Philip. Each night I would draw him for hours as he slept. Each day I would look at my work and it was beautiful" (*S&B*, 192). She too must "conceal" her own nighty work, in order to delay Philip's inevitable departure, which is similar to Penelope's attempts to delay until Odysseus' arrival. Calypso, though, realizes something further at this point in the story. As she considers the implications of revealing her paintings and losing Philip, she comes to understand a part of own nature:

> If I showed [the paintings], I would never see him again, never hear from him, never smell him, never taste him. Yet even that I could live with. What terrified me was the thought that I would never paint him again. If he was gone, my magic would die. I would never paint again. And that would destroy me: to think of eternity without the power to create. Better to draw and paint all night, better to undo my work each dawn by hiding it in the back room. I thought I could live like that. For seven years I did. (*S&B*, 192)

First, she comes to the realization that she can live with losing Philip. She did, after all, survive Odysseus' departure, and she had mothered two of his children. But along with this comes an awareness of the fact that her magic, which is tied to her ability to paint, is now linked directly with Philip. This thought terrifies her, as it should: "Byblis fell hopelessly in love and became a fountain. Echo wasted into a sound in the night. Hamadryads die when their trees die" (*S&B*, 195). And Hand, in another moment of wonderfully timed delivery, follows this epiphany with: "And then he left" (*S&B*, 192), immediately rendering Calypso alone and without her power. The way in which Hand weaves this into the plot is again a representation of the actuality of violence. Rejection, or being left by a lover, is quite an emotionally violent event, and is one that Calypso has had to endure before. Having been through this experience, she is arguably already conditioned to this type of situation. The difference, however, is that in this instance, both Calypso's power and life are threatened.

As in "Cleopatra Brimstone," the occurrence of violence impacts a change in Calypso that is much like that of Jane, who elected to leave home in favor of a distant, unfamiliar, and anonymous London. Calypso, in almost no time, books a flight for Berlin, simply because it "was a city that Philip loved, a city he had been to once" (*S&B*, 193). As mentioned earlier, "moving to another residence or even another city is not unusual" (F&W, 168) for victims of trauma. Calypso chooses to relocate to be nearer to a reminder of Philip, as well as for the change in scenery. In Berlin, she rents an apartment and settles in. She is immediately shocked by the commotion of Berlin, and confesses that "in a city, we can become disoriented and exhausted. We may even die" (*S&B*, 194). Luckily she chooses a flat in a quiet part of the city, though her description of the flora betrays her true state of mind: "Chestnut trees littered the sidewalks with armored fruit. There were broad streets where vendors sold sunflowers and baskets of hazelnuts" (*S&B*, 194). "Armored fruit," for one, is an odd way to describe a Chestnut, and the fact that they "littered" the sidewalk speaks of waste, and her own distaste. Sunflowers and hazelnuts as well are "armored fruit," sporting a protective shell that is hard to penetrate. This also corresponds to Philip, in a way, in that Calypso earlier referred to him as "tough to crack," though it seems to be a trait worthy of obsession, as it applies to him. Being that she is connected to nature, Calypso should certainly feel a link to everything in the natural world, including "armored fruit." In her current state of mind, however, and with the recent trauma weighing on her mind, she cannot feel the connection, because her magic has left her. "I couldn't paint. Philip said that would happen" (*S&B*, 194). This disconnect, with both her powers and nature, is symbolically relevant. Rape victims, as mentioned earlier, often feel disconnected from their partner when trying to return to a normal relationship. Calypso, in a way, has a symbiotic relationship with nature, and were that connection to be severed, she would

begin to weaken and wither away. Her connection with Phillip becomes secondary at this point; the central focus remains on her connection, or lack thereof, with nature, which is the essence of every nymph. The fact that she cannot paint, then, is what worries Calypso more, and for good reason.

As her despair begins to deepen, weeks pass. In frustration one day Calypso throws her windows open, and the wind carries to her "the scent of pine trees and the sea, of rock and raw wool" (*S&B*, 195). These scents have symbolic meaning for Calypso:

> It was the smell of the north, the scent of my island—my true island, the place that had been my home, once. It filled me not with nostalgia or longing but with something strange and terrible, the realization that I no longer had a home. I had only what I made on the page or canvas. I had bound myself to a vision. (*S&B*, 195)

This scene solidifies the idea that Calypso has "bound" her power and her longevity as a nymph to a "vision," a painting, an art form, and that without her muse, her Philip, she will begin to sicken and die, as nymphs do. It must be remembered that Calypso, who now finds herself facing the possibility of death, survived Odysseus's departure, which was quite an emotionally violent and traumatic affair. What sets this apart from that past event is surely the fact that while Odysseus's leaving was definitely a trying time, Calypso's magic was never in jeopardy. Now, however, she finds herself facing yet another emotionally traumatic event, as well as the fact that her longevity on this earth is threatened. It is no surprise then that Calypso is imbalanced, and disconnected from the nature she is so closely linked to. For Calypso, however, this is not the first instance of this type of trauma. Already having survived something like this, Calypso is scarred, with a "psychic wound, stemming from unpleasant experiences which cause abnormal stress" ("Trauma"). So while it is odd, at first, that Calypso does not react rashly to Philip's

leaving, it becomes more understandable, having considered that she is no stranger to this type of event.

Despite her worries, though, Calypso seems to adjust to Berlin. After a short time she finds that she is able to bring her sketch book with her on her walks, and is even learning to draw Philip from memory.

> I began to draw other things, too—the lindens, the ugly modern buildings elbowing aside the older terraces that had not been destroyed by the bombings…Bronze Nereids and Neptunes decorated them, whitened with bird droppings thick. Lovers still sat beside the empty pools, gazing at drifts of dead leaves and old newspapers while pigeons pecked around at their feet. I found this beautiful and strange, and also oddly heartening. (*S&B*, 196)

This passage signals a small but important change in Calypso's mood and state of mind, and hints at the beginning of a tentative reconnection with nature. To begin with, the attitude of this paragraph becomes increasingly nostalgic; it even contains elements of romanticism, characterized by a shift away from faith in reason, and urban society: "the ugly modern buildings elbowing aside the older terraces" (*S&B*, 196). It instead moves toward a faith in feeling, emotion, the senses, and rural society: "beside the empty pools, gazing at drifts of dead leaves…while pigeons pecked around at their feet" (*S&B*, 196). And while only days ago Calypso was referring to the chestnuts as "armored fruit," she now finds the same city "beautiful and strange, and also oddly heartening" (*S&B*, 196). Berlin, after the war, was certainly no paradise, but Calypso is beginning to find solace and comfort there, and is starting to reconnect with the part of her she had attached to Philip. "The sun came out after a bit. Or no, that may have been another day—almost certainly it was" (*S&B*, 196). In addition to her seeing the beauty of nature anew, Calypso is beginning to lose track of time, and this is no accident on the part of Hand. Earlier, when Philip leaves Calypso, she very explicitly tracks the passage of time:

"hours passed, days; a week" (*S&B*, 194). After his departure, Calypso immediately finds herself without her powers, and is beginning to transform, and become mortal. Time, in this instance, and her fixation upon it, is Hand's subtle and symbolic reference to Calypso's humanity. But now, because she cannot exactly recall on which day a certain memory takes place, we begin to see the reemergence of Calypso's true, immortal self. Like many victims of violence and trauma, reintegration into society is a difficult process, and "survivors face the task of restoring order to their lives and reestablishing a sense of equilibrium" (F&W, 167). It is, however, only the beginning of the path to full recovery, and is a time when victims are still susceptible to a reappearance of earlier symptoms. It is in this state that Calypso now lives, and though she quickly recovered her sense of identity and connection to nature, she remains somewhat vulnerable.

Just as Calypso begins to become accustomed to a life without Philip, he calls her. Interestingly, she answers the phone, and arranges to meet with him in a few days. After she hangs up, Calypso experiences a number of emotions simultaneously: "What did I feel then? Exhilaration, desire, joy: but also fear. I had just begun to paint again; I was starting to believe that I could, in fact, work without him. But if he were here?" (*S&B*, 196) These emotions are all quite normal, considering that she is facing her "attacker," as it were; Philip, and his leaving her, are, in a way, responsible for her near death experience. Calypso is certainly aware of what will happen to her should she continue to entertain the love she has for Philip, yet she allows him to come and see her again. While this may seem like a terrible decision, it must be remembered that earlier, when she was facing the possibility of becoming mortal and dying, her feelings for Philip became *secondary*, and less important. There is nothing to indicate that Calypso has

changed her values since then, and it quickly becomes apparent that, instead of just carelessly allowing him to endanger her life once more, she does indeed have a plan.

At this point in the story, a number of important psychological developments occur, and the reader begins to see the transformation of Calypso, from the seemingly heartbroken, innocent, and human-like creature that she appears to be, into the "queenly nymph" (*Odyssey*, 5.165) and the famed "concealer," who imprisoned Odysseus on Olygia for seven years. The change is subtle, yet Hand's prose, and the way in which Calypso walks through it, reflect a change in the mood and bearing of the protagonist. To begin with, Calypso, with no further reflection upon Philip's return whatsoever, immediately walks into her bedroom. It is quite odd that after expressing a multitude of feelings at her upcoming reunion with Philip, she begins to do something else, effectively disconnecting herself emotionally from the situation. Instead of reflecting on how his arrival might affect her, she picks up one of his sweaters:

> It was an old, tweed-patterned wool sweater, in shades of umber and yellow and russet, with holes where the mice has nested in it back in the cottage. He had wanted to throw it out, years ago, but I kept it. It smelled of him, and I slept wearing it, here in the flat in Schoneberg, the wool prickling against my bare skin. I picked it up and buried my face in it, smelling him, his hair, his skin, sweat. (*S&B*, 197)

The way Calypso buries her face in the sweater here is similar to the opening scene of the story, in which she picks up a handful of leaves and "pressed [her] face against them, cold and wet" (*S&B*, 188); she is bonding with Philip again, though her intentions are as yet unknown. As well, the colors she describes in the wool, "umber and russet," are earthy colors, representative of the natural world, and Calypso's own essence. Mice, too, had nested in it, and it was prickly, old, and abrasive, yet Calypso slept in it at night, naked, allowing the rough and sharp wool to prickle against her skin. She is completely in her element, it seems, and it is as if we are seeing an entirely different character at this point; with Philip's imminent return the trauma has come full

circle, and Calypso, because she is afraid, is forced to act. "I had just begun to paint again…But if he were here?" (*S&B*, 196); the fear of what will happen if she allows herself to fall for Philip again is concerning enough to transform her into her true state, a state that is naturally powerful, seductive, and skilled at the art of concealment and deception.

After immersing herself in the smell and remains of Philip's essence, she takes the sweater and begins "slowly, painstakingly, to unravel it" (*S&B*, 197). Calypso, the concealer, was once a weaver, and it was partly because of her talent in weaving that she lured Odysseus into her cave: "Deep inside she sang, the goddess Calypso, lifting/ her breathtaking voice as she glided back and forth/ before her loom, her golden shuttle weaving" (*Odyssey*, 5.68-70). Hand, as well, references Calypso's talent as a weaver, and compares her to Penelope:

> Odysseus's wife was a weaver. I was, too. It's right there in Homer. When Hermes came to give me Zeus's command to free Odysseus, I was in my little house on the island, weaving scenes into tunics for Odysseus and the boys…Penelope. Yes, she had a son, and like me she was a weaver. But we had more in common than that. I was thinking about her unraveling her loom each night and it suddenly struck me: this was what I did with my paintings of Philip. (*S&B*, 191-2)

Her returning to weaving, here, is deeply symbolic, as it alludes to the time in her life when Odysseus left her, a time during which she was weaving tunics. Calypso has not mentioned her ability to weave, nor has she displayed the talent, until now. The fact that she has not weaved, only painted, since that time in her life is quite possibly because the simple act of weaving a sweater reminds her of that event, and the emotional violence it was responsible for. The experience certainly warped her, and as is customary in some situations involving violation, the victim is forever changed. What this warping translates to in the present is that Calypso, instead of allowing herself to become the victim again, assumes the role of attacker. She is aware of the reality of the situation, now, and will use every tool at her disposal—namely power, dominance,

and magic—to ensure her survival. Quite simply, Calypso is a nymph with a plan, and it is her return to weaving that is the first marker of this transformation.

It remains clear that despite all of this, Calypso does love Philip. She buries her face in the sweater to smell him, and she is allowing him to come and visit her again. But it is quite obvious that Calypso is aware of the connection between Philip and herself: if she continues to love him, she will die. This juxtaposition of Eros and Thanatos functions on a number of levels. To begin with, Eros represents not only her love for Philip, but her own wish to survive. That, in turn, involves embracing Thanatos, and destroying Philip, which goes against the erotic urge within her. The result, though, is that Calypso elects self-preservation, despite the conflicted emotions she is experiencing. She also didn't deliberate long on this matter, choosing to unravel the sweater only moments after the realization of her fear; Calypso will not succumb to Eros, and will not allow herself to fall in love once more. She understands that she can live without Philip, and can even paint again. She has made her decision. After her short display of fear, in fact, Calypso lacks emotional response altogether; it is the occurring transformation that causes this cold, natural logic to set in, and leaves her devoid of emotion and feeling.

Calypso unravels the entire sweater, "careful not to fray the worn yarn, careful to tie the broken ends together. When [she] was finished, [she] had several balls of wool, enough to make a new sweater" (*S&B*, 197). Calypso is very deliberate in her efforts, and does not reflect at all upon what she is thinking or feeling. Even Hand's prose is bereft of any internal details. Calypso simply sets to her task, carefully, and only describes what she is physically doing:

> I know how to knit, though I haven't done so for a long time. I found a pattern I liked in a book of Icelandic designs. I bought the book, bought the special circular needles you use for sweaters, bought an extra skein of wool in a color I liked because it reminded me

> of woad, not quite as deep a blue as indigo. I would work this yarn into the background. (*S&B*, 197)

At this point, the nymph Calypso entirely emerges, and the transformation is complete. She is weaving again, signifying her return to her true persona (which has not been visited fully since the time of Odysseus). This cold, unfeeling creature, in the skin of a beautiful woman, is what we are left with as a result of Philip's return. The mortal danger he poses to Calypso, should she fail to avoid falling in love with him, is too alarming to ignore, and so she continues to further her plan. Her decision to use a certain color because it reminded her of "woad" is also very interesting. In many cultures, though most notably among the ancient Britons and Celts, Woad (a blue pigment, produced by grinding the leaves of the plant *Isastis tinctoria*), was used as a dye; quite often, in fact, the pigment was used for body coloring, or tattooing. First, this reference alludes to Calypso's incredible age; she would likely have been alive when woad was used as both a body pigment and a commercial dye. Second, Calypso, the "concealer," would certainly be familiar with the many ways to hide oneself, including the use of a body pigment. And lastly, this also foreshadows the way in which she will kill Philip; the woad-colored sweater will serve as a magical concealment, in the end, and will literally be Philip's undoing.

As Calypso continues to weave, she finds that she must gather supplies for her project, and also opts to explore Berlin a bit more:

> I had nearly a week before Philip arrived. I was too wound up to paint. But I continued to walk each day, finding my way around the hidden parts of the city. Small forgotten parks scarcely larger than a backyard, where European foxes as big as dogs peered from beneath patches of brambles; a Persian restaurant near my flat, where the smells of coriander and roasting garlic made me think of my island long ago… I watched a kingfisher dive from an overhanging willow. (*S&B*, 197-8)

In many ways, Berlin has now become Calypso's home. She calls it "the city" instead of "Berlin," which is common among people who have lived in or near a major city long enough to call the area home. As well, she seems to remember and observe nature with her usual joy, as opposed to earlier, when she described the chestnuts as being "armored." In addition to happiness, Calypso seems to be embracing the inevitability of her decision. Earlier in the text, she explains "what happens to nymphs: they are pursued or they are left…We turn to trees, seabirds, sea-foam, running water, the sound of wind in the leaves…a diving kingfisher, an owl…a cold spring on the hillside" (*S&B*, 189). This passage is laden with sadness, despair, and a hint of the inevitable. As she describes Berlin in the present, however, Calypso again sees the "kingfisher," speaking to her understanding of what will come to pass, should she succumb to emotion. Calypso too is reminded of her island once again, by way of a smell, which had initially signaled the realization that she had bound herself to a vision. But the realization that occurs at *this* point is that Berlin in now her new home; her new peace is threatened by Philip's return. She can paint again, she has reconnected with nature, and as a result of this realization she has resolved to kill Philip in order to protect herself.

As Philip's arrival approaches, Calypso works to finish the sweater. "When I found I couldn't paint or draw, I'd take the sweater out and work on it. It was repetitive work, dreamlike, soothing" (*S&B*, 198). To call the work "dreamlike" and "soothing," in light of what is to come, is indicative of both Calypso's full immersion into the character of the nymph, and her commitment to the plan she has devised. To further the power of her creation, Calypso introduces an element of magic to her weaving:

> Inside the envelope was a curl of hair I'd cut from Philip's head one night while he slept. I set the envelope in a safe place and, one by one, carefully teased out the hairs. Over the next few days I wove them into the sweater. Now and then I would pluck one of my own

> hairs, much longer, finer, ash-gold, and knit that into the pattern as well. They were utterly concealed, of course, his dark curls, my fair straight hair: all invisible. I finished the sweater the morning Philip arrived. (*S&B*, 198)

As she weaves the hairs into the sweater Calypso is performing a kind of magic, a "Hellenic Voodoo," perhaps, which will capture Philip's soul. She also weaves some of her own "ash-gold" hair into the garment, to enhance the magical quality of her creation. It is strange that she describes her hair as "ash-gold" now, where in the opening of the story, she refers to it specifically as "blonde, no grey" (*S&B*, 189). The fact that it is now "ash-gold" could be indicative of the stress involved in enduring Philip's departure. If she was beginning to become mortal, or decay in any way, it is likely that her hair would begin to grey. This, as with her initial inability to paint, is one of the signs of the lasting physical damage brought about by trauma and violence. Calypso may have remained incredibly logical and calm throughout, but the trauma took its toll.

In startling opposition to the cold, unfeeling creator of a deadly magical object, Calypso, upon Philip's arrival, remarks that it "was wonderful seeing him" (*S&B*, 198). This stark contrast in emotion, under normal, human circumstances, may be seen as a severe form of dissociation, and even denial that the encounter ever took place. In victims of kidnapping, for example, Stockholm syndrome, defined as the "psychological tendency of a hostage to bond with, identify with, or sympathize with his or her captor" ("Stockholm syndrome"), is a real possibility. While Calypso's situation is very different, Philip did, in a way, capture a part of her, the loss of which could result in her death. This is one conceivable explanation for her change in outward appearance. The other possibility, and most likely the more accurate assessment, is that Calypso is devoted to her plan, and will stop at nothing to protect herself. It is for this reason that Calypso puts on a smile and acts as if nothing has changed. This is the famed "concealer," at

work again, and she is no longer under Philip's spell, but rather casting her own over him. She is able to be content now, simply because she has elected to pursue this course of action, a decision which frees her from the possibility of death.

Shortly after Philip's arrival, he and Calypso "[fall] into bed. Afterwards [she] gave him the sweater" (*S&B*, 198). Calypso, earlier, claimed that sex "energized" her, and so it is fitting that she would give him the sweater immediately after they had sex, when her powers are at their height. She makes him put on the sweater, claiming to want to check the fit. "He smoothed the thick wool, October gold and russet flecked with woad; then [he] tugged at a loose bit of yarn on the hem. 'Oops,' I said, frowning. 'Don't worry, I'll fix that'" (*S&B*, 198). By putting on the sweater, Philip unknowingly activates the magic within it. As well, when describing the colors of the sweater, Calypso actually calls the blue color "woad," as opposed to her earlier claim that it "reminded [her] of woad" (*S&B*, 196). This slip on her part may not be an error at all, but rather a testament to the depth of her transformation; she is reconnected with the entire body of her power, now, and has transformed into the nymph who would remember that specific color, as she knew it in her early days. The sweater is also magically active now, its power working on Philip as soon as he puts it on. Through the eyes of Calypso, once this color is wrapped around Philip's body, it becomes the magical, concealing woad dye. The loose piece of yarn at the bottom of the sweater is no mistake either; her response of "oops" is simply an effort at a human reaction to Philip's question. The loose piece of yarn, in reality, serves a much more sinister purpose.

Just as before, Calypso and Philip continue to get along well. In fact, if Calypso had not undertaken the task of knitting that sweater, it would be as if nothing was amiss at all. But the reader, at this point, is aware of at least part of her plan, and it is clear that beneath the surface,

Calypso is plotting something. Outwardly, however, she appears to be perfectly happy. And this, perhaps, is not entirely untrue. Calypso is likely relieved, now that she has decided to proactively solve the problem she faces. The façade of happiness, and love, even, that she wears in the presence of Philip is certainly a disguise. Hand reveals this to us by way of her choice of words: "We walked arm-in-arm to the Persian restaurant, where we ate chicken simmered in pomegranates and crushed walnuts, and drank wine the color of oxblood" (*S&B*, 199). Her diction here is significant, and alludes to the emotional and mental state of Calypso. "Pomegranates" and "oxblood," to begin with, both remind the reader of the color red, and blood, in particular. Red, of course, is the color of passion and love, but also of violence, bloodshed, and anger. Hand, here, hints at Calypso's true state of mind, and it becomes clear that she is now a predatory creature, rather than a victim. "Crushed walnuts," as well, speak to a change in Calypso. Walnuts, chestnuts, and sunflowers, three nuts which contain shells, are all mentioned throughout the story. The chestnuts were initially referred to as "armored fruit," because at the time Calypso was disconnected with nature. Now, however, the walnuts are crushed, cracked, and have clearly been penetrated; she is integrated with the natural world once again, a natural world which no longer defies her. Hand remains consistent in the way she symbolically aligns nature: it will always reflect Calypso's current emotional state. At this point in the story, for example, Calypso is completely reconnected with nature, and is committed to realizing her plan to do away with Philip. She once referred to him as "impenetrable," or "armored." This is understandable, being that Philip, and Calypso's love for him, caused her powers to diminish. But now, as she watches "the slow rise of his chest, the beard coming in where he hadn't shaved, grayer now than it had been; the thick black lashes that skirted his closed eyes" (*S&B*, 199-200), Calypso notices something different about him. The grey in Philip's beard, though only

mentioned briefly, is a very large change in him through the eyes of Calypso. Her fascination with Philip used to lay in the fact that he was "in his early fifties but seemed as ageless as [she] was, as though he'd been untouched by anything…someone human could be, not merely beautiful, but untouched. There wasn't a crack in him, no way to get inside" (*S&B*, 190). She is still somewhat attracted to him, indicated by the fact that they have been to bed twice since Philip's return, but the obsession has been overcome. Philip is visibly aging, and it is this, perhaps, that helps push Calypso in the direction of murder.

This moment in the text, as well, displays one of the only instance of conflicted emotion in Calypso. "If he had wakened then and seen me, would anything have changed? If he had even seen me watching him like this... would he have changed? Would I? I watched him for a long time, thinking. At last I curled up beside him and fell asleep" (*S&B*, 200). This passage marks a remembrance, in which Calypso is both questioning her reasons for carrying out her current plan, and remembering her time with Odysseus, before he was taken from her. The connection with Odysseus is important because it functions on a few levels. To begin with, the Gods decreed that Calypso must release Odysseus, the man she loved, from her island: "So now at last, you gods, you train your spite on *me*/ for keeping a mortal man beside me. The man I saved" (Odyssey, 5.143-4). Calypso is expressing her fear of loving again, because of the trauma associated with her last major love affair. "He slept beside me for seven years… his face was imprinted upon mine, just as Philip's was centuries later" (*S&B*, 188). The act of physically comparing Philip and Odysseus illustrates just how much she actually cares about Philip; it also, however, demonstrates exactly how traumatic Odysseus' leaving was, in that seeing Philip sleep reminds her of Odysseus. And second, by aligning both Philip and Odysseus' violations as equal, Hand confirms that Calypso is in danger. To put Philip and Odysseus on the same plane, as far

as their appearance, and their capability to do emotional harm to her, leads the reader to believe that Calypso finds the current situation with Philip just as heartbreaking and potentially damaging. It is for all of these reasons that Calypso, instead of having a change of heart, simply "curled up beside him and fell asleep" (*S&B*, 200). Despite a moment's hesitation, Calypso will not be made into the victim once again; her nature will not allow it.

The following morning, as Philip and Calypso wander around the city, the dynamic between them seems to be unchanged; it is as if nothing is amiss at all. But Hand, by way of Calypso's diction, again reveals her true state of mind:

> The bleak emptiness of the Alexanderplatz where a dozen teenagers lay around the empty fountain, each with a neon-shaded Mohawk and a ratty mongrel at the end of a leash; the construction cranes everywhere, the crowds of Japanese and American at Brandenburg Gate; the disconcertingly elegant graffiti on bridges spanning the Spree, as though the city, half-awake, had scrawled its dreams upon the brickwork. (*S&B*, 200)

At first, her descriptions seem to be of a barren, forgotten place; neither "bleak emptiness" nor "ratty mongrels" inspire a sense of beauty, enjoyment, or happiness. But it is the way Calypso refers to these things that demonstrates her actual connection with the environment. "Disconcertingly elegant graffiti," for one, establishes that while this scene appears to be desolate and bleak, Calypso is, in reality, coming to find joy in this place. She has bonded with Berlin, has overcome Philip's hold on her, and is seeing this city anew, "as though the city, half-awake, had scrawled its dreams upon the brickwork" (*S&B*, 200). These dreams are now *her* dreams, and Berlin is her home. "You seem happy here" (*S&B*, 200), Philip remarks as they move into an old forest to the city's west. And she *is* happy, happy without him. Calypso does not need Philip anymore; each day that passes finds Calypso closer to nature, and nearer to her strange, dark powers. As they enter the forest, a truly crepuscular place, Calypso seems to become more alive with each step:

> There were wild animals, boar and foxes; there were lakes, and hollow caves beneath the earth that no one was aware of…These woods seemed an irruption of a deep, rampant disorder: the trees were black, the fallen leaves deep, the tangled thorns and hedges often impenetrable. I had found half-devoured carcasses here, cats or small dogs, those pretty red squirrels with tufted ears, as well as empty beer bottles and the ashy remnants of campfires in stone circles. You could hear traffic, and the drone of construction cranes; but only walk a little further into the trees and these sounds disappeared. It was a place I wanted to paint, but I hadn't figured out where, or how. (*S&B*, 200-1)

To begin with, the description of this forest, on the whole, seems to be quite negative. It appears to be a wood fraught with danger and death, and speaks of a darkness and depth which would likely cause many travelers to be wary of such a place. "Half-devoured carcasses," for one, illustrate the level of decay and rot. But for Calypso, this environment holds only promise. This is made clear by the fact that her immediate desire is to capture the image of this space, to paint it. Another interesting detail is that as Calypso moves deeper into the trees, the sounds of the city disappear; like this forest, she is slowly becoming immersed in the natural environment, and is embracing the wild around her. She is becoming increasingly comfortable with death, also. In a single sentence, she mentions the "cats or small dog" carcasses rotting, and then "those pretty red squirrels with tufted ears." It is as if death holds no sway over Calypso, and speaks of a very strong connection with and acceptance of death. What it translates to, then, is her continued comfort with her present plan of action (which involves the death of Philip). The forest bears relation to Philip, as well, though perhaps the Philip from the beginning of the story, rather than the current, aging man now walking alongside Calypso. In a moment of foreshadowing, Philip, initially an "impenetrable" entity, is no longer an "armored fruit" to Calypso, but only a man, who is "grayer now;" like this forest that Calypso is now actively penetrating, Philip's "shell," as it were, will also be cracked.

In this somewhat isolated grove, they come to a stop. Because Philip is tired, Calypso looks around for a place to rest, but "there were no benches, not even any large rocks. Just the leaf-covered ground, a few larches, many old beeches" (*S&B*, 201). The setting is completely bereft of any human elements. Instead, this space is dominated by nature, and is a place where Calypso reigns supreme. Looking around, she spies "a declivity [which] spread beneath one very large old beech, a hollow large enough for [them] to lie in, side by side" (*S&B*, 201). First, this depression, which snugly fits the two of them, speaks to Thanatos; this coffin-like image which Hand evokes surely hints at what is to come. Second, the words "hollow" and "declivity" are interesting choices, and upon examining their roots they become largely relevant. "Declivity," from the Latin *declivis*, meaning "a sloping downward" ("Declivity"), has a common root in the Proto-Indo-European *klei*, meaning "to lean." "Lean," while, having quite a few etymological branches, finds a part of its lineage in the Old Irish *cloin*, which means "crooked, wrong" ("Lean"). As well, "hollow," from Old English *holh*, a "hollow place, hole" ("Hollow"), shares a link with the Proto-Indo-European prefix *kel-*, which means "to cover, conceal." This is fitting for Calypso, the concealer, and is a wonderful instance of foreshadowing and further development of Calypso's internal psyche; her language literally speaks to the transformation she has undergone, and to the coming transformation she will perform upon Philip. "Leaves had drifted to fill the space like water in a cupped hand; tender yellow leaves, soft as tissue and thin enough that when I held one to the sun I could see shapes behind the fretwork of veins. Trees. Philip's face" (*S&B*, 201). This beautiful line, like the passage before, continues to herald the coming of Philip's end. Calypso almost personifies the leaves, and the "fretwork of veins." The transparency of the leaves enables her to literally see right through them, and see "Philip's face." Philip, in his mortal state, is aging, like the "yellow leaves, soft as tissue and thin," and becoming

less appealing to Calypso. As well, the leaf in the sunlight is her looking glass, as it were, and through it she is able to discern "Trees. Philip's face;" her two loves, side by side, are becoming almost as one.

As they lie in the hollow, they begin to make love. Calypso can "smell the sweet mast beneath [them], beechnuts buried in the leaves" (*S&B*, 201). The mention of mast again indicates a predator-prey relationship, as in "Cleopatra Brimstone;" though in this instance it is Calypso who is the predator, as it is she who can identify with the mast, and she who sees and smells the fruits of nature, as opposed to Philip, whose "eyes were closed… All the things men never see" (*S&B*, 201). This identification of Philip as a man illustrates the dichotomous nature of their relationship at this point, with Calypso clearly being the more superior, divine being, and the hunter. Philip, however, is just a man, whose eyes are closed to the magic Calypso is weaving before him. As they take each other's clothes off, Calypso tugs "the sweater free from him arms, until it hung loose like a cowl around his neck" (*S&B*, 201). The words "hung" and "neck," while being words associated with death, indicate the deadly power contained in the sweater she has created, and the eventual fate of Philip. And a cowl, or a hood over the head, is a symbol of Philip's blindness to what she is planning. Calypso, however, is in her element, and misses nothing: "His eyes were closed, but mine were open; there was grit on his cheek and a fleck of green moss, a tiny greenfly with gold-faceted eyes that lit upon his eyelid then rubbed its front legs together then spun into the sunlight" (*S&B*, 201). While this sentence richly describes the splendor of the natural world, on a deeper level Hand uses this to create a beautiful picture of what is about to come to pass. The greenfly, for example, is an insect belonging to the Aphid family, which is one of nature's most efficient devourers of crops; when Aphids exhaust all resources in a given area, some species have been known to produce winged offspring, which

can fly in search of a new, viable source, or host. This, strangely enough, is what Calypso appears to be doing to Philip. This aging, mortal man has lost his appeal to Calypso, and she, after disposing of him, will probably move on to another host. Also, the fact that she is, ultimately, leaving Philip, will result in a new "host" for the greenfly as well, thus explaining its attraction to Philip and Calypso.

They finish making love, and as Philip climaxes, Calypso's raw, earthly power starts to take shape:

> I lay my hand upon his face, before he turned aside and fell asleep. For a moment I sat, silent, and looked for the greenfly. Then I pulled my jeans back up and zipped them, shook the leaves from my hair and plucked a beechnut husk from my shirt. I picked up Philip's jacket and tossed it into the underbrush, then knelt beside him. His flannel shirt had ridden up, exposing his stomach; I bent my head and kissed the soft skin beneath his navel. He was warm and tasted of semen and salt, bracken. (*S&B*, 201-2)

This gesture, of laying her hand upon his face, and then kissing him beneath his navel, on the "soft skin," is similar to the way Jane kisses her victims after they climax, and is laced with undertones of power and dominance. For Jane, in "Cleopatra Brimstone," it signals the onset of her transformative power, and causes her victims to mutate into rare butterflies and moths. Calypso, too, seems to contain within her an element of power, which can be delivered through a simple touch. Her tenderness seems a loving gesture on the surface, but beneath the façade we can clearly see the nymph Calypso, performing her magic upon Philip. The result, of course, is that he falls asleep immediately, leaving him quite vulnerable to whatever Calypso may have in store for him. Surely, the fact that she tossed his jacket "into the underbrush" does not bode well for Philip. What follows, in a truly enchanting scene, is a display of magic and power which, until now, Calypso has not openly flaunted:

> A faint buzzing sounded, but otherwise the woods were still. The sweater hung limp round his neck. I ran my fingers along the hem until I found the stray bit of yarn there. I tugged it free, the loose knot easily coming undone; then slowly and with great care, bit by bit while he slept, I unraveled it. Only at the very end did Philip stir, when just a ring of blue and brown and gold hung about his neck, but I whispered his name and, though his eyelids trembled, they did not open. (*S&B*, 202)

Here, at the beginning of the magical act, the sweater, which is still around Philip's neck, is described as "limp," as if to imply that Philip is entirely under her control. This is again exemplified when Philip almost wakes, and Calypso need only whisper his name to subdue him again. She tugs at the stray yarn at the end of the sweater which she intentionally left unfinished, and the sweater begins to unravel around Philip's neck. As she does this "a faint buzzing sounded," as if the greenfly she saw before has recognized what she is going to do. Nature is responding to her now, and she is immersed in her power: "holding the loose armful of warm wool, [I] drew it into my face and inhaled deeply" (*S&B*, 202). The smelling of the sweater, like the smelling of the leaves earlier in the story, illustrates both Calypso's heightened sense of enjoyment of and connection with nature, and the impending coalescence of Philip and the natural world. "It smelled more of him than his own body did" (*S&B*, 202), she claims as she smells the wool. She is celebrating and enjoying the essence of Philip, and the aroma of him, but not actually the man himself anymore. She has bound herself to a vision, a vision which is slowly coming together before her eyes:

> I teased out one end of the skein and stood above him, then let the yarn drop until it touched his chest. Little by little, I played the yarn out, like a fisherman with his line, until it covered him. More greenflies came and buzzed about my face… A gust sent yellow leaves blowing across the heap of wool and hair as I turned to retrieve my satchel. The greenflies followed me. I waved my hand impatiently and the darted off, to hover above the shallow pool that now spread beneath the beech tree. I had not consciously thought of water, but water is what came to me; perhaps the memory of the sea outside the window where I had painted Philip all those nights, perhaps just a memory of green water and blue sky and gray rock, an island long ago. (*S&B*, 202)

As the yarn, which is made of "wool and hair" from both of their heads and Philip's old sweater, touches his chest and covers him, the transformation begins to occur. The space he lays in becomes filled with water, and he is covered and concealed. As the greenflies gather in anticipation of their newest victim, Calypso completes this act of magic, and is left pondering why a shallow pool came to fill this space, despite the fact that she "had not consciously thought of water." At first, she attributes it to "the sea outside the window" where she painted Philip. Though as she continues to reflect, it becomes clear that there is a deeper meaning behind the choice for water: a memory of pain and sadness. When Odysseus left, it was obviously a traumatic event for Calypso, as established before. They had lived on Olygia for seven years together, and after all of that time Odysseus still wished to leave her, despite the fact that they had two sons together. A scarring, terrible event such as this would certainly remain imprinted upon one's mind and heart, no matter how much time has passed. And for Calypso to attribute the forming of this shallow pool to "just a memory of green water and blue sky and gray rock, an island long ago" is indicative of the fact that the memories from her time on Olygia are still with her, regardless of whether or not they are conscious thoughts. Calypso, like many mortal victims of violence and trauma, has learned to lessen the pain of that time, but has not forgotten. This deep-seated psychological wound, though it occurred thousands of years prior, still speaks to the way Calypso reacts to men who have caused her pain. This single sentence—"just a memory of green water and blue sky and gray rock, an island long ago"—encapsulates the entirety of Calypso's state of being, and reflects her longing and sadness over Odysseus' having left her.

Now that Philip lay entombed, as it were, beneath a "small still pool…[not] green but dark brown, with a few strokes of white and gray where the sky caught it" (*S&B*, 202), Calypso sets to working again. It is interesting to note that she first thinks of painting this scene, and only

after considering for a moment does she take the precautions necessary when having just committed a murder, so to speak:

> I got my bag and removed my pencils and watercolors and sketchpad, then folded Philip's jacket and put it at the bottom of the satchel, along with the rest of his clothes. Then I filled my metal painting cup with water from the pool. I settled myself against a tree, and began to paint. (*S&B*, 203)

The violent act accomplished, Calypso immediately turns to her art. It is, perhaps, largely a credit to Hand's writing that we do not witness Calypso dwelling on the event at all; she does not, in fact, seem to exhibit any remorse whatsoever. This is, quite possibly, due to Calypso's fantastical nature; if she were a mortal, she would likely have been immediately disturbed by having just drowned Philip, thus putting an end to a love affair that lasted for seven years. But Calypso is calm and level headed at this point, and is entirely comfortable with the violence she has just committed. Here, as Calypso commits the murder of Philip, the reader is able to achieve the aforementioned "emotional climax," in that they *understand* Calypso's reason for committing this act, and on some level even *agree* with her reasoning. Regardless of her morality, though, Calypso, like anyone who experiences a life-changing trauma, has found a way to deal with that pain, and the reader understands this. And the way the nymph Calypso *deals* with her negative emotion is not *much* different than the way in which a human victim would, if given free rein to react as they pleased, with no consideration of the consequences. The pain *itself*, as established, is very human. But Calypso knows no other way in which to handle her despair, so she turns to violence. It is elegant, lovely, and artful violence, to be sure, but violence nonetheless. Kidnapping and attempted murder, for one, are committed with almost no hesitation, and she remains entirely level-headed and calm about it. It is only once, when Calypso returns to Berlin some months later and stops by the pond to see Philip, that she shows any emotion:

> The pool was gone: there had been no snow to replenish it. Instead, a cloud of blossoms moved above the earth, gold and azure, crimson and magenta and shining coral. Anemones, Adonis, hyacinth, clematis: all the wildflowers of my girlhood turned their yellow eyes towards me. I feel to my knees and buried my face in them so that they stained my cheeks with pollen, their narrow petal crushed beneath my fingertips. I cried as though my heart would break, as the wind stirred the blossoms and a few early greenflies crawled along their stems. (*S&B*, 206)

As she comes upon Philip's resting place Calypso starts to cry, which is the first and only display of emotion following her transformation of Philip. But this emotion, it comes to be seen, is not entirely for the loss of Philip himself, but also for the loss of the beautiful and inspirational scene which she had created in nature. This is made apparent by the fact that she, shortly after arriving and becoming upset, sees Philip beneath the wildflowers growing in the hollow. As she continues to observe the beauty of the scene, her spirits begin to rise: "Beneath rose-veined lids his eyes twitched, and I could see each iris contract and then swell like a seed. He was dreaming. He was beautiful. I wiped my eyes… I began to paint" (*S&B*, 207). She is still able to paint and access her power, and as she wipes her eyes and the sadness dissipates, a predominant part of Calypso's true nature and character is made plain. By leaving Philip buried beneath this bed of flowers so that she can paint and draw him, it becomes clear that she, despite valuing companionship, love, and even sex, is really concerned with the power, and the vision. And like Odysseus, who was both fated to live a different life, and who in the end was true to his nature, Calypso too leaves Philip, and lives as *she* is fated to live.

Calypso is, of course, a nymph and a mythological creature, who thrives on power and a connection with nature. For this reason she claims to be happy at the end of this story, even though she has killed Philip. But there does exist within Calypso a human element. This is made apparent in a number of ways, such as her crying after seeing Philip's body again, but most prominently in the fact that she takes Philip and Odysseus as both lovers *and* companions. In

The Odyssey, for example, Calypso "welcomed him warmly, cherished him, even vowed/ to make the man immortal, ageless, all his days" (5.150-1), indicating that she likely wanted to spend the rest of her life with him as his partner. And in "Calypso in Berlin," she falls in love with Philip so deeply that it puts her in danger of becoming mortal, a threat which even Odysseus did not pose. Love, then, is something that Calypso cannot avoid, and because it brings her closer to being human, it demonstrates that she does, in fact, have some human emotional capabilities.

It is this human aspect of Calypso which enables the audience to both sympathize and identify with her, as well as what allows Hand to create an honest *mimesis* of the human emotions present in the situations which befall the character. This mimetic representation and the feelings evoked by it, in addition to the plot itself, create an opportunity for the audience to undergo a catharsis. Both Odysseus' and Philip's leaving of Calypso, for example, were painful and extremely sad events. As such, the audience feels pity and compassion for her, and sympathizes with her in her struggle to cope with these losses, even if she turns to violence. When Philip leaves her, she does in fact decide to kill him, as we come to find out, and the audience both understands and *enjoys* her choice; the audience can sympathize with Calypso, and is even willing to condone her use of violence, because they themselves feel the "same or similar" emotions. And Calypso, or at least the part of her with which the audience identifies, does meet a tragic end. By the culmination of the story Calypso is alone, and we witness her cry for the first time; like her, we also seek companionship and love. But by viewing her tragic life through the medium of art, objectively, and witnessing the full course of events, we are able to recognize that her actions, even though we enjoyed them at the time, were responsible for her ultimately being alone, doomed to repeat this process. Again, we are able to "purge" these "undesirable or

unwanted emotions or passions" because we realize that Calypso, like Jane, brought this upon herself. Even though it was subtly and beautifully carried out, what Calypso did to Philip was, in essence, revenge for his loving her, despite the fact that he could never be with her. What is "purged" from the audience, then, is the drive to seek vengeance as a result of heartbreak.

Generation Loss

Generation Loss, published in 2007, is the beginning of the beautiful and dark story of Cassandra Neary, a woman who's early and middle life is plagued with bouts of violence, trauma, struggle, and an obligation to cope with a newly discovered magical ability. As the events and circumstances of Cass Neary's tumultuous life unfold, it becomes clear that from an early age, Cass' existence has been anything but simple. Within the first two pages of the novel, Cass describes her mother. It is interesting to note how quickly she moves from the seemingly pleasant and beautiful remembrance of her parents' meeting, to the physical description of her mother's death:

> My mother was much younger than my father, a beautiful Radcliffe girl he met on a blind date arranged by his cousin. She died when I was four. The car she was driving, our old red Rambler station wagon, went off the road and into the woods, slamming into a tree on the outskirts of town. It was an hour before someone noticed headlights shining through the trees and called the police. When they finally arrived, they found my mother impaled on the steering column. I was face up on the backseat, surrounded by shattered glass but unhurt. (*GL*, 4)

Once again, Hand delivers the news of Cass' mother's death in nearly the same way it would be delivered in a normal situation: it is not romanticized. Instead, Hand writes in a tone that is almost conversational, moving quickly from a statement about her mother's beauty, to the way in which she was "impaled on the steering column." To begin with, it illustrates a sense of detachment in Cass, which is understandable given the violent nature of her mother's death; a sense of detachment, especially from the issue itself, is a common effect after the loss of a close relative to violence. As well, the knowledge of having escaped entirely "unhurt," despite the fact that her mother died a sudden, gruesome death, is something that likely caused Cass to feel guilty,

if only on an unconscious level. This guilt at having survived an accident which killed her mother serves to instill a sense of disparateness, and sets the stage for her young life.

As Cass enters her teens, she continues to face trials which alienate her from the world, and brand her, at least in her own mind, as an outsider; something strange; the "other." She admittedly "liked being alone" (*GL*, 4), which speaks to her sense of disengagement from the rest of the world. This level of isolation is, in itself, extremely unhealthy; and for a young teenager this certainly enters the realm of emotional violence, of which isolation is included. The self-destructive lifestyle and internalization of trauma that follows after Cass' mother's death, up to this point, are direct results of the violence of her childhood, and they began on the day her mother lost her life:

> I have no memory of the accident. The police officer told my father that I didn't cry or speak, just stared at the car's ceiling, and, as the officer carried me outside, the night sky. Nowadays there would have been a grief counselor, a child psychologist, drugs. My father's Irish Catholic sensibility, while not religious, precluded any overt emotion; there was a wake, a funeral, week of visiting relatives and phone calls. Then my father returned to work. A house-keeper, Rosie, was hired to tend to me. My father wouldn't speak of my mother unless asked, and, forty-odd years ago, one didn't ask. Her presence remained in the framed black-and-white photos my father kept of her in his bedroom. While Rose vacuumed or made lunch I would sit on his bed and slowly move my fingers across the glass covering the pictures, pretending the dust was face powder on my mother's cheeks. (*GL*, 4)

To have no memory of the accident is normal, given the circumstances. At the age of four, one may not explicitly remember a violent event. The emotional scar and stain, however, remain, and are quite apparent in Cass. Hand's quick, spare prose in this paragraph surely attests to this. It is as if Cass wishes to describe the events as quickly as possible, so as not to dwell on them any longer. Even as a child Cass seems to be repressing the incident: she "didn't cry or speak, just stared." The absence of an emotional reaction, while partly due to shock at the time of the

crash, continues into Cass' teen and adult life. Her father's "Irish Catholic sensibility," which "precluded any overt emotion," is of no healing benefit to Cass, either; rather, it only exacerbates her condition. In a time when the young Cass is in dire need of support, her father, instead of trying to console his daughter, returned to work, and hired a house-keeper. This is, unfortunately, very common. Many young boys and girls live through identical situations, and many do end up like Cass, who reflected that the she, many times, would simply "sit on [the] bed and slowly move [her] fingers across the glass covering the pictures, pretending the dust was face powder on [her] mother's cheeks." For Cass, this translates to a childhood and adolescence defined by solitude and loneliness, which largely contributes to her feeling of being different than other people, and of being without something that so many others have, and take for granted; "my life, who could pretend there wasn't a big fucking hole in it?" (*GL*, 3). To compound the matter, Cass, in her early teens, is subject to a vision, of sorts:

> Once when I was fourteen, walking in the woods, I stepped from the trees into a field where the long grasses had been flattened by sleeping deer. I looked up into the sky and saw a mirror image of the grass, black and yellow-gray whorls marking a slow clockwise rotation like a hurricane. As I stared the whorl began to move more quickly, drawing a darkness into its center until it resembled a vast striated eye that was all pupil, contracting upon itself yet never disappearing. I stared at it until a low buzzing began to sound in my ears. Then I ran. (*GL*, 4-5)

Through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old, this vision must have been terrifying and profoundly confusing. Such a sight would certainly cause her to feel an even larger rift between herself and reality, and would be a psychologically and emotionally disturbing event. At this age, young boys and girls reach puberty and depend on both of their parents for support, guidance, and exemplification. But for Cass, who is already experiencing the pain of living without her mother at a young age, having no one to turn to in a time of crisis and confusion only serves to deepen this feeling of being alone. "I didn't stop until I reached my driveway. When I finally halted a

looked back, the eye was still there, turning. I never mentioned it to anyone. No one else ever spoke of seeing it" (*GL*, 5). Coupled with this notion of loneliness is the feeling of being the "other," or just simply "different." Normally, a child would mention this to someone, like a parent, a close, relative, or even a friend. But like Jane in "Cleopatra Brimstone," who did not tell anyone about her strange, elongated eyebrows, Cass opts to keep this to herself; she clearly does not trust her father, or her housekeeper. This entire situation, from the secret of her vision to her estrangement from all forms of personal, loving contact, is intensely traumatic for Cass, and it will continue to be for some time. And the vision itself, the numinous "mirror image of the grass, black and yellow-grey whorls…a vast striated eye," is symbolic of Cass' fear of self-reflection and judgment. To further this, Cass admits: "I wouldn't meet people's eyes. I didn't like people looking at me. It made me feel sick; it reminded me of that great eye above the empty field" (*GL*, 5); she cannot stand to be judged, by herself or others, indicative of the truly damaging effect these events have had on her psyche.

In high school Cass' relationship with her father improves, and she refers to him as "friendly, if distant" (*GL*, 5). She skates through her classes easily enough, but she is far from having reconciled any of her past violent and traumatic experience, and admits that her "sense of detachment grew" (*GL*, 5). This is quite common among victims of violence and trauma, especially in victims who have problems that remain unresolved. To make matters even more complicated, Cass experiences another vision: "I had this dream. I was kneeling in the field where I'd seen the eye. A figure appeared in front of me…his smile mocking and oddly compassionate. As I stared up at him, he extended his hand until his finger touched the center of my forehead" (*GL*, 6). Cass reacts to this dream in the same way she did when she saw the eye in the field: with fear. The fact that she was "kneeling in the field where [she'd] seen the eye"

speaks directly to her fear of judgment, and discomfort at being looked at; self-reflection, even years later, is still terribly difficult for Cass. In the dream there is also someone else in the room, a man who reaches out and "touch[es] the center of [her] forehead." This gesture, while certainly terrifying and unsettling, is an extremely symbolic gesture. The center of the forehead, in the Hindu tradition, is said to be the location of a person's "third eye," or *sahasrara*. The use of this "eye" offers the person higher consciousness, which results in a multitude of different magical abilities. Cass, however, already has an ability, though she hasn't quite focused it yet:

> I had from earliest childhood a sense that there was no skin between me and the world. I saw things that other people didn't see. Hands that slipped through gaps in the air like falling leaves; a jagged outline like a branch but there was no branch and no tree. In bed at night I heard a voice repeating my name in a soft, insistent monotone. *Cass. Cass. Cass*." (*GL*, 3-4)

These are not the imaginings of a child. Cass has an actual, magical ability to see things that others cannot. Even the swirling eye in the field, in light of Cass' ability, becomes a real-life event. Like Jane, who discovers her "strange" eyebrows at a young age and chooses to remain silent about it, Cass, too, seems to dismiss this part of her, over the course of her adolescence. But, also like Jane, the weight of violence and trauma result in a resurfacing of this ability in Cass, whether she wants it to happen or not. The dream she had, for example, is indicative of this. And the fact that it takes place in the "empty field" demonstrates the impact that experience had on her, insofar as it continues to haunt her, even when she is asleep. The voice, repeating "*Cass,"* is also of the same variety. The insistence, and the monotone of the voice indicate the real, driving force of this dream, and the effect it has upon her; Cass' traumas, while buried deep within her subconscious, seem to be clawing to the surface, focused on incessantly plaguing her.

The events of Cass' young life, to this point, have been riddled with violent encounters and episodes. It is no surprise, then, that, like Jane and Calypso, Cass, in the face of

overwhelming violence or trauma, undergoes a transformation. In Hand's works, when a character is subject to a transformation, the values and interests of the characters often play a part in the actual nature of the metamorphosis: for Calypso, the nymph, the "concealer," it is appropriate that her transformative power ultimately finds Philip entombed in nature, beneath a pool of water; for Jane, the lover of entomology, the fact that her mutation allows her to turn men into butterflies and moths fits quite well; and so it is that Cass, who has "the sight," and who's vision is able to penetrate the "skin between [herself] and the world," experiences a transformation which corresponds quite well with her inherent ability:

> As I stared up at him, he extended his hand until his finger touched the center of my forehead. There was a blinding flash. I fell on my face, terrified, woke in bed with my ears ringing. It was the morning of my seventeenth birthday. My father gave me a camera. I sat at the breakfast table, turned it in my hands, and remembered the dream. I saw my face distorted in the round glass of the lens, like a flaw; like an eye staring back at me. (*GL*, 6)

The power which Cass possesses, and has always possessed, involves "sight" and "vision." As the man touches her forehead, where the "third eye" would be, he is, in a sense, releasing or unlocking Cass' latent ability, but not unlocking it in the sense that it is being broached or opened. She can already see things that others cannot; rather, it is as if the power is being freed from its original state, allowing it to take shape in a way which will be pertinent to who Cass really is as a person. This, of course, is why Cass, whose entire ability is concerned with sight, receives a camera for her birthday. The camera, both symbolically and tangibly, becomes the lens through which Cass comes to see her world, as it relates to her power. Hand's prose, too, parallels this transformation. As the man reaches up and presses her forehead, she sees a blinding flash, like that of a camera, and her ears are left ringing. As well, he smiles, as one would before being photographed, and it is as if Cass herself were taking the picture. In fact, if

all of these camera-related references are perceived as one (the pressing of her forehead, the flash leaving her ears ringing, and the photograph from her perspective), it as if Cass *is* the camera.

As this transformation is occurring, Cass looks down at the lens of the camera and sees her reflection, "like a flaw; like an eye staring back at [her]." Before, Cass' self-reflective efforts were met with fear, and she still, arguably, cannot face herself. She is still flawed in her own eyes, indicated by the way in which she describes her reflection. But her power, which is now fused with, or rather *embodied* within the apparatus of a camera, allows Cass to literally capture the images of *other* people, instead of having to face herself.

Her description of taking photographs, for instance, illustrates just how immersed she is able to become within the subjects she is photographing: "it's like I'm no longer standing there with my camera, with my eye behind the lens, looking at someone. It's like it's me lying there and I'm seeping into that other skin like rain into dry sand" (*GL*, 9). She speaks of penetrating, "seeping into that other skin," as if she is able to escape herself entirely, and become something else. Cass can now take her leave of the self-reflective, investigative, yellow-gray eye in the sky, and look outward: "This is what I lived for…Not just knowing I'd…taken the picture but feeling like I'd made them, like they'd never have existed without me…Nothing is like know you can make something like that real. I felt like I was fucking God" (*GL*, 13). Cass' transformation allows her to create and capture, but also to escape self-reflection, and it this combination of elements which allow photography to perfectly channel her power. For Cass the camera becomes a form of protection, in a sense, from the outside world. It remains apparent, however, that she both cannot and will not look inward, because her trauma still weighs upon her despite this newfound outlet for her ability. This bond with the camera also illustrates an element of her power which is like that of Calypso, especially. Cass' power, which is her sight, and ability to

see damage, is now dependent upon her connection with the camera, and her ability and willingness to take photographs. Like Calypso, who required a connection with nature in order to survive (facilitated by her ability to paint), Cass' ability is now linked with the camera, and her ability to capture life in its liminal state. It is interesting that both photography and painting allow Cass and Calypso to depict and capture the world as it is viewed by them. And it is in this state which Cass must remain, and thrive, else she lose the means to connect with her internal power.

The resulting effect of this vision and the ensuing transformation that follows leaves Cass in a different state of existence, the liminal space of existence. Liminality can be defined as "relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition; threshold, often pertaining to a physiological or psychological response" ("Liminality"). From the Latin *limen*, for "threshold," this is the state in which Cass has come to live. "It sounds creepy, but I always liked the idea of disappearing then becoming something new. That of course was before I disappeared" (*GL*, 9). Cass has indeed disappeared, and become something new:

> I can smell damage; it radiates from some people like a pheromone. Those are the ones I photograph. I can tell where they've been, what's destroyed them, even after they're dead. It's like sweat or semen or ash, and it's not just a taste or scent. It shows up in pictures, if you know how to catch the light. It shows up in faces, the way you can tell what a sleeping person's dreaming, if they're happy or frightened or aroused. I don't know why it draws me; maybe because I dream of leaving this body the way other people dream of flying. Not flying to a sunny beach or a hotel room, but true escape, leaving one body and entering another, like one of those wasps that lays its eggs inside a beetle so a wasp larva grows inside it, eating the beetle until the new wasp emerges. (*GL*, 9)

Her power has warped and transformed into something else: the ability to "smell damage." She can see "what's destroyed them." This development, or mutation, more accurately, is very closely linked with the psychological circumstances of her childhood traumas. Because she did

not reconcile the events of her past, Cass' power takes shape in two ways. It begins as a defense mechanism, which saves her from having to look within herself. The development of her power, in fact, inverts this structure of self-reflection, allowing Cass to move outside of herself, "leaving one body and entering another, like one of those wasps" as if she were a spirit—a liminal being—capable of fortifying herself from both outside judgment and internal examination. But like the wasp, which *does* kill the beetle, and even lays "its eggs inside [the] beetle so a wasp larva grows inside it," Cass has become a predator. "I wanted to see the world he knew from inside his junkie's skin, smell the lilacs that grew outside his window" (*GL*, 7), she says, about her ex-boyfriend. She wants to literally penetrate this man's skin, to *enter* him, and then, like Jane, like the predator, to capture him, in his liminal state: "I liked to watch him sleep; I liked to watch him nod out. I took pictures of him…his eyes closed, cigarette burning in his hand" (*GL*, 7).

This embrace of the liminal, the "threshold," continues through Cass' young adult life. Photography, as well, in that it is the interface by which Cass can capture life upon the *limen,* becomes thoroughly integrated into her life. Even the creation of photo paper finds her upon a transforming threshold, subject to her will:

> I liked the detail work of creating my own photographic paper, of processing then developing the film myself in the school photo lab. I loved the way the paper felt, soft and wet in the trays, then the magical way it dried and turned into something else, smooth and rigid and shining, the images a mere by-product of chemistry and timing. (*GL*, 6)

The act of developing film and creating photographic paper is a process that Cass regards with passion. The "soft and wet" texture of the paper, sensuous sensory observations, and the mention of "love," speak strongly to Cass' enjoyment of this aspect of photography: "I loved playing with the negs, manipulating light and shadow and time until the world looked just right,

until everything in front of me was just the way I wanted it to be" (*GL*, 13). Processing film allows Cass to operate upon the threshold, and to serve as the instrument by which a transformation will occur. The photos she is developing, as well, will also be concerned with life in its liminal state. As for her subjects, Cass is especially intent upon photographing people when they are almost asleep, or while they are sleeping, and dreaming:

> I liked portraits of my friends while they were sleeping. I've always watched people sleep. When I occasionally babysat, I'd go into the children's rooms after they were in bed and stand there, listening to their breathing, waiting until my eyes adjusted to the soft glow of the night-light or moonlight. I liked to watch them breathe. (*GL*, 6)

This begins innocently, and she observes people while they are asleep: "it's not just a taste or scent. It shows up in pictures, if you know how to catch the light. It shows up in faces, the way you can tell what a sleeping person's dreaming, if they're happy or frightened or aroused" (*GL*, 7). Cass' ability allows her to first see this "radiating" from people, and then to capture it, in a photograph.

But as Cass continues to explore her newfound talent and ability, she begins to develop an appeal for a different aspect of liminality—the threshold between life and death: "I liked dead things…mouse skulls disinterred from an owl pellet, a cicada's thorax picked clean by tiny green beetles" (*GL*, 6). Not only are these things "dead," which is a part of what interests Cass, but they have also been transformed. As Cass describes "mouse skulls disinterred from an owl pellet" or a "thorax picked clean by tiny green beetles," it becomes clear that she is concerned, primarily, with the natural process of life and death, and the predator-prey dynamic. She revels in this transference, this mutation from one form of life to the next, and it does not end with nature and the wild. Cass, shortly after, shoots "an entire roll of film of a kid who'd OD'd in [an] alley early one morning…[she] stood out there, shit-colored light filtering from the street lamp, and

photographed him close up" (*GL*, 8). She is fascinated and enchanted with this space, this threshold, and she can tell "what's destroyed them, even after they're dead" (*GL*, 9). This is art, for Cass. "I thought they were beautiful," (*GL*, 8) she says, despite her friends considering them to be repulsive. But to Cass they are something else, something magical: "Slow exposure and low light made the boy's skin look like soft white paper, like newsprint before it's inked. His head was slightly upturned, his eyes half-open, glazed. You couldn't tell if he'd just woken up or if he was already dead" (*GL*, 8). This is where Cass' power is able to take shape and function freely. She captures the moment when something is "half-open," half closed, or on the brink of either sleep or death—this is living, for Cass. When speaking with Hand about Cass' fascination with death, she describes Cass in an interesting way:

> Someone refers to her as a Valkyrie, and she takes that for herself. I wanted her to be that. Cass is this Valkyrie figure, she's one of the choosers of the slain, on the battlefield—she finds the dead there, and she takes them. For her, it's transforming, thanks to her art…the whole notion of taking the dead and bringing them to Valhalla…And it did all stem from that initial scene when she has that experience in her childhood. (EH, 16)

This indeed relates to what Cass does. Her art allows her to function much in the way a Valkyrie would. Valkyries, in Norse mythology, are supernatural, female creatures, who are tasked with deciding, in many instances, which soldiers will die in battle, and which will live. The Valkyries then choose, among the slain, which to bring with them to Valhalla, the afterlife hall ruled over by Odin, where they will live as exalted heroes for all eternity.

Cass is, in a way, doing just this. Her photography and her power allow her to capture the images of these people, and to decide whether or not they will live eternally in a photograph. As well, this "afterlife," which is promised if one is chosen by the Valkyries, is portrayed as being a far more comfortable existence than the one they have departed from. Cass' estimation

of her own ability, and the fact that "she takes [the title of Valkyrie] for herself," indicates that Cass does believe she is doing something positive with her art. Cass, in fact, so enjoys the process of capturing people in the space between life and death that she comes to identify herself with this sphere of existence, this liminal space: "This is what I lived for…Not just knowing I'd seen them and taken the picture but feeling like I'd made them, like they'd never have existed without me" (*GL,* 13). Basically, Cass feels like a god whose subjects would "never have existed without" her; to take photographs is to immortalize, and to generate, but only if *she* chooses to take the picture. And as the story progresses, Cass continues to operate as if she *is* this superhuman woman and "chooser of the slain," and she begins to live recklessly and self-destructively, ultimately finding herself in danger once again.

As Cass continues to probe the depths of her power, she begins to experiment with sex. Though she has not been sexually abused in any way, it is common among rape and sexual violence survivors to experience a change in sexual behaviors and attitudes. Most victims, however, do *not* choose to experiment and explore, like Cass does. Rather, the frequency of sex usually declines, with most survivors reporting "less desire to engage in sexual activity" (F&W, 168). But Cass, like Jane and Calypso, is also something more than human, and here Hand again dismisses the rules of realism. By exploring her sexuality, Cass makes a discovery about her power:

> Sometimes it happens with sex. Once I brought a sixteen-year-old boy back to the apartment…I'm still sorry I didn't [photograph] him. He was beautiful…But I left my camera on the floor, and instead I just fucked him, more than once. Then I lay awake and watched him sleep. When he woke in the morning he looked at me, and I saw what had happened to him: his mother's death, the small apartment in Queens where he lived with his father and sister…He told me all this, but I already knew; I could see the light leaking from his eyes…suddenly I felt real panic… [I] literally pushed him out the door. The look he gave me…I could live with. What I couldn't deal with was the knowledge that

> he was so close to dead already. The only thing that made him feel alive was fucking me. (*GL*, 10-11)

After having sex with this boy, she can see "the light leaking from his eyes," and the damage radiating from him. What is interesting about this is that instead of relishing the moment, as she does when she sees this "light" through the lens of her camera, Cass reacts with "real panic." This may be because Cass is used to photographing people that are either sleeping, near death, or already dead. But when she sees the "light" coming from this boy, he is very much alive and awake. The "panic" is likely a result of her proximity to someone so "close to dead," and her having used her power without her camera to protect her. As well, the fact that the boy only found meaning in his life by having sex with *her* terrifies Cass deeply. She is still horribly afraid of judgment: "It made me feel sick, it reminded me of that great eye above the empty field" (*GL*, 5). For this boy to find a sense of worth in life by way of her is tantamount to being examined from within, something which Cass cannot even bear to consider.

Like Jane, Cass lives a reckless lifestyle for some time, eventually dropping out of school and living in squalor. Her apartment sported a "toilet [which] hung over a hole in the floor; [a] claw-foot tub was in the kitchen…a sheet of plywood over the tub and on top of that a mattress" (*GL*, 8). When she does leave school, she admits that she "didn't tell [her] father [she'd] been suspended… [and] used the checks he sent to buy film and speed, black beauties, crystal meth" (*GL*, 8). While Cass' self-destructive life with drugs, alcohol, and sex begin to take a toll on her, it also continues to place her in the liminal space in which she thrives, in that space where she is able to grab "at that frayed seam and just [yank] to see what [is] behind it; to see what [is] left when everything [is] torn away" (*GL*, 13-14). And Cass does just this, continuously pushing her limits as she embraces the "threshold" between life and death. A prime example of this is her success in her young age with a book called *Dead Girls*, which was a "series of pictures, black-

and-white photographs of [her] dressed and posed like women in famous paintings…[her] as Ophelia…floating in a tenement bathtub filled with black-streaked water" (*GL*, 11). Cass' portrayal of these famous dead women is symbolically relevant, in that is demonstrates how Cass seems to go beyond the veil, where "everything is torn away." Cass *enjoys* this exploration of death; she stages self-portraits of the dead, and she lives in this space, in this "in between," where life and death meet. The caption beneath the central image in her collection *Dead Girls* wonderfully captures the spirit of Cass' art: "Death: I am the one who will make a serious woman of you; come, let us embrace" (*GL*, 11). Like the Valkyrie she identifies herself with, Cass does indeed embrace death, and in no small way. With a young life dominated by loss, violence, and trauma, it is no wonder that Cass' ability and power develop in exactly this direction, in fitting with her internal, psychological state of being.

After *Dead Girls*, Cass enjoys some minor celebrity success. Her book is selling well, and, in a wonderful example of the nexus of fantasy and reality, Cass "even had a fleeting appearance on *The Merv Griffin Show*" (*GL*, 17). But the damage caused by her wild life thus far, as well as the inner-suffering that she surely feels from the long-neglected events of her upbringing, are causing her to spiral downward into a place where she can no longer manage the insanity with which she is surrounding herself:

> I was fucking up big time. I showed up at interviews drunk. I insulted people. I came on to the women hired to talk to me, which pissed them off, and pissed off the guys too. A reporter referred to me as a lesbian photographer, and I reamed him out about it when I saw him a few nights later. I wasn't a lesbian; I wasn't straight. When it comes to relationships, I'm an equal opportunity destroyer. (*GL*, 17)

Cass is losing control of herself here, clearly, and is digging herself a hole that she may not be able to escape from. She is now beginning to feel the weight of her violent and traumatic past, so much so that it seems to be obscuring her connection to her power. It is interesting that Cass,

in regard to her *own* consumption, seems to also live in a liminal space. The drinking, drugs, sex, and partying all put her closer to the scene and space in which she, and her art, thrives, but it *also* puts a massive strain on her physiological and psychological state of being. This duality, this inversion, seems to be the problem for her. How can Cass, whose gift depends on embracing the "threshold," remain grounded? At this point in her life, the answer is: she cannot.

As this downward spiral continues, Cass becomes more and more removed from her power. It is fitting, then, that what drives her furthest from her ability is the fact that she succumbs to the addictive, human temptations of drinking and drugs. Cass is descending into a state in which *she* will be furthered damaged, as opposed to capturing the damage in *others*. It appropriately follows, then, that Cass, because of her lifestyle, finds herself in a very bad situation. She is still living in the same apartment, has been working at the Strand Bookstore, and continuously goes out at night to party. It is in this setting that the events of her twenty-third birthday transpire:

> I was down on the Bowery, leaving CBGB's, late, as usual. I was drunk, as usual. I was barefoot—I'd been dancing and left my shoes inside, even though it was late October and the streets were cold. I was alone, until a car pulled up alongside a broken street lamp. Someone was repeating my name, a low, insistent voice. Piecing it together later, I think he must have said "Miss, miss." I heard *Cass. Cass.* I stopped and turned. The car door was already open. There was a knife. It happened fast. (*GL*, 18)

This scene parallels Cass' earlier traumatic experiences, where as a child she used to hear someone calling her name: "*Cass. Cass. Cass*." Immediately following Cass' hearing of her name, earlier in her life, her mother was killed. In this similar scene, Hand hints, by way of the spectral uttering of Cass' name, that something terrible is about to befall her. And it indeed does, in much the same way that Jane, and even Hand herself, were attacked:

> I don't remember much. Or no, I remember a lot, but it's all scattered, like those discarded photos you find strewn outside an instant-photo booth. This is what I see: a burned out vacant lot. Me on my knees. A cut on my bare heel where I stepped on broken glass. Blood above my pubis. Blood and semen on my thigh. Me running across chewed up asphalt. A man's head protruding from a car window. Me screaming in the middle of the street. A police car. I see these things, but I don't really remember them. I remember floating above the vacant lot and looking down on two shadows, one moving, the other still. I remember a car. There was a knife. (*GL*, 18-19)

This entire description, like Cass' personal recollection of the event, is full of sentence fragments and incomplete thoughts. This is exactly the way in which rape victims recall their attack, and in many instances small pieces and images dominate the memory, as opposed to a start-to-finish account of the event. As well, Cass undergoes a psychological break, just as Jane did, in which she is "floating above the vacant lot and looking down on two shadows, one moving, the other still." This fragmentation is again dissociation, or "the separation of a group of mental processes or ideas from the rest of the personality, so that they lead an independent existence, as in cases of multiple personality" ("Dissociation"). For Cass, it is not quite as literal as having multiple personalities, but rather a more metaphorical, magical separation from her power. Additionally, Cass will come to experience regret due to this incident, which will further disconnect her from her ability. "They asked me, did I fight? I didn't fight. I couldn't describe him, or the car. My mind had been wiped clean" (*GL*, 19), she says, after the incident. Cass is overwhelmed by this fact, by the knowledge that she did nothing to resist, and that she allowed this to befall her. Shame and regret, "reactions in which the survivors blame their own actions for the rape" (F&W, 167), are feelings that plague many rape victims, and it is only through hard work and counseling that they are able to overcome this. But Cass instead claims that it just "happened; I'm not in denial. I'm not ashamed" (*GL*, 19), and she is plainly lying. She firmly believes that she could have done something, and she blames herself for not having fought back:

> The drunk young woman, the leather miniskirt, tight T-shirt, no bra, no shoes. That street, four A.M., late October. A bisexual punk who took pictures of dead boys. I didn't fight. My whole life since then, the only thing that matters to me is those three words. I didn't fight. You'll wonder what it's like to live with this. I'll tell you. It's like having a razor blade clamped between your teeth: you move your mouth too much, your tongue, you smile or talk or kiss someone, you cut yourself open. You could drown if you swallowed that much blood. You could fucking bleed to death. (*GL*, 19)

This regret and shame can be crippling, and it appears that it is the case for Cass. The overwhelming trauma of this incident results in a divide in her, which leads, much like it did with Calypso, to a separation from her power. Cass certainly ruminates upon this event, much like Calypso does with Odysseus, and even with Philip. And let it be remembered that Calypso lost her power because she allowed Philip to "violate" her nature, in a way, and turn her into a mortal. In much the same way Cass is also violated, and forcefully stripped of her nature, because she lost control of herself.

In the wake of the rape Cass falls apart, and simply goes "through the motions of behaving like a normal person" (*GL*, 20). This is common among rape victims, who often resume life activities, "but they are undertaken superficially or mechanically" (F&W, 167). Similar to Jane's urge to relocate after her rape, Cass experiences a desire to disconnect from the world. However, unlike Jane, who attempts to get at least *some* closure by reflecting on the events and implications of her rape, Cass absolutely refuses to mention anything of the sort. In fact, she so completely dismisses and suppresses the event that she simply "shut down after that…[and] stopped making even cursory efforts at emotional connection" (GL, 20). As with all of the previous traumas in her life, Cass' defense mechanism is repression, and it leaves her so damaged that she can barely take worthwhile photographs anymore. Even the way in which Hand describes the loss of Cass' ability, through the lens of photography and light, reflects the almost tangible shadow hanging over Cass:

> That dead light that comes in late afternoon in winter, that light that makes everything look like it was cut from black ice—I could feel that light on me in the middle of summer; in the middle of the night…it got so I had to drink three shots of bourbon just to get the nerve to pick up my camera. (GL, 24)

This change in Cass, yet another transformation, is a direct consequence of the trauma of the rape. It seems that instead of the threshold, which she can no longer operate upon due to the loss of her power, Cass is now entrenched in the world of death, which is full of "dead light." She seems to feel a shadow over her, and cannot even take photos without getting drunk. The act of rape itself, which involves violation and penetration, implies a sense of being examined, in way, in that the attacker gets *inside* of Cass, both physically and emotionally. She is, of course, terribly afraid of being judged, and because she no longer has her camera and her power to hide behind, Cass is exposed to the world, raw and in the open for anyone to see and criticize. The opening line of the novel, "There's always a moment where everything changes" (*GL*, 3), fits quite well with where we find Cass after her rape. Her power, when she was able to access it, was concerned directly with liminality, the veil, or that in-between space where everything changes. But because of this trauma Cass no longer *is* the camera, as she was before, and is no longer able to deflect, by way of photography and her ability, the judgment she so fears and avoids. It is somewhat ironic that Cass' power is lost because of her self-destructive lifestyle and her drinking; Like Calypso, who lost her ability because she fell in love and abandoned her nature, Cass' power seems to want to escape from her, because of how she is living. In comparison to Jane, however, it is interesting to note that while Jane's transforms *after* the rape, Cass' powers develop from an earlier trauma in childhood; it is the rape which *disconnects* Cass from her power, rather than facilitate its advancement. But Cass' loss of her ability is a direct result of her *own* lifestyle, and throughout the rest of the novel she attempts to reconnect with this power, as well as to deal with the events of her brutal past.

Conclusion

In *Generation Loss*, as well as in "Calypso in Berlin" and "Cleopatra Brimstone," violence and trauma bring about *massive* emotional and physical transformations upon the characters within the stories. The metamorphoses themselves are often fantastical, but in many instances the basis for these scenes come directly from Hand's own traumatic past. As such, these characters come to life *through* Hand's experience. By her own account, she "mimed those emotional strata in [her] own life" (EH, 8). In her representation of these events Hand displays the real, ugly nature of violence, yet she also remains compassionate in the face of unflinching brutality; in order to better deliver to her reader a genuine account, she does not hesitate to represent violence and trauma as the graphic, sensitive, and transformative forces that they certainly are. Violence *will* always have a sensational aspect to it, which cannot be helped. But to write about the actual violence *itself* in a detached way does something to temper the sensational effect it has on the reader.

Hand does just this, and focuses her attention upon the sentimental, the psychological, and the transformative development of her *characters*, rather than the sensational properties of violence itself. In fact, she puts so much of an emphasis on these particular facets of her characters that, despite their willingness to either exact revenge, kill, or embrace death, the reader is always able to recognize what it was that led them there. In addition to this, while the violence is atrocious and explicit, it is not beyond the realm of human capability and comprehension. With Jane, for example, the reader understands the character's motives, identifies a similar capability for revenge within themselves, and thus the groundwork for a catharsis is laid. While this was probably not explicitly intentional on the part of the Hand, it is

understandable to see how writing about violence and trauma in such a way can cause catharsis to occur.

But the semi-autobiographical nature of Hand's work goes a step further. At the onset, writing about personal trauma is often the result of an authorial need to understand. Like Jane, Hand's rape caused a dissociation to occur in her: "one part of me was on the ground, this catholic autopilot sort of praying, part of me just blindly submitted, and another part of me was up in the air, floating, looking down, and seeing everything that was happening" (EH, 3). This fragmentation *warped* her perception of the world, just as it did with both Jane and Cass, and resulted in a transformation:

> I can say that [violence] *certainly* does warp the victim. After I was raped, for a couple of years I walked around with this, just, utter rage…and it wasn't there all the time. But I remember that during those times when I lived near the place where I was attacked, to get to the subway, I had to go right by the site. I had no choice but to walk this way; it was either this, or walk through a much worse part of town. I can remember wearing these cowboy boots with the steel-toes, and I would get myself so worked up into such a fury, a barely suppressed rage, that if anyone looked at me sideways… I was a walking bomb. (EH, 6-7)

From the girl who had never seen beyond the "veil," to the woman with steel-toed boots and an internal *fury* that dared the world to step in her way, Hand quickly became a different person as a result of her trauma. And Hand admits that she, at first, did not reconcile these feelings: "it had kind of been the elephant in the living room, that I was living with, and not talking about…I had never dealt with it head on, until 'Cleopatra Brimstone'" (EH, 13-4).

For Hand, and for all three of her female protagonists, but most especially Cass, who Hand considers to be her "shadow self…that other person I could have become, but did not" (EH, 7), it is *art* that provides the link to reestablishing a "connection" with her power. Since Hand

possesses no supernatural ability (that I know of), the goal is not to reconnect with her power, but to find a sense of normality, or perhaps the capacity to accept life as a person who is no longer disillusioned to the harshness of the world. Unlike her characters, who all violently went "off the rails" (EH, 7), Hand did not turn to revenge, but rather chose to approach her trauma in her writing. Convention, however, states that this can't be done with fantasy, and that it is something more appropriate for memoir. But unlike memoir, with fantasy Hand is able to go *beyond* the events and circumstances of her life, and with a combination of experience and imagination she is able to explore the different paths she *could* have taken, but did not. And while this permits Jane and Calypso to live and act beyond Hand's personal experience, and to kill people, it also illustrates just how deep Hand's trauma actually went, in that it surfaces and is extremely relevant even in fantasy fiction, which at its core implies a greater distance from reality. Hand, however, is *not* simply living vicariously through her characters, it is nothing so base and banal. Rather, Hand is breaking the old rules, and making fantasy work for her, in complex psychological ways. Despite the distance from reality inherent in fantasy, it provides a way for Hand to explore fundamental autobiographical trials in her life, and is, perhaps, an even more effective method of dealing with it than normal therapy. In fact, because of the semi-autobiographical element of her stories, it can be argued that Hand *herself* is undergoing a catharsis.

It has been established that catharsis need not only apply to tragedy, but can in fact function in fantasy fiction, as well as many other mediums. Again, a few conditions must be met in order for this to occur. A work must first be mimetic, and involve certain tragic elements and emotions, like grief, fear, pity, or compassion. This enables the reader to form a bond with the character, and thus understand what has led the character to that point. The character most often

then commits a terrible act, such as take revenge or murder someone, which will "violently excite" the reader, and stimulate in them the same ethically questionable feeling. Lastly, the character must experience a failure, which prompts the reader to either purge or clarify these negative urges because they have seen the consequences of following a similar path. This, of course, customarily applies to the audience, or the reader.

But can the author also experience catharsis, if the majority of the tragic content stems from their life experience? To answer this question, let us examine where exactly Hand (not just as author, but also as the model for both her characters and their initial traumas) becomes a spectator, in a way, of these tragic events, and ceases to be the *source* of the tragic material. This happens, as could be expected, in the moment that her characters decide to use violence as a tool to cope with their transformations. Hand plainly states that she "couldn't actually *do* what Jane did" (EH, 6). Before this point, Hand fundamentally *is* her characters, and therefore certainly feels pity, grief, fear, and terror, and has a bond with them. But when her characters turn to violence, they develop inclinations which are beyond what Hand herself is capable of. In this light, she is a spectator, and not simply of a "revenge fantasy." Of course Hand, because she used her imagination in the creation of these stories, likely found some sensational excitement in writing female characters who seek revenge. Violence, as mentioned will always be sensational. But because it is sensational *and* sentimental in her stories, and thus in her mind, Hand, like the audience, is able to understand what led the character to that point. She also witnesses the failure of the protagonist, a failure which could have been her own, had she elected violence as her means for coping with trauma. As an alternative to this fate, Hand chose to write about her traumas: "I did want to look at Jane, who could be the kind of person who could do that and not feel terrible guilt about it… I wanted to put myself in that person's head. Because Jane and

Calypso have absolutely no remorse whatsoever, though Calypso, at least, can get away with a lack of remorse; because she's a nymph, she has an excuse" (EH, 6). As she mentioned, Hand could not do what Jane did, but the fact that she has written it demonstrates that she is at least capable of imagining the idea. And just as the audience ultimately understands how the characters' choices led them to their own ends, Hand is able to see what would have become of having "absolutely no remorse," and deciding to harbor a lust for revenge, punishment, and even murder.

Instead, Hand took to literature, the decidedly smarter *and* safer route, and has since been gracing us with beautiful, unfathomable, and profound stories which continue to speak to the child, the artist, and the dreamer in all of us. Rather than repress her traumas, Hand has chosen to face them in literature, "and [she] didn't even have to turn any men into insects! 'No men were turned into insects in the writing of this book.' Disclaimer" (EH, 15).

An Interview with Elizabeth Hand

February 24, 2012 (London – New York)

Mark Kaufmann: My exploration, initially, was about how violence and trauma are agents of change and transformation in contemporary fantastic fiction. I began with "Cleopatra Brimstone" simply because Jane is, essentially, the poster-child for this type of examination; As well, I'm examining how fiction, namely fantastic fiction, can function on the same level as, say, memoir, insofar as it is therapeutic, or cathartic. And lastly, I'm investigating how creating semi-autobiographical fiction, in which an author shares a personal violent or traumatic experience, can benefit both author and reader. What portions of your stories are autobiographical, and how much of the fiction were you compelled to write, regarding this story in particular? What shocks me is that you have these powerful female characters, who are usually violated in some way. The result, of course, is that they respond in kind, and beyond. Where does this all come from, in relation to your life experience?

Elizabeth Hand: In 1979, just a couple of weeks before my 22nd birthday, I was in D.C., and I was abducted and raped. It was one of those things that… it was a different time, so the way it was dealt with by police was different. There wasn't the whole therapeutic structure set up, like there is now for rape victims; although I was not treated badly by the police, not at all. Afterwards, when I went home, my parents insisted, against my will, that I go and see a counselor, which I did for a little while. But I didn't feel it was a useful experience…not bad, but not useful. It wasn't something I really talked about, it was just kind of something that happened. Looking at it now, I would say that I was in denial, and trying to push it away. It was

kind of superseded by the fact that when I went to the E.R., immediately afterwards, the doctor examining me told me that I had some cysts that were undetected before. I ended up having to undergo surgery shortly afterwards, and at the time I didn't know whether it was cancer, or if I was going to die, or anything like that. But the whole thing was just too much to take in, for someone who was twenty-one years old. I didn't block it out, in the sense of forgetting about it, but I just kind of put a wall up. And in a lot of ways, that was worse and more frightening than the rape, which was horrible…but when it was over, it was over. It was an awful experience, and I thought I was going to be killed. But then this other thing came down, and I had to live with that for however many weeks, before I underwent the surgery, and I thought: "wow, maybe I am going to die after all." I was a kid. I didn't know it from anything. I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't want to talk about it to my parents or my boyfriend. I just wanted to put it behind me. So later, when I started writing, and getting published, I had not really dealt with anything head on. Although my early books, like *Winterlong*, had a first person narrative…and actually, the characters in my early books and stories were very often traumatized women, as well, in one form or another. *Waking Moon*, which was a novel that had a lot of autobiographical elements, though it didn't deal with *this* experience, did have a scene in it where the protagonist narrator has the experience of feeling as though the veil has been ripped away, and she's seeing the world we live in as a terrible, horrible place. She just has this experience of the abyss, which I did experience when I was raped. I had this feeling that I had divided into three: that one part of me was on the ground, this catholic autopilot sort of praying, part of me just blindly submitted, and another part of me was up in the air, floating, looking down, and seeing everything that was happening. And then there was this sensation that all of a sudden, for the first time, I felt alive. This was life: it was the horror, and the fable that is really, actually, there. So in *Waking Moon*,

there's this scene where she talks about this in a more existential sense, and I really kind of danced around this experience in a story, but it wasn't until I wrote "Cleopatra Brimstone" that I really faced it dead on. And I had a title in mind for some time. I was one of those kids, like Jane, who loved animals, and entomology, and lepidoptery, and I still do. I have all these geeky books, and I was looking in a book about bugs, when I came across this butterfly species called Cleopatra Brimstone, and I said "Oh, my god! This is a great name! I'm going to use that in a story someday." And in 2000, maybe, I was supposed to make a trip to London, and I used to have panic attacks. I had a very bad panic attack while I was on my way, driving to the airport to make the trip to come here. It was so bad that I had to go back home, and I did not fly to London. And it was a trip I had planned for a long time, to do research, etc…and I was obviously very upset and angry with myself that I couldn't go over. I told myself I was mad at this bad experience, of not going to London, so I sat down and I started writing this story, set in Camden Town, somewhere where I've spent a lot of time. Basically, I told myself I would recreate this part of London in the story, so I would feel like I was there. And I'm not even sure that I really had it in my mind that this was the story I was going to write, about this girl being raped; in many ways, her experience mirrored mine…not in every way, but in certain ways it did. Certainly the part of the city, of Washington D.C., where it happened in the story, was the part of D.C where I lived at the time. So I kind of forced myself to revisit that, and then the character of Jane was somebody, who, with much more of her own agency, was able to enact vengeance, not upon the man who raped her, but upon men in general; she turns into a predator. And I wanted it to be a very ambivalent story, in that she's no better than he is, she's become somebody who is also doing terrible things, actually doing worse things than her assailant, because he didn't in fact kill her, and she turns around and becomes a serial killer. That is deliberate. I wanted to have

that in the story because I am not that like that, personally. I am not somebody who would react that way to a violent act. But I wanted to think about it and to explore it, and I wanted readers to be made uncomfortable by it. I didn't want it to be read as a revenge fantasy. A more "feel good route," per say, would be somebody taking their vengeance upon the actual perpetrator of a crime, either killing them, or bringing them to justice, and then that's the end, and you walk away. That's not what Jane does. What she does, really, is a terrible thing. And she does it repeatedly. At the end, she's in this ongoing relationship with David, and the roles, ultimately, are reversed; she becomes the hunted, the prey.

Kaufmann: One thing that I found interesting was that despite the violent acts that Jane is committing, I did sympathize with her a little. Not to the point of her being a role model, but I *understand* her, and I think that's one element that was strangely compelling. I was riveted by these acts of violence, and I almost felt complicit. I understood why she was doing it.

Hand: I do think that Jane is sympathetic, and I want her to be sympathetic. She does not see herself as being a villain. I think villains, for the most part, don't usually see themselves as villains. Sometimes you do, like with a Hannibal Lector, who has that kind of self-awareness and irony. They're able to look at their actions and see them, and recognize them for being transgressive. I don't think Jane is doing that, I don't think she felt that she was being transgressive; I think she felt that she was within her rights, to do what she was doing. But I very much did want the reader to feel complicit in the crimes, because that's where I think it gets

really interesting, and becomes a literary experience. Reading Lolita, here you have this completely terrible, heinous, character, who is this pedophile, and he kills someone, marries a woman so that he can assault her child, and yet we go along with him for the entire ride! I'm sure some people say "I can't read this," and throw it across the room, but most people don't do that. Most people read it, and that's the genius and brilliance of Nabokov; what I was always so impressed with was, just…how did he do that? That is a real, almost mind control trick.

I have this recurring nightmare, triggered by reading Donna Tartt's book *The Secret History*. The narrator is this young man, a college student, who ends up being involved in a murder, where they kill someone, late at night. It's in the wintertime and they bury the body in the snow, but when the melt comes, the body resurfaces. And for me the most terrible thing about it—and what I dream about—was to read this first person narrative, to be in the head of someone who has committed this horrible act, and even though they hadn't been caught at it, to have the idea of living your life with that knowledge…that is more horrific than anything. It still is terrible to think about, and I still have nightmares about having committed a murder, and I haven't been caught. But now I have to live the rest of my life with that knowledge. So I couldn't actually *do* what Jane did. Though I did want to look at Jane, who could be the kind of person who could do that and not feel terrible guilt about it… I wanted to put myself in that person's head. Because Jane and Calypso have absolutely no remorse whatsoever, though Calypso, at least, can get away with a lack of remorse; because she's a nymph, she has an excuse.

Kaufmann: Something I've been looking at is "violation." For example, in the initial account of the violation of Calypso by the gods, which caused her initial pain and grief at losing Odysseus and left her traumatized, you write of her two sons, whom she has to literally hold back from drowning in their chase to follow their father. This was a violation. Jane was raped, as well, which is both a physical and literal violation. How does violation come into play, and on what levels? Emotional? Psychological? Personal purity and sanctity? How do you feel violation "warps" the psyche of a victim?

Hand: I can say that it *certainly* does warp the victim. After I was raped, for a couple of years I walked around with this, just, *utter* rage…and it wasn't there all the time. But I remember that during those times when I lived near the place where I was attacked, to get to the subway, I had to go *right* by the site. I had no choice but to walk this way; it was either this, or walk through a much worse part of town. I can remember wearing these cowboy boots with the steel toes, and I would get myself so worked up into such a *fury*, a barely suppressed rage, that if anyone looked at me sideways… I was a walking bomb. It was a dark, spooky place, and I just remember vividly doing that, night, after night, after night, and living with, what I look at now, as a very, very unhealthy amount of…fury. And I was sort of waiting for somebody to say something, so I could answer with "you talking to me?" [laughs] I wasn't looking for fights or anything, but I was ready. And I stayed ready for a really long time. To some extent now I still feel ready. When I'm here in London, if I'm ever out at night alone, or even if I'm with someone, and I feel threatened, I can just feel those hackles rise…like a pit bull, or a Rottweiler. And I dealt with that in *Generation Loss*, and *Available Dark*; the protagonist there, Cass, is me, and the appearance I had, only she goes off the rails, and I did not. With that book I very consciously said "she is my

shadow self," this is me for an entire novel length, like Jane was for a novella length story. This is that other person I could have become, but did not. I don't think there are a lot of women…if every woman who was victimized by either her husband or boyfriend… if every one of them became a serial killer, there wouldn't be a lot of men left. There are so many women who have suffered from some sort of violation, or abuse. But that action, which can be translated, or transmuted, is very ancient… it's one of the reasons why I've always been drawn to the Greek myths. Look at Medea, who is the archetype for this. She's a woman who falls in love, and betrays her family and her country to go off with him. And he leaves her for a younger, richer, woman. So she kills her children, and she gets away with it. She calls to Apollo, I think, and he sends down a chariot pulled by dragons, and she jumps in… "so long sucker!" [laughs] And she's not punished for it, which is extraordinary! I think these stories that are built on a vision of a woman who is violated, and then takes revenge… it's very ancient. But in literature, and in the real world, it's something that has been re-enacted millions and millions of times.

Kaufmann: Through the lens of transformation, and how violence and trauma impacted these changes in these women, I find myself comparing these acts of violence to real world scenarios, but they're beyond the real world. How do you fit in to both the lives of these characters, and the transformations which they ultimately undergo? How much of you went into this, and, on a deeper level, how much did you get back?

Hand: These characters are very much me. I was very conscious of writing them, and while they may not have had my psychology, or my entire background…well, Cass Neary does. Also, Jane certainly has the geeky girl persona, who is into entomology, and that's me. Calypso, too, is like me. But I definitely mimed those emotional strata in my own life. I very consciously took that material and made use of it, and wanted to not just replicate it, but I wanted to be able to draw on that, and also to write about it in a kind of detached way. I try to write in an elegant style, most of the time, but I feel that when you're writing horror—and I don't mean "gross out" horror—and you want to elicit a certain response from the reader, of being horrified, in an emotional sense, not just in the sense of being grotesquely offended by seeing something disgusting, you have to do that. I had this sense, that this veil had been ripped away in the world, and I was seeing something terrible there, that I had not been aware of. Or maybe I had been aware that it was there, but I didn't believe it was real. And all of a sudden I saw that it *was* real. People undergo these experiences all the time. Soldiers in combat, for example, experience this. This is what goes on in the world. People experience this in war time, on the front, and everywhere else in the world. I have this fairly narrow bandwidth that I can broadcast from, which is my own experience, and I don't feel that I can presume to attempt to do something different with that, because I don't have that experience to draw on. I don't have the experience of a child in the Congo, or someone in Bosnia, or a soldier in Iraq. I don't have that. But I think that sense of that station, and horror, *that*, I can share. I have a very different experience. I wouldn't compare myself with someone who's been living with violence with years, or months. But I can share what I've been through.

Kaufmann: The way you introduced the rape in "Cleopatra Brimstone" was stunning, and without warning. You were talking about her, and entomology, and then *boom*, the rape happens. The immediacy of it was startling because it was so plainly put, and there was no warning whatsoever.

Hand: In that way, I guess, I'm kind of a minimalist. Before that I had written a number of frightening supernatural stories, or horror stories, spooky stories, which were frightening, but they depended very much upon a buildup of sensual imagery, atmosphere, and all of these things, almost like a pornography of terror, or the erotica of terror. And I'm not saying that in a derogatory way, because I will still do that, and write in that way. It's a kind of seduction, of presenting violence, in a story. But I didn't want to do that with "Cleopatra Brimstone" or "Calypso in Berlin," because I did not want there to appear to be anything sensual, or seductive about it. I wanted it to have something in the way of how rape, or violation, or violence, feels: where it's brutal, but there's also a certain detachment to it. It's hard when you're trying to deal with violence, in a movie, say, because I don't have much of a stomach for watching violence. And it's hard to do it in writing, because I think there is *certainly* a moral argument to be careful of. Especially in this country, with all the issues we have with violence. I did not want there to be anything pretty about it, in those stories. Even narratively, I didn't want it to be pretty. And this isn't something that I've thought of consciously until now, but I think that in *Generation Loss*, the scene where Cass talks about her rape, also comes out of left field. I think it makes it more powerful, but also for me, as a writer, I could write about it without feeling that I was condoning it, or glorifying it, or sensualizing it, or prettify it any way at all. It's ugly, it's brutal,

and I think you want to write about it in such a way that you also want to dispatch with it very quickly, so you can get back to a story which people are going to want to read.

Kaufmann: Do you feel that an author has a responsibility to honestly represent the issues they're writing about, like violence and trauma, as they relate to a larger societal concern? Can you speak to the current societal concern with violence? It has become a kinder box, at the moment. What sort of responsibility do honest authors have to honestly portray this, and in what light, in what way? Where is the line?

Hand: I think it's a difficult issue to confront head on. On the one hand, I could say that I get a free pass to write about violence, however I want to. As if there's this notion that because I was raped I can write about all kinds of violence, against men, and horrible things happening to men, until the cows come home. I'm not saying that I believe that, but that is how many people operate. People who undergo experiences like this…there are so many individual traumas that so many people undergo… people, like Diane Arbus, who has toed the line, when she took pictures of the people that she called "freaks," who had various disabilities. But she would say "the freaks are the aristocrats of the world, because they are living with this." I think that there could be a really terrible tendency there…and I think we do see this, in our culture, especially with non-fiction writing, where there becomes this preciousness involved with writing about trauma. This tendency to feel that the people who experience some kind of trauma, and who are writing about it, that they are the aristocrats; that they experienced this terrible thing, and they've

lived to tell the tale. And this is not to denigrate, in any way, people who have experienced horrible things, or to say that they don't have the right, or should not write about those things. But I do think that it can be a kind of morally perilous ground to cover. I believe that people maybe don't think about that enough, when they're writing about it, or when they're reading it, or looking at it critically. And I think that the terrible, horrible, things that happened at Newtown finally allowed this out of the closet. For the first time, people are seriously thinking about violence as entertainment in our culture, and the way it's dealt with, not just as entertainment in films and novels, but in the way it's entertainment in mass media, like the news, television, newspapers. And I think that we're finally starting to have that discussion. Even with beautifully written books that are memoirs by people who have undergone terrible experiences, I think there is this anesthetizing effect that can come from art, which can immunize us against the realities of violence, of rape, or any kind of trauma. That's where I feel it can be a kind of dicey moral ground, to write about these things, because at what point are you cashing in on narratizing your own experience, and at what point are you turning it into another form of entertainment? Which is not what I meant to do, or want to do at all, but I am conscious of the fact that I could be accused of that, and maybe should be accused of that. Am I guilty of that? I don't know, but I think about it a lot.

Kaufmann: Are you getting anything back from writing in this way? Like memoir, it seems that there is some sort of therapeutic or cathartic value in writing about what happened to you. I, personally, believe that you're getting something out of this as well, and that is noble. You're

not just selling this for the sake of entertainment. You're using it also, to a personal end, and perhaps other people can as well, because it's an honest portrayal of what happens.

Hand: I don't know that I feel it's noble [laughs]. To me it has always felt more…cathartic, than therapeutic… for me it has always felt like that, like a catharsis. I don't really read "Cleopatra Brimstone" aloud that often, but I've read from *Generation Loss* quite a lot. I have a podcast that I did with the opening chapters of that book, when it first came out, and I've read from it up to, and usually end with, the scene where Cass is raped; which is, in a lot of ways, similar to the scene in "Cleopatra Brimstone," and it's always very difficult to read. It never gets any easier for me to read it out loud. But I *read* it, and I can feel the physical toll that it takes on me. And I'm a good reader, and I do it well, but it comes out, and it has a shocking effect on the audience, when I read it honestly. There is a catharsis there, but it doesn't feel therapeutic in the sense of feeling necessarily "better" afterwards. It feels more like what I was describing earlier, like walking down a street in the dark, and getting that feeling of fury again…

Kaufmann: Has putting it down on paper, reading it aloud, and sharing it with the world been of benefit to you? I imagine that to revisit it, in itself, could perhaps be of help. Does the fury abate more quickly these days?

Hand: [Laughs] That's a great question! And it does make a difference. It definitely made a difference in me. It made a difference with "Cleopatra Brimstone," and even things that I wrote after that, like "Calypso in Berlin," which did not necessarily deal with that experience outright. But I think that up until then it had kind of been the elephant in the living room, that I was living with, and not talking about it. It's not that I wasn't aware of it, that I had all these powerful women in my work, but I had never dealt with it head on, until "Cleopatra Brimstone." And after that, it became easier, in a lot of ways, to integrate it. For many years I had these terrors, in addition to panic attacks. I had what we would now call PTSD; I would have night-terrors and parasomnias for decades. A parasomnia is where you are asleep, but you stand up and you move around and you act out things even though you are asleep. I would, sometimes, have very violent episodes of parasomnia. Once, when I woke up, I had punched my hand through a window. It was a screen window, so it wasn't glass, but I did punch a hole in the window, and I scared the shit out of my boyfriend [laughs]. I thought there was a fire outside the room, and someone was trying to get in. As well, for years I would wake up and think there was somebody standing over my bed. Once, in DC, I called the police, because I was so convinced someone was there. And about ten or twelve years ago, in Maine, I had probably the most severe parasomnia. I woke up and I thought that there was somebody there, it's always the same thing, and I thought my assailant is in the room with me. It's like Cass, in *Generation Loss,* and also to some degree, like Jane, who adopts her attacker's phrase "try to get away," possibly because she didn't actually try to fight to get away from *her* attacker. And that was one of things that I have carried with me through all those decades—I didn't fight. Although at that time, that was the sort of received wisdom; if somebody attempted to rape you, you didn't fight back, because that's how you would end up being killed. So during this parasomnia, I woke up, and I thought

my assailant was in the room with me, and I went across the room to the window, turned the light on, and I ripped the wooden curtain rod off the wall, and I held it, and turned around to fight the assailant…and then of course, stopped. I was standing in my bedroom in the middle of the night, shouting at the top of my lungs, and naked, holding this big, heavy curtain rod that I had torn from the wall…and there was nobody there. But I kept that, and I put that into *Generation Loss,* with Cass and her boathook. And, now, I don't have those parasomnias anymore. Knock wood. So I think there was a link there, a link between having this sleep walking event, in which I was trying to fight back, and then thinking "alright, I'm going use this," and then putting that into the book. I think I did exorcise something with that, and it was a follow-up from "Cleopatra Brimstone," because I see those being very much alike. So I *do* think it's therapeutic, or cathartic, or however you want to label it. And it helps. Maybe it's something that you can write about, and then maybe some other writer, someday, will read it and take something away from it, even comfort, maybe. I don't know if there are any insights there. Well, for me there are, I'm sure, but it happened a really long time ago, and I think having been able to make use of it has helped, perversely. Strangely enough, and I think about this all the time, the stories that I've become known for, are, probably, "Cleopatra Brimstone," and the Cass Neary books, and those are the books that deal, with the most immediacy, with *my* life. I was able to take that, when I was mature enough, and had enough distance, and make insight into it to make use of it, and it actually worked in my favor [laughs]. And I didn't even have to turn any men into insects! "No men were turned into insects in the writing of this book." Disclaimer.

Kaufmann: Is the vision that Cass has, in the beginning of *Generation Loss*, a Dionysian vision? How does that relate to you?

Hand: Oh yeah! Definitely. You're one of the few people who have caught on to that. That was something that I put there on purpose, and I thought "people might miss it"…but she has that vision, early in the book, the same kind of vision as the boy in the tree, which I've written about. I put that there deliberately because I wanted there to be a supernatural, or numinous, or otherworldly aspect to Cass herself. And you don't *need* to be aware of that when you read the books, but she's literally assessing damage, because she herself *is* so damaged. That's real, that's a genuine sixth sense that she has. In *Generation Loss*, Denny says to her: "you and me, we carry the dead on our backs." And then in *Available Dark,* someone refers to her as a Valkyrie, and she takes that for herself. I wanted her to be that. Cass is this Valkyrie figure, she's one of the choosers of the slain, on the battlefield. She finds the dead there, and she takes them. For her, it's transforming, thanks to her art, or her photography…or ideally it would be, if she was still taking photographs. But the whole notion of taking the dead and bringing them to Valhalla, that's something that I was deliberately playing with, in that book. And it did all stem from that initial scene when she has that experience in her childhood.

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