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# Matters

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PAMELA SUE ANDERSON



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# Editorial

It is a pleasure to launch a special themed issue of *Text Matters*, dedicated primarily to “Re-visioning Ricoeur and Kristeva.” Apart from being a contribution to Ricoeur and Kristeva studies, to be introduced in detail below, the issue will, traditionally, include materials unrelated to the main theme. Opening *Text Matters* no. 4 is the interview with Mieke Bal, a special guest of the journal, an internationally acclaimed and widely known critic in visual studies, and a visual artist herself. Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker’s video installation *Madame B* was premiered in Łódź from December 2013 till February 2014.

In writing on texts by, about, and after, Julia Kristeva and Paul Ricoeur the contributors to this special themed issue of *Text Matters* have played parts in a process of “re-visioning.” The term, “re-vision” with a hyphen, has a technical meaning which I have elsewhere appropriated from Adrienne Rich’s “When We Dead Awaken: Writings as Re-vision.”<sup>1</sup> Here re-vision is “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.”<sup>2</sup> What is significant in this themed section of *Text Matters* no. 4 is the process of entering a text “with fresh eyes” and “from a new critical direction”: this is how “text matters” for those of us reading “text” in the process of “re-visioning Ricoeur and Kristeva.” Although each contribution on Ricoeur and/or Kristeva to follow is written independently, it is important to notice the threads, making up the themes of this section. Themes of violence, loss, blood, separation and horror are accompanied

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Sue Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), ix–xiii, 1–4, 25–27; and see the next footnote.

<sup>2</sup> Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writings as Re-vision.” *College English*, 34.1, *Women Writing and Teaching* (Oct. 1972): 18.

by themes of vision, life, birth, recognition, imagination and transformation. Each essay has its uniqueness and speaks to different, critical textual and contextual issues, including sexuality, gender, religion, education, ethics, alterity, difference, intellectual practice, literature, feminism, art and literary genre.

To begin with, I introduce gender and its re-visioning, as a feminist response, to Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of the capable subject. My essay aims to bridge Ricoeur's early and later writings, while also introducing the intertext of Julia Kristeva, where she re-visions the position and vocation of Antigone from Sophocles' ancient text. This first contribution to the section gives the sense that Ricoeur and Kristeva each create texts which remain strongly gendered by their paternal and maternal vocations as male or female subjects within phenomenology and/or psycholinguistics (where patriarchal language conditions all meaning and values). Yet subsequent contributors will challenge these traditional accounts of heterosexuality and patriarchy with new possibilities for difference in re-visioning with Kristeva in particular.

In "Eyes wide shut': Paul Ricoeur's Biblical Hermeneutics and the Course of Recognition in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*," Małgorzata Grzegorzewska also explores Ricoeur's conception of human capability in his later texts; yet she relates capability back to fallibility in one of Ricoeur's earliest texts. Grzegorzewska argues that ultimately Ricoeur's dual-focus, on the one hand, in *Fallible Man* (1965), on the precarious fate of the "fallible man" and, on the other hand, in the *Course of Recognition* (2005), on the destiny of the "capable man" enables a re-visioning of Milton's evocations in *Paradise Lost*. Grzegorzewska engages with biblical and literary hermeneutics, as well as Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology, continuing the sense that we are confronting the traditional roles played by men and women in Ricoeurian texts.

In "To Look at Things *as if* They Could Be Otherwise: Educating the Imagination," Laurie Anderson Sathe introduces the themes of vision and transformation, along with the highly significant role of imagination in the texts of Ricoeur. Anderson Sathe engages with Ricoeur, in order to contribute to discussions of narrative theory in the context of education studies, or pedagogy, in holistic health. She brings in a strongly positive vision for educating the imagination of those, especially, who work in healthcare, confronting illness, suffering and pain with Ricoeur's wholly positive strategies for opening new worlds through, as she sees it, the configuration of texts and the reconfiguration of contexts. Anderson Sathe reminds us how much Ricoeur believed in hope and horizons where there are always new possibilities to be created by the productive imagination through the telling of (our) stories and the quest for narrative identity.



In “Testimony, Responsibility and Recognition: A Ricoeurian Response to the Crises of Sexual Abuse,” John Crowley-Buck turns to a harsh reality—to a paradise lost—with the crises of sexual abuse, as exposed in the Roman Catholic Church since 2002. Crowley-Buck returns to Ricoeur’s texts on testimony and responsibility, searching for constructive resources to re-vision the tragedy of sexual abuse. He brings up the tragic themes of human violence, loss of innocence, broken lives, horror and faithlessness; he is, then, bold to suggest new possibilities for justice in recognition and forgiveness. Here rather than vision and truth winning the day, the reader is reminded of the deep wounds created by deception and corruption in religious institutions.

In “Reading *The Road* with Paul Ricoeur and Julia Kristeva: The Human Body as a Sacred Connection,” Stephanie Arel eagerly engages both Ricoeur and Kristeva in reading the fiction of Cormac McCarthy: her text is McCarthy’s novel, *The Road*, which Arel re-visions in imagining how body and spirit might sustain life after the world’s “fiery destruction.” *The Road* appears to tell a story about a father and a son who are “carrying the fire,” uniting human and divine. But Arel admits the glaring absence in this text of the mother; and she seeks the help of both Kristeva to subvert this absence and Ricoeur to imagine new possibilities beyond McCarthy’s fiction. In this way, Arel draws on a Ricoeurian threefold-mimetic approach to the text, recognizing what is prefigured and configured, while seeking to reconfigure life—body and spirit—after a cataclysmic event.

In “‘When China Meets China’: Sinéad Morrissey’s Figurations of the Orient, or the Function of Alterity in Julia Kristeva and Paul Ricoeur,” Grzegorz Czemiel offers the reader a path to engaging the texts of both Kristeva and Ricoeur, in order to discover new visions in Irish poetry. Here the poet is Sinéad Morrissey and the focus is poetic exploration of alterity, foreignness, and the Orient (China) meeting the Occident in artwork (china). Czemiel’s essay is ambitious but no less than many of Kristeva’s own works on intertextuality in reading and writing about not only alterity (in China and china), but about human subjectivity. Moreover, alterity and its relation to the subject generate common ground for a productive conversation between Kristeva and Ricoeur.

In “Kristeva: The Individual, the Symbolic and Feminist Readings of the Biblical Text,” Joshua Roe takes us back to biblical studies, but also returns to a feminist response, this time, to Kristeva’s textual readings of the (Hebrew) Bible. Roe raises a critical problem of the individual and “the symbolic” for Kristeva’s psycholinguistic account of (any) literary text, whether biblical or not. He helpfully introduces the psychoanalytic role of desire in Kristeva’s reading of texts, but also her psycholinguistic conception of language as a relation of the semiotic and the symbolic. Again

the implicit theme of vision emerges in Roe's text, but now, as "coming to light," appearing, illuminating and (re)presenting: this theme is developed in his fascinating discussion of the constructive role of "fantasy" in Kristeva's account of human understanding. Subjectivity, as in the previous essay, comes into Roe's assessment of Kristeva's account of sexuality and difference; this also unwittingly anticipates the next essay on the place of sexual difference in Kristeva's texts.

In "Kristeva, Ethics and Intellectual Practice," Sylvie Gambaudo offers a wonderfully engaging account of Kristeva's contested place in critical debates: these include debates about "diversity," "French theory" and feminism. Gambaudo argues that Kristeva's significance rests in her "discreet form of subversion," contributing to an ethics and "a forward-thinking" intellectual practice on the question of difference. In fact, Gambaudo focuses on Kristeva's considered contribution to sexual difference and social unrest. She also—similarly to Roe—does not dismiss, or try to sever, Kristeva's psychoanalytic training. Instead, Gambaudo commends Kristeva for sticking to her "psychoanalytic guns," especially when it comes to social concerns, rather than "uncritical speedy fixes" to deep social unrest. Here the re-visioning and transformation of sexual difference are reached by going the long way of Kristevan understanding before taking action.

In "Abjection and Sexually Specific Violence in Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*," Dorota Filipczak returns the reader to the imagery of "cleft" which appears in the quotation from Kristeva at the beginning of this section: Kristeva's vision of Antigone is one of being "cleft" between "the logic of the political" and "the blood of an instigator of transgressions." Filipczak discovers in Lessing's text, *The Cleft*, imagery and concepts resonating profoundly with Kristeva's psycholinguistic writings; psycholinguistics becomes the condition of all meaning and value as seen in this novel. Just as Kristeva associates Antigone's state of "being cleft" with a maternal vocation—in taking up the position of her mother, Jocasta, of care and tenderness in the burial of her brother—Lessing creates a community of "Clefts" who, as Filipczak explains, are associated with "their gift of creating new life"; they are pre-cultural in their motherhood; togetherness and communal being are implied by Cleft motherhood. Imagery of water, of nature and natural instinct, recalls Kristeva's psychoanalytic conception of the maternal vocation, or "function," and its associations with fluidity and the semiotic; but sexually specific violence arises in the process of abjection, whereby the maternal body is expelled, and after which "Squirts" will evolve into a different, symbolic realm. The psychoanalytic themes in Lessing's texts become—in Filipczak's expert hands—part of a Kristevan re-visioning: this creates intertextual connections, giving the text a life of its own. Vision, imagination and transformation equally become implicit themes—for new possibilities—in Filipczak's reading of abjection

and sexually specific violence in Lessing's fiction. Thus, vision and violence come together in illuminating ways for understanding sexual relations, revealing why "text matters."

In "Taking Sides on *Severed Heads*: Kristeva at the Louvre," Alison Jasper has fun with her reading of Kristeva's unusual text, its subtexts and the various resonating concepts. Jasper produces a fascinating review of what is basically an exhibition catalogue—but in Jasper's hands it is so much more! No nuances are missed when it comes to the psychoanalytic resonances of the art, the imagery and the concepts which come into Kristeva's text, *Severed Heads*. Yes, the exhibition is about heads without bodies! Jasper follows the order—chronologically—of the head(s) as the privileged object in this exhibition and in the (western) history of human societies. No trouble with, nor any tendency to dismiss, Kristeva's psychoanalytic connections appears in this essay. Just the opposite: Jasper brings out the richness and depth of Kristeva's text; the understanding gained concerning the worship of skulls plus the murder and decapitation of the Father inform a familiar Freudian reading of the role of the phallic object in religious or social rituals. As Jasper makes clear, in killing their father, the sons act out of the fear of castration and impotence; but the vision of a mother's power and its loss is equally implied in a cannibalistic ritual, quoting Kristeva:

I try to cry out in the face of this loss to name it, to envision it; I also appropriate it, consume it, I do not want to lose it. I rediscover the pleasure of the archaic orality that this breast, this mass, this head provided me.

Jasper further offers us a re-visioning of art-history as she runs through the exhibition of bodies without heads. So, vision, violence, loss, life, imagination, horror, recognition all oscillate through the twists and turns of Kristevan psychoanalytic imagery in her text about the western art of severed heads. In the end, as Jasper reminds us, Kristeva's own re-visioning takes its point from her role as an analyst, as much as a writer or intellectual. Kristeva as a therapist constantly confronts the suffering from loss, horror, fear and the silence of melancholia—each of which creates the pain which can lead to "mindless/headless violence."

In "Convention, Repetition and Abjection: The Way of the Gothic," Agnieszka Łowczanin gives a fitting conclusion to this section on "Re-visioning": we have Kristeva placed alongside Gilles Deleuze, who almost twenty years after his death is now one of today's most popular twentieth-century philosophers. Even Ricoeur wrote, near the end of his own life in this century, that Deleuze was one of the two French twentieth-century philosophers who he most admired. But here Łowczanin does not speak of Ricoeur. Instead she engages in a re-visioning of texts, returning with fresh eyes and a critical openness to the Gothic genre and its conventions.

Through the eyes of Kristeva and Deleuze, she shows us a novel process of re-visioning—that of “Gothicism.” Łowczanin considers how the survival of “a potent cultural form” in Gothic texts has been possible for more than three centuries. Of course, not all Gothic fiction would meet the Deleuzian principle of “theft and gift” which, as Łowczanin demonstrates, implies a transformation of something specific. Łowczanin sets out a Deleuzian transformation of the specific as “what is repeated becomes modified, and the repeated incorporates a necessary ‘gift’ of novelty.” Kristeva comes into Gothicism, according to Łowczanin, because Kristeva’s abject is “mapping the same territory”: the attributes of which are otherness, the sublime and the ambiguous. Well-known is the Kristevan claim that “the abject is edged with the sublime”<sup>3</sup>: but elsewhere she calls the abject “the ambiguous.” Fear and the real threat of the abject, then, follow the repetition of the principle which Deleuze helps Łowczanin to describe as “Gothic fiction.” Again, in this essay, the reader finds themes of violence, loss, horror accompanied by vision, life, birth of the new, and the transformation of the old. These seem to complete what, I might wager, is a proper Deleuzian repetition as “a necessary and justified conduct in relations to which it cannot be replaced”: something which Kristeva exemplifies in her re-visioning of the abject in a range of texts across centuries of western thinking.

Thus, I end this introduction to the themed section, “Re-visioning Ricoeur and Kristeva,” with a confident conclusion, that violence and loss do not have the last word. Old and new life are repeatable, as we transform our vision through an act of “looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.” This is why *Text Matters* names a journal, and a truth about our ability to imagine the new in a text, even while still repeating what is most singular in the unmatched texts of the past.

The section “Re-visioning Ricoeur and Kristeva” is followed by the section “Continuities” that takes up some topics from Issue 3, whose title was *Eroticism and Its Discontents*. The latter focused mostly on mediaeval literature and drama throughout the centuries. The “Continuities” section includes an article by Małgorzata Dąbrowska, a historian specializing in the Middle Ages, concerned, among others, with the encounter between Byzantium and the West. Her text “A Cypriot Story about Love and Hatred” focuses on King Peter I Lusignan from Cyprus, whose love affair culminating in disaster found its way into the folk song that is alive today. Significantly, the author also touches upon the themes of this issue: “violence, blood, loss and horror.”

Another section with distinct identity focuses on Irish themes. An article by Jan Jędrzejewski entitled “Anthologizing Sir Samuel Ferguson:

<sup>3</sup> *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. 11.

Literature, History, Politics” engages with the output of Sir Samuel Ferguson, “one of the key figures of mid-nineteenth-century Irish literature.” Basing his argument on extensive evidence, the author contends that Ferguson’s contribution is not adequately reflected in anthologies of Irish verse which include his poems. This is followed by a text on Yeats’s poetry “Recalling all the Olympians: W. B. Yeats’s ‘Beautiful Lofty Things,’ *On the Boiler* and the Agenda of National Rebirth.” Its author Wit Pietrzak deals primarily with the poem “Beautiful Lofty Things.” His contention is that “the poem is organized around a tightly woven matrix of figures that comprise Yeats’s idea of the Irish nation as a ‘poetical culture.’”

In his review of Christina M. Gschwandtner’s *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy*, Michael D’Angeli looks at what he identifies as “a compelling study of how twentieth-century philosophy stemming from the phenomenological tradition has impacted on, and enabled, contemporary trends within philosophy of religion.” In particular, D’Angeli pays careful attention to Gschwandtner’s chapter on Ricoeur, “A God of Poetry and Superabundance.” From this title alone, it is clear that Gschwandtner studies the poetic dimension of Ricoeur’s texts, conveying divine love as “superabundance.” D’Angeli praises Gschwandtner’s exploration of textual polyphony and limit expressions in Ricoeur, while questioning her failure to consider how these matters necessarily inform Ricoeur’s account of biblical polyphony and parabolic limit-expressions. In other words, D’Angeli concerns himself with text matters, especially the re-visioning of biblical texts which is made possible by Ricoeur’s linguistic understanding of non-religious texts.

Finally, the issue includes two interviews by Joanna Kosmalska. In the first one she talks to a prominent Irish writer Roddy Doyle born in Dublin; and this connects to the articles on themes Irish. The next interview concerns the fiction of Joanna Czechowska, a British writer of Polish origin. Both interviews tackle the issue of Polish immigration to Ireland and the United Kingdom. They refer specifically to the recent immigration wave which followed the expansion of the European Union, but also to the previous migrations, i.e. in the aftermath of World War II, and the state of martial law in Poland (1981–83), respectively. The emphasis on Polish migrations in the interviews connects with the Polish location of Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker’s video installation premiered in Łódź, and discussed in the opening conversation. Thus *Re-visioning Ricoeur and Kristeva*, as well as the discussions refiguring things mediaeval and things Irish are “framed” by the Polish locatedness.

Pamela Sue Anderson



## A SPECIAL GUEST OF TEXT MATTERS

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### Mieke Bal: “Writing with Images”

#### A Conversation—Dorota Filipczak

(University of Łódź)

**Dorota Filipczak:** Professor Bal, we are meeting primarily because of your video installation *Madame B*, which is being premiered in Muzeum Sztuki (the Museum of Modern Art) in Łódź.<sup>1</sup> Was there a special reason why you and Michelle Williams Gamaker decided to choose this particular location apart from the fact that this is one of the oldest museums of modern art?

**Mieke Bal:** Yes, I really like the idea that it is actually the oldest museum of modern art (I've been told), so this “old” and “modern” tension is relevant for our project. The novel I have worked with responds to and takes us back to the 1850s, which is the beginning of modern art, and we are now in this sort of postmodern moment or even post-postmodern, so Łódź seems to be a lovely place to have this exhibition. It's a video exhibition from 2013/14, it's completely new and fresh from the press. It responds to a novel that in its time was already cinematic although cinema wasn't there yet. If you read the novel, you see, it's a cinematic novel, of its time and ahead of it. This is such a strong anachronism that when the director of Muzeum Sztuki suggested we should have our exhibition there, we were just in heaven. We said, “This is ideal. This is the very best place for it!” And there is a secondary reason that also makes sense, which is the former communist and now capitalist society. It is also a historically “thick” place, again anachronistically, to propose a work that is very much about the abuses of capitalism and the sentimentalizing of the allure

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Mr Jarosław Suchan (director of the Museum of Modern Art in Łódź), Ms Katarzyna Słoboda (curator of the exhibition) and Mr Przemysław Purtak (coordinator) for making it possible for me to interview Professor Mieke Bal while she was staying in Łódź as their guest.

of the accumulation of goods that you don't need, which is what caused the current crisis. Again, there is an economic anachronism involved. So I couldn't wish for a better place to have this exhibition.

**DF:** Well, I'm delighted to hear that. I must say we feel privileged that you and Michelle Williams Gamaker are premiering this exhibition in Łódź. Coincidentally, you are going to have a lecture in MS2, which (I'm sure you've been told) is located in the flourishing area of Manufaktura, the most fashionable shopping centre in Łódź, where women are seductively marketed with *Madame B* syndrome recycled.

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**MB:** Yes. I think we are all vulnerable to that attraction; that's why capitalism has been able to sustain itself. We are all vulnerable to the desire to own, to have, to buy. But what came to our attention while we were rereading this novel (after I had an intuitive interest in doing a project on this novel) and made us so excited about doing the project was the incredible intertwinement of capitalism and its seductions, and patriarchy and its seductions, and its ongoing presence in our societies. These men, who will get all they want, have sex with Emma, and in the end she completely falls for the seduction whatever the seduction is. She confuses the two domains. She is a very confused woman, but we could all be in that position, so we don't want to say this is individual, or this is hysterical. It is a socially produced syndrome that I think is at the root of the current economic crisis, but also at the root of a lot of unhappiness in private lives.

**DF:** By all means. I'm not sure if you've been told that there was a film in Poland called *Pani Bovary to ja* (*I am Madame Bovary*), which translated Flaubert into the reality of the seventies here.<sup>2</sup>

**MB:** Oh, really? I didn't know that one. I must see it.

**DF:** It was actually released in 1977, and it referred to the so-called "prosperous decade" in the communist era, because Edward Gierek (the man in charge of Poland at that time) incurred debts abroad in order to give an impression of stability and glitz in this communist country. The film started in a very suggestive way; it showed women behind a barred window. You could hear them, but you couldn't see them. You could only see their hands. They were involved in some sort of domestic activity.

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<sup>2</sup> The film was directed by Zbigniew Kamiński in 1977.



**MB:** How profoundly intelligent! Is it available on DVD?

**DF:** It is available on the internet, but I must find out if it is available with subtitles. It won a prize in Locarno.

**MB:** If it went to Locarno, there must be a version with subtitles.

**DF:** The passages from Flaubert are superimposed on the film narrative. The main character keeps thinking through the book.

**MB:** But it's a different woman, not Emma.

**DF:** It is the Emma of those days, a socialist version of Emma, who takes part in a fashion show, buys expensive clothes, fantasizes about a love affair, but eventually resists having sex with a stranger and comes home.

**MB:** So it's a moralistic version.

**DF:** Not necessarily. She comes home because she is bored and frustrated. She comes back disillusioned.

**MB:** Oh, that's brilliant! I want to know everything about this film. This is so exciting. We didn't know that, but with sex and love affairs, it's not only sex, it's also a craving for admiration. The link between sex and capitalism is the lie, the promise that things can be permanently exciting. But by definition excitement doesn't last. Emma is somehow (and this is romantic education) raised with the idea that you can actually be constantly excited. You can't. Nobody can. So if the love and the sex get boring, then you go and buy things, but that also gets boring, because after buying a new dress, the next day the dress is already boring, so you need another one, and another one. So it's that contradiction of boredom and excitement.

**DF:** Let me switch to the mode you have chosen, because you use a video installation to connect with Flaubert. Was there any special reason behind this?

**MB:** Well, it's the only medium I can be an artist in. I cannot draw, I cannot paint, I cannot write fiction. I can write essays and scholarly things, but video is the only medium that I can work with in art making. And I think it's also like writing, it's writing with images. There is movement and time. The challenge for us (I am saying "us" because I do this always with a partner) was to make the installations before film (we also made a film), which

is the continuous story. The challenge was to make it what we call an “immersive” exhibition, which doesn’t mean that you get sucked in and are passive, but on the contrary that you are so involved that you keep wondering: “Could this be me? Could I do this?” And you do that in each piece. There are eight installations with a different number of screens, and each piece has a different question to ask the audience, such as: “Would I be on this side or that side?” For example, in the first installation we have voyeurism and flirtation in the looks on the two screens that are opposite each other. The man looks at the woman but he doesn’t want to be seen. And she, the young girl, looks up and sees a man who has a nice house and she is flirting. And both looks, the flirt and the voyeurism, have a bit of a social stigma. We think they are rather dubious. And, of course, they are mild forms of prostitution and violence. But in a mild form we all do it. So people come in between two screens opposed to each other; in one they see a man who is voyeuristic, and in the other—a woman who is flirting, and you cannot see both at the same time. We made sure that the distance is such that you are caught between them, and you look and look and look. So with whom would you go? That was an appeal to think about the act of looking, its genres and their consequences. Each installation challenges the viewer in a different way to consider their own position in visual culture today. So back to the relation between capitalism and patriarchy, and the power relations between men and women. Sexism is a harsh word that I don’t use very often but what I mean is the relations in which it seems natural that men have initiative, power and money, and women are just there. We think this is over today, but it isn’t. So this is another thing that we are trying to show. It’s a temptation for all of us, men and women, to fall back into those roles. Even for men who don’t like to be bossy it’s sometimes the easier way, and for women who like to be independent it’s also very appealing to be taken care of. So as soon as you lose your alertness, you fall back into those roles. The same goes for capitalism. We know that we cannot spend money endlessly, we all have our wisdom about it, but when we see a beautiful dress, we just say, “Why don’t I just indulge myself once?” The exhibition is designed to make people really aware of their own position in relation to these temptations. The beautiful images are a part of that temptation.

**DF:** Absolutely. What strikes me immediately is the relevance of what you’ve written in the book devoted to Louise Bourgeois: “So little is said about what we see and what seeing is involved.” So it’s not only *Madame B*. It’s the *seeing*.

**MB:** Yes. At the heart of this process is seeing what modes of *seeing* we bring to what we see. Because there are different ways of *seeing*. It’s not

just one thing, like: "I see this so that's the truth." There is deceptive seeing, there is sexual seeing, a feeling seeing, the desiring (to own) seeing. There is also cruel seeing: seeing something that you shouldn't see. In the last installation with five screens we have three different endings. The first ending is about the man who lets Emma down when she comes for money; the second is connected with economic ruin, when they make an inventory of the house, and the pharmacist who always meddles gets hysterical. Then there is suicide, that is, the actual ending of the poison, which is in the book. The ending that we could imagine in the 1950s would be: "She's crazy. Put her in a hospital. Confine her to a psychiatric ward." And the ending that today seems the most normal one would be divorce: "I don't love this man. Why don't I just divorce?" Then you have to go on welfare. You have no money. No love, no money. How do you deal with that? So we have these three endings in the installation. In the second one, the 1950s ending, the little girl, Emma's daughter, stays behind and sees her mother being taken away. To a child, the image of a mother being taken away on a stretcher is sadistic. You don't do that, and yet they did, and they do. It still happens, so this is also a very stark confrontation. What is there to see for the child who doesn't know what is happening to her mother, and remains completely powerless? It's yet another form of seeing.

**DF:** Quite. Is this explored so thoroughly because this is the video installation, or is it the advantage of your particular approach, or is it both?

**MB:** I think it is both. Video installation is a good medium to do this, to make these distinct forms of *seeing* visible. As a second person in contact with this image you are solicited to witness these forms of seeing, but, of course, it is also because I've been working for over twenty years in visual art, and my interest has not always been how great this art is but how it interacts with desires, fears, modes of seeing. Even in my earlier work on literature, or on biblical narrative, I was interested in what happens when people see something. And I don't know why this is so. I wasn't raised in art or anything, but I see the importance of the visual precisely because it is not linguistic, because you are not aware of this. It's not unconscious but unreflective. If you see a puddle in the street, you don't step in it, you step around it, but you don't realize that you do it because you are talking to a friend next to you, and you just go around the puddle. Now, if somebody asks you why you did not step in the puddle, of course, you know why, but at the moment you do it, you don't realize it. And that's the level of cultural agency I explore: where you don't talk about it, and still things happen on that basis.

**DF:** Right, so coming back to the whole issue connected with the video installation, McLuhan says the medium is the message.

**MB:** Yes, this would fit here really well. The medium is the message in the sense that we don't distinguish between the two. It's not that the medium gives you a message. It is itself the message. In other words, there is no message. There is just cultural agency and cultural interaction.

**DF:** Could you say more about the overlap between the visual and the textual in your own work? Video is a twentieth-century genre. It is still a new genre. Could you comment on that as one of the first theorists, and now also an artist?

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**MB:** Well, it has been around for decades, so I am not a pioneer in that in this sense at all. What I may be innovating is the relation between the image and the text in the sense that our starting point was: "Flaubert's novel is contemporary." It was contemporary then, so to be loyal to it you have to make it contemporary now. So I wrote the script on the basis of quotations from the novel, practically a few little scenes that had to be updated. Basically, it's all quotations from the novel but with a completely contemporary setting. Maybe the innovation in this project is that it's a complete endorsement of anachronism as a way of being loyal to the contemporaneity of art. In my view, all art is contemporary. It always stands in, emerges from and responds to a moment in culture, and in that sense it's always contemporary. Now, our favourite example that we mentioned in the seminar (in the Museum of Modern Art in Łódź) is the opera, you know, when Emma meets Léon at the opera. Well, in Flaubert it's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, a contemporary opera at the time. It came from the 1830s, and it was very much performed, and everybody was singing songs from it. And all the films (I don't know about the Polish one) about *Madame Bovary* use *Lucia di Lammermoor*, because that's the one in the book. It's mentioned, so you cannot change that. Well, you have to change it, because Flaubert chose a contemporary opera, so we had to choose a contemporary opera. And we chose William Kentridge, not only because we had access to him already, but basically because his work is a critique of colonialism in relation to the time. It talks about the clocks and how to adjust the clocks in terms of the colonial endeavour. In our work, the relentless ticking of the clock in the B house, stronger when Emma is bored, resonates with the opera's topic. You would actually betray the novel by making it a historical drama, which is most often done (costumes show it well). *Lucia di Lammermoor* was a critique of romanticism at the time, when capitalism started to be devastating. Romanticism was the other devastating thing. Flaubert

completely mocked it, so *Lucia di Lammermoor* would be his ideal case to make something ridiculous. So, we think, today colonialism is what we want to make ridiculous, because we are at a moment when we finally have to get rid of it.

**DF:** The way you talk brings to my mind the cultural turn in translation studies, especially Gideon Toury, who says that no translation should be analyzed out of context. And the context for translation naturally explains it, so when the context changes, a new translation can be born. So the utmost literality would be a betrayal of the text.

**MB:** Absolutely. It's what Walter Benjamin also said.

**DF:** So utmost fidelity can be total infidelity.

**MB:** All the films, some better than others (the famous one is by Claude Chabrol) make that mistake. The only one from Eastern Europe is by Alexander Sokurov, who made *Save and Protect*. He doesn't so much make it a historical drama, but rather sets it in a class (peasant) environment that seems out of time. Flaubert is in the middle of his time.

**DF:** Your project is also a very interesting case of intersemiotic translation.

**MB:** Absolutely, that's what we consider it to be. You know, I wonder about one thing. I knew this novel very well. My very first article forty years ago was about *Madame Bovary*. But filming as a group, collective endeavour is a different thing. Filming means working with actors and amateurs (we had a few professional actors, but most of them were amateurs). They all had a say; it was an open process. We didn't come to the set with a totally clear idea—"You do this, you stand there." We are always open to interventions. The actors taught me so much about this novel. They had read it in school, or read it for the occasion, but they had their own interpretation, and it gained so much from their input.

**DF:** I am intrigued by what you call "an endorsement of anachronism." I've been writing a book on Brian Moore, one of whose novels, *The Doctor's Wife*, could also be described in this way. The heroine is a Madame Bovary updated and translated into the reality of Belfast, her husband treating the casualties of bomb attacks. When he fails to accompany her to Paris and the south of France because he has to attend to his patients, she has a fling with a student who is ten years her junior, but a graduate of the same university (Queen's). Sheila (Moore's version of Madame Bovary) fits in

with the early 1970s despite obvious allusions to Flaubert's novel. In your video installation I was able to hear dialogues from the novel superimposed on contemporary settings, played out against the details in the setting or costumes that gestured towards previous epochs, and this was fascinating.

**MB:** Yes, in the exhibition you would have a country gentleman in a top hat, not necessarily from Flaubert's times, maybe from the 1920s, but you would also see clothes from fashion designers such as Yohji Yamamoto with the anachronism showing that this applies to all times. In order to feel it and experience it, you have to translate it into contemporary reality.

**DF:** Exactly. I've wanted to ask you about the way the video installation can deconstruct and subvert our ways of seeing. We become aware of them; for example, we become aware of our judgemental attitudes, the fact that we want to take sides. So there is huge potential for indeterminacy in the way the screens are set. My impression was that of a visual stream of consciousness. My experience was continually disrupted and fragmented. I had come over to reread Flaubert, but I could not go from one page to the other. It is not like moving on with the direction of the exhibition. It was disorientating, but also strangely liberating. Also, when I went there again, it was a different experience. My perception of it was different. I am intrigued by the fact that we participate in what you call "an immersive exhibition."

**MB:** Yes, you're not going to choose the button. That so-called interactivity is deceptive, suggesting freedom while only offering limited, mostly binary choices. Instead, when you are looking, you are asked to be active, when you enter the space, you are asked from the beginning to look at particular things, but then you'll be hooked to this or that, and your attention will be attracted to something else. It's based on activity, and not on linearity.

**DF:** There are so many conflicting attitudes, so many angles from which to see that you end up confused. You are not supposed to make judgements, or are you?

**MB:** Well, you always make judgements, but it's also good to know that you are doing it. So this sort of righteousness of people who always know what is ethical, and what isn't—that's going to be made difficult. We also exhibit photographs, and there is one set of photographs of portraits of the characters. We decided to put the portraits in a way that suggests intimacy, like being at somebody's home a long time ago. We do that on purpose to make people a little confused, to make them say: "What is this?" We are in

the museum and yet now it feels like a living room; and that's quite challenging, because the private/public opposition doesn't exist either. The political is inside the home; you always think when you lock your door that this is a private space, but your home is full of ideology. So we want people to be a bit "unsettled." As Dominick LaCapra puts it, it's *empathic unsettlement*. Isn't that beautiful?

**DF:** It is indeed.

**MB:** You don't want to identify, but you feel for Emma, because she's trying, and she's miserable; she doesn't do much harm, so you are empathic, but you are unsettled about your own empathy, because you want to judge her. You know, I read a book about Emma in the 1990s (written by a psychoanalyst) that was so moralistic. She deceives her husband; she spends his money. How ridiculous! Everybody is at fault there. Everybody in the novel is complicitous with her demise. They all make mistakes that cause her to go further down the hill. So there is no way to blame her. Instead of moralism we want to offer a different perspective, without giving up a critical stance.

**DF:** Yes, it makes me angry when I read Flaubert criticism that insists on woman's timeless nature.

**MB:** Yes, it's ridiculous. There is no timelessness. We are here and now. There is no placelessness, and there is no timelessness. Flaubert criticism is not up to Flaubert in the first place, although there are some attempts to do justice to his novel, for example, the criticism of Jonathan Culler, which is very good. Nobody has written extensively about the cinematic quality of the writing. It's very striking. And there is also this capitalist issue. Emma gets into that buying hysteria, but when Charles goes for the first time to the farm of Rouault he's already thinking that they have a lot of money. And his mother pushes him into this marriage, because they are supposed to be rich. Nobody is innocent.

**DF:** Let me make a connection between *Madame B* and your other interests. Through your writing I came across Ann Veronica Janssens, an artist who destabilizes perception. Are you drawn to such artists because of your interest in the use of video installation and its potential connected with ways of seeing, or is your particular approach a product of interaction with such artists? Or both?

**MB:** Again, I think it's both. I've always been attracted to ambiguity, also in my literary analysis. That's what attracted me to Flaubert. He's

completely ambiguous. But I'm also always attracted to artists who experiment. And it can be Rembrandt or Caravaggio, or it can be a contemporary artist. Ann Veronica Janssens is a great experimental artist who tries out things. She's a very serious physicist in a sense, interested in light. I'm going to talk about her work during the lecture as a retrospective revisioning of Strzemiński. Strzemiński was very worried about lines and didn't like lines. And Strzemiński said, "Colour implies lines, because when one colour changes into another, there's a line." And she says, "No!", because you don't even know the place where you go from one colour to another in her mist installations. And it's quite stunning. You do see things have changed, but you cannot say the colour changes here. It's fluid. So she is radicalizing Strzemiński's concern. And I think that makes it very relevant to put the two together in dialogue. Yes, I am attracted to work that makes me ask the question, "What's happening here?" If I immediately understand it, it doesn't interest me. I am a thinker; now I think I'm also an artist, and I think I want to be excited about someone smarter than me. So I always choose an artist from whom I can learn something new. I'm addicted to learning. It's very strange, but I think I'd die if I stopped learning.

**DF:** You've also written about Dutch art. To what extent was it important for you in the experience of the visual?

**MB:** Well, I've written about Rembrandt, but I've also written about Caravaggio. So I have written about the Italian, as well as the Dutch legacy, and maybe it will mean something if I tell you how I started to work on Rembrandt. I've never thought about it as a connection but I had to move out of the country, shake it off in order to look at it. I'm more interested in contemporary art. I actually got interested in Rembrandt for a very anecdotal reason. I was still working on the Bible, and I was invited to give a lecture in Jerusalem, not in the biblical context, but in the context of psychoanalysis and discourse. The only thing I was doing at the time was biblical stuff. I thought: "I cannot go to Jerusalem and talk about the Hebrew Bible, that's impolite and arrogant, because I don't have the knowledge of Hebrew, so what the hell can I do?" Then my partner came up with that Rembrandt etching book and said, "Look at this! Have you ever seen this image?" It was an etching of Potiphar's wife.

**DF:** So this explains your interest in Joseph's story!

**MB:** Yes, that is how it started. And I thought, "Aha! I cannot give a lecture on the Bible. I'll give a lecture on Rembrandt and the Bible. So I came up with that etching and I gave it a really harsh critical reading, and people



came to thank me afterwards, saying, "Thank you for not talking on the Bible." And I did talk on the Bible! But not just on the Bible!

**DF:** You've mentioned psychoanalysis, and I'm aware of that from your work. Where do you stand on psychoanalysis, which is such a tangled thing for feminists?

**MB:** I take it seriously as one of the discourses of the early twentieth century that shaped our thinking. Also, before *Madame B* we did a project on madness, and there we were fiercely on the side of psychoanalysis even against Freud, but more against the pharmaceutical industry, and hospitals that would confine people for life. I was working with a psychoanalyst who had a very different approach from both Lacan and Freud, so if Freud says: "psychosis can't be helped by psychoanalysis," he must be wrong, because that's an unacceptable answer. Society—its violence—drives people mad, psychotic; hence, society must help them, not push them away. The psychoanalyst I know was militantly against this verdict, but even more against the pharmaceutical industry. And so this was the moment when I was on the side of psychoanalysis, but against Freud, siding with Françoise Davoine whose book, a "theoretical fiction," *Mère Folle*, makes a smashing case for this opinion. At some point the exhibition was held in the Freud museum, where we installed one video at the foot of the famous couch with a Persian rug, near the figurines. On the screen you see a "mad" woman, a schizophrenic patient with her analyst sitting on the couch together. This was a visual critique of Freud's analytical set-up. I'm not against psychoanalysis as an idea, a project, but in *Madame B* I am not into the "Emma is mad" or "Emma is neurotic or hysterical" interpretation, because I think it's really important to acknowledge the strength of the social discourse. So psychoanalysis must be held at bay as soon as you begin to claim that problems come because someone was abused in childhood. I do take abuse very seriously, but you cannot fall back on childhood to explain everything you do wrong. There is a social aspect to consider. So in the current project we look more to sociology than to psychoanalysis. We did work with two psychoanalysts as consultants, though, to come up with a plausible depiction of character.

**DF:** This brings me to yet another issue connected with your research. What matters is not only what we see but also how we see it. Your concept of framing makes me think that we should not rely on things uncritically. There is a frame or hyperframe, something we have to reckon with.

**MB:** Right.

**DF:** I'd like you to comment on this, because this is a critical statement that is also overtly political.

**MB:** Absolutely, everything is political without being stated in socialist realist terms. I'm sure you understand what I mean.

**DF:** I do.

**MB:** There is always a frame, and that frame is a bunch of choices, which is why I prefer the term "framing" to "context." The context seems to be just there to be made of anything and then given authority as facts. Everything is framed. That's almost a universalistic statement, but then what kind of frame is it? We cannot escape ideology. The question is: "Would it be better to escape ideology?" No, this is impossible. The question is: for whom is it beneficial; for whom is it damaging? In other words, who frames it? So it's within the frame that the question of the political comes up.

**DF:** Yes, I haven't thought about that, but context is such a neutral word.

**MB:** Yes, while frame is not.

**DF:** The context sounds innocent.

**MB:** It sounds innocent, and that's why I don't use it. It is deceptive. It's as deceptive as internet claims about freedom and choice. We cannot be impartial, and there is nothing wrong with having an authority to regulate things. I mean it's naive to think we don't do that. But when I wrote the chapter on framing in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, my emphasis was on how central the frame or the act of framing is. Another thing that is crucial is the difference between guilt and responsibility. And this is what I want to achieve with this exhibition. You can be responsible without feeling guilty. In a colonial situation, for example, we are not guilty of colonialism, as it happened before our time, but we are responsible for the consequences, as they are still in this world. And these consequences should make us do something about migration policy, for example.

**DF:** Yes, to connect with this, I want to use the phrase you use in your book on Louise Bourgeois: "close engagement." Is this connected with responsibility?

**MB:** Yes, brilliant, I was not expecting that you would be so knowledgeable about my work. Thank you! So "close engagement" is a variation on close reading. Reading is engaged closely, so you cannot escape that.

**DF:** The fourth issue of *Text Matters* is devoted to Ricoeur and Kristeva. You refer to Ricoeur occasionally; you've worked with a narrative and memory. Could you comment on the way you see Ricoeur's contribution? And how do you relate to his work?

**MB:** He's not a primary source for me, but we have had similar interests—I mean, his volume on *Temps et Récit*. He's more into the hermeneutical tradition. I see that he is a very important philosopher of the twentieth century. As for Kristeva, it is the same case. I can see her importance, of course. She has done some things that are really crucial, especially that essay "Women's Time." It's a very important essay. So I think both philosophers made me aware of some issues, but then I go on, on my own and with others. That's how it worked. But I'm totally happy to be in the volume devoted to those two.

**DF:** What about your future projects? Your primary concern seems to be interdisciplinary.

**MB:** I can never talk about future projects because I don't have them. My work will always be interdisciplinary and in the present. That's inevitable, but I'd like to write a book with *Madame B* as a central thing around which to discuss my own film work. I think I am one of the few people who can write about films they make, because I don't start writing about them before I make them. I discover things in the process that I later want to be spelled out in a way that is relevant for scholarship in the humanities. I would like to do that, but I don't know if I will. First of all, I would like to make another film. I would like to include the wonderful people I've been working with. My last corner of interdisciplinarity is the interface between making a film and analyzing it. I would like to develop this into a book; maybe I will now that I've told you about it. Maybe I'll feel obliged to do it now.

**DF:** Thank you very much for this wonderful conversation. And thank you for *Madame B*.

**MB:** My pleasure!



# **RE-VISIONING RICOEUR AND KRISTEVA**

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**Pamela Sue Anderson**

University of Oxford

**Lost Confidence and Human  
Capability: A Hermeneutic  
Phenomenology of the Gendered,  
yet Capable Subject**

# ABSTRACT

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In this contribution to *Text Matters*, I would like to introduce gender into my feminist response to Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of the capable subject. The aim is to make, phenomenologically speaking, "visible" the gendering of this subject in a hermeneutic problematic: that of a subject's loss of confidence in her own ability to understand herself. Ricoeurian hermeneutics enables us to elucidate the generally hidden dimensions in a phenomenology of lost self-confidence; Ricoeur describes capability as "originally given" to each lived body; but then, something has happened, gone wrong or been concealed in one's loss of confidence. Ricoeur himself does not ask how the gender or sex of one's own body affects this loss. So I draw on contemporary feminist debates about the phenomenology of the body, as well as Julia Kristeva's hermeneutics of the Antigone figure, in order to demonstrate how women might reconfigure the epistemic limits of human capability, revealing themselves as "a horizon" of the political order, for better or worse.

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**ABSTRACT**

“You are divided, torn—I would say *cleft*—between  
the logic of the political and that of your own blood,  
but only if it is the blood of  
an instigator of transgressions”  
(Kristeva 216)

## INTRODUCTION

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This essay will focus on a subject’s loss of confidence in her own ability to understand herself. The aim is to make, phenomenologically speaking, visible the gendering of subjects in at least one strand of post-Kantian philosophy, that is, in Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology of the capable subject. In one sense, my focus here derives from Alan Montefiore’s “Introduction” to *Philosophy in France Today*, where Montefiore reflects on a philosophical culture in transition. That was philosophical culture thirty years ago. Yet today we still face that philosophical issue “bound up with the subject’s loss of self-confidence in its own ability to understand itself, and indeed, in its own intrinsic significance” (xi). In another sense, my focus derives from Ricoeur’s own chapter from thirty-one years ago, “On Interpretation,” also in *Philosophy in France Today*. At that time, Ricoeur interprets his self-identity as a philosopher by elucidating the path of his published texts to “hermeneutic phenomenology” (187). In 2014 we can see in retrospect, how in 1983 Ricoeur himself anticipated his later philosophical account of “the capable subject.”<sup>1</sup>

To the above philosophical thinking, I would like to introduce the generally hidden dimensions of gender in the loss of (philosophical) self-confidence presented by Montefiore and in the discovery of human capability made by Ricoeur. Inserting gender specific pronouns helps to indicate my present concern with “gendering.”<sup>2</sup> So, my focus includes gendering the “subject’s loss of confidence in her own ability to understand herself” (cf. Introduction xi). I will elucidate feminist understandings of the subject: those that emerge in the decades of transition, 1983–2014, in French and Anglo-American philosophy. My contention is that during these three decades women in philosophy have actively sought to restore a woman’s confidence in her own ability to understand herself, philosophically, personally and socially. The stress here is on “restore.” This

<sup>1</sup> On the capable subject, see Ricoeur, *The Just* 2–7; *The Course of Recognition* 89–149.

<sup>2</sup> Here “gendering” means the generally hidden process of determining the qualitative (as distinct from the numerical) identities of women and men.



restoration assumes that a woman is similar to a man insofar as she is, in strongly phenomenological terms, originally a capable subject. Human capability is, then, originally given to each lived body, what Ricoeur calls *le corps propre* (one's own body). To this phenomenological assumption is added a Ricoeurian hermeneutics that attempts to interpret what has happened, gone wrong, or has been concealed, in the loss of confidence in one's own capability.

Ricoeur himself gives an account of *l'homme capable* (the capable [hu]man): but this raises questions concerning the gender-inclusivity and/or gender-neutrality of the body of that capable subject for the contemporary feminist reader. Is human capability gender neutral? If so, how does one's own sexed/gendered body affect one's capability? Has the gender/sex of the phenomenological conception of one's own body been exclusively masculine and/or male? Here I will maintain that even if *l'homme* in the sense of the generic "man" is meant to be gender inclusive, the impact of this conception on Ricoeur's legacy is struggling to locate the role of gender in hermeneutic phenomenology. Admittedly, only an implicit and pernicious gender bias would ignore woman as a capable subject who, similar to any capable man, can have confidence in her own ability to understand herself philosophically. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to stress that the capable subject's self-understanding must consider its lived body as socially and materially located: and this includes its gendered locatedness (Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender* 205). I will contend that this is necessary, even if we would like to assume, perhaps with Ricoeur, that our bodies are equivalent to each other in the fundamental sense of each being originally capable.

In 1980 when I first began reading and talking to Ricoeur, I attempted to understand two necessarily interrelated aspects making up what I came to identify as Ricoeur's Kantian dual-aspect subject of action; these were the interrelated aspects of practical reason and natural inclination in human freedom (Anderson, "The Subject's Loss of Self-Confidence" 87–93). At the time, I argued that the two aspects of Kantian rationality and sensibility together constituted the two moments of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology (*Ricoeur and Kant* 41–59). More than thirty years later, in this retrospective reading of Ricoeur's "On Interpretation," I have been surprised to find—I seemed to have forgotten—that in 1983 Ricoeur also mentioned the loss of self-unity which, in Montefiore's words, "all Kant's transcendental horses and king's men" would not exactly be able to put back together again (xii).

In 2014, when we consider philosophy in Britain, France and the rest of Europe, especially if we consider the female subject's ability to understand herself, it is clear that the philosophical subject continues to struggle with

various dimensions of dis-unity. However, I no longer see the Kantian tensions which Ricoeur identifies between freedom and nature as the most difficult challenge, if they ever were, to a philosopher's self-unity. The ongoing dis-unity of the self involves cultural, as well as cognitive, conative and affective factors. It is not just that the self's unity has been broken up, but that something highly significant has been lost. This is something that, as I am contending, we do not mourn. Instead we can and need to retrieve what has been lost from our social and interpersonal awareness. Contemporary feminist philosophers at least have come to recognize that women and men have materially and socially specific differences due to gender's intersectionality (cf. Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality*). Yet the unique singularity of personal identity has been lost from our vision, or obscured by a preoccupation with the concrete differences of our lived bodily experiences. So, in the twenty-first century I have tried to demonstrate that gendering has become increasingly significant as a philosophical issue, not only for my feminist reading of Ricoeur's text, but for philosophy in the past three decades of social and cultural transition in Europe and the Anglo-American world.

We can discover gendering as the generally hidden process of determining the qualitative as distinct from the numerical identities of bodies in a culture: we discover these qualitative identities of bodies in terms of culturally recognized "sex." Here it must be stressed that this hidden process of gendering in the West at least has been highly problematic, especially insofar as philosophical texts construct gender in relation to a binary of sex. This process of gendering becomes the critical focus of the present hermeneutics of philosophical and literary texts. And this hermeneutics aims to extend what I began in *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness*: that is, we should continue "to look back with open eyes" and "from a critical distance," in order to interpret the gendering of human identities by the moral and religious dimensions of philosophical and literary texts (ix, 1, 49, 89–94). Gender has very definitely, even if unwittingly, shaped the philosopher's self-understanding, especially her or his understanding of human emotion, reason and cognition.

#### GENDER IN PHILOSOPHY: A PROBLEM FOR SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Although Montefiore's "Introduction" does not make this explicit, Ricoeur's "On Interpretation" is grouped with those other chapters in *Philosophy in France Today* that address the subject's loss of confidence in its own ability to understand itself. Montefiore adds that this is also a loss of self-confidence in "[the self's] own intrinsic significance" (xi) as

a subject of knowledge and action. In “On Interpretation” Ricoeur situates himself within a French tradition of “reflexive philosophy”: he explains that being reflexive means being subject-oriented in a movement of looking back on oneself (187–88). So the philosophical subject as an agent is literally reflexive in its act of turning back upon itself. Adding gender to this account, we discover that the philosophical subject also has the ability to reflect, socially and materially, upon the qualitative identity of herself and of her actions. Nevertheless, reflexivity does not necessarily ensure self-understanding in philosophy.

Basically, reflexive philosophers in France, but equally other philosophers both on and off the Continent, came to be preoccupied in the second half of the twentieth century with the subject’s own loss of self-understanding. For his part, Ricoeur would have assumed that this loss is related to a lack of what he nevertheless thought to be necessary: self-reflexivity. Most relevant for reflexive philosophy was the fact that the philosophical ideas and issues of the rational subject extended from a Cartesian to a neo-Kantian philosophical tradition of self-reflection. As an active part of this long rationalist tradition, Ricoeur in particular singles out the reflexivity by which the subject seeks to understand itself in relation to its own (internal) alterity. But it is worth noting that, unlike the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas or feminist psycholinguist Luce Irigaray, Ricoeur never takes the self’s alterity to include sexually specific female figures.

The closest Ricoeur comes to giving an account of a female figure of alterity is an interesting exception in *Oneself as Another*. This book contains Ricoeur’s Gifford Lectures, which he revised to include an “Interlude” where he discusses the tragic figure of Antigone (241–49, 256).<sup>3</sup> Previously I have placed Ricoeur’s configuration of Antigone alongside other configurations in texts written by G. W. F. Hegel, George Steiner, Martha Nussbaum and Irigaray. What is noteworthy about Ricoeur’s configuration is his reliance on Hegel’s remarkable reading of Antigone as “the eternal irony of the community” (Hegel 288).<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur singles out Antigone’s act from the role of her sister, Ismene, and from her own potential role as a wife and mother; this singularity suffices to mark Antigone out as an exception to her gender. So, for Ricoeur, she does not in any straightforward sense represent feminine alterity. Instead, Antigone is above all a tragic figure; her “one-sidedness” in the face of “the complexity of life” leads inevitably to her death (*Oneself as Another* 249).

<sup>3</sup> For an earlier discussion of Antigone in *Oneself as Another*, see Anderson, “Re-reading Myth in Philosophy” 51–68.

<sup>4</sup> For an earlier discussion of Hegel’s reading of Antigone and Ricoeur’s relation to it, see Anderson, “Re-reading Myth in Philosophy” 55–59.

My point here is that Ricoeur does not configure an essential femininity, or any other normative figure of female alterity, in *Oneself as Another*. His concern is neither gender nor sexual difference. In sharp contrast, Irigaray mimes Antigone as a sexually ambiguous figure who can be read to play either a masculine or a feminine role. In her disruptive mimesis, Irigaray deliberately configures Antigone, as if multiply gendered, in order to explore the sexual difference between two sexually specific subjects. It, then, seems that Ricoeur has not kept up with feminist texts insofar as he simply configures the philosophical subject, including Antigone, as gender-neutral. As a figure of fragility and death, Antigone serves as Ricoeur's tragic figure for familial and political life; and as such, Antigone does not represent a loss of self-confidence either in the ability to understand herself or in her own intrinsic significance. Yet I insist that even if configured as one-sided, Ricoeur's Antigone reveals her own capability and confidence. Nevertheless, his (re)configuring of Antigone as atypical—as torn between masculine and feminine roles—links Ricoeur with a long Hegelian tradition in finding her “an eternal irony of the community” (Hegel 288).

Today Julia Kristeva can help us to reread both Hegel and Ricoeur on Antigone for better understanding of how the subject is gendered. In Kristeva's dialogue with Catherine Clément, in *The Feminine and the Sacred*, she claims that it is

That sense of strangeness that confers on certain women the appearance of a disabused and benevolent maturity, a serene detachment that, it seems to me, is the true sense of [what] Hegel so enigmatically calls “the eternal irony of the community.” In fact, women do not remain on the near side of phallic power, but they accede to it only to better learn their way around its omnipotence. That *detachment* . . . stems from our immersion in Being and sensible timelessness. (60)

Is Kristeva proposing that this “immersion in Being” gives women the possibility for greater confidence (than men) in their own capability?

In a more recent collection, *Feminist Readings of Antigone*, Kristeva develops several new and highly nuanced points concerning this same figure who is “cleft” between the logic of the political and of her own blood. I propose that Kristeva makes points which are relevant for re-visioning gender. In her eighth (out of nine) interpretative point concerning Antigone, Kristeva suggests

Far from being a relic of the past, the universality of Antigone resonates in the psychic life of women today. . . . The emancipation of the “second sex,” and the intermingling of diverse religious and cultural traditions

(as Judith Butler discusses in *Antigone's Claim*)—the anthropologically universal dimension of *feminine solitude* confronted with the drive of de-binding (*déliaison*) still makes itself evident today in clinical observation, as well as in social behaviour. Solitude and de-binding (*déliaison*), neither necessarily reject motherhood, but rather demand and accompany it. . . . This cannot make us forget, however, the emerging strength of those women who have the opportunity and the capacity to generate a new understanding, skill, or even a way of life or survival out of it: a remarkable consequence of the emancipation of women that is still in process. (“Antigone: Limit and Horizon” 226)

Now it is helpful to recognize that in *Oneself as Another* the philosophical subject which had reigned supreme within a certain French Cartesian tradition suffers a decisive blow from twentieth-century philosophy. That subject loses confidence in its own self-certainty. In Ricoeur's terms, the “shattered cogito” (*cogito brisé*) refers to a serious and, for some philosophers, decisive blow to the Cartesian confidence: the “I think” is no longer an *indubitable* of modern philosophy. In other words, late twentieth-century philosophical critiques of Cartesian certainty have left an indelible mark on the French philosophical legacy. In fact, thirty years ago, I myself was directly concerned with the upshot for a Kantian tradition in France of a renewed attack on the cogito's self-certainty; and one response to this attack was to assert the pre-reflexive cogito of French existentialism (cf. Howie 136–40, 162). Similarly, in 1980s Oxford, it was popular for Anglo-American philosophers to talk about the problem of the self. Gradually the philosophical problem of numerical and/or qualitative identity became a common concern of philosophers globally. The question of personal identity continues to have a universal remit.

Ricoeur's own contribution to this question is apparent in his salient distinction between numerical sameness over time (in Ricoeur's terms, *idem*) and qualitative identity (*ipseity*) (*Oneself as Another* 16–18). Today the problem of personal identity remains a popular topic of debate for philosophers on both sides of the English Channel. Yet a distinctive characteristic of selfhood in France continues to be *ipseity*. Crucially for Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology, *ipseity*-identity rather than sameness-identity, enables a reflexive self-sameness; and this generates the possibility of self-understanding (*The Course of Recognition* 101–04).

I am not sure how common it would have been in the 1980s or how common it is in 2014 to respond to philosophical scepticism concerning gender by exposing loss of confidence in the subject's ability to understand herself. Nevertheless, if there is anything therapeutic in studying post-Kantian philosophy—that is, in the upshot of Kant's legacy as seen in the problems of the self—it is the possibility of responding to the

philosophical problem of selfhood with the tools of French hermeneutic phenomenology. This means that, if following the late Ricoeur, we *can* interpret the lived body as capable. So, a distinctive response of hermeneutic phenomenology *can* restore the self's capability in an ongoing critical process.

It is important to notice that Ricoeur's phenomenology begins by recognizing the Kantian limit to self-knowledge; next, Ricoeur responds to this Kantian limit by proposing an indirect route, by way of hermeneutics, to self-understanding. With this hermeneutic phenomenology, Ricoeur leads his readers indirectly to the self: he interprets the "signs, symbols and texts" which have been left as the remains of a philosophical culture.<sup>5</sup> For example, we already mentioned texts which configure Antigone as a self who is divided against herself. Now, we may also like to recall the ancient text of *Genesis*, part of which has been reconfigured using "signs" (e.g., the defilement) and "symbols" (e.g., the fall) to represent Eve's seduction of Adam. In fact, (re)configurations of a woman's qualitative identity by patriarchal cultures have shattered the female subject's self-understanding as originally innocent. Patriarchal configurations of Eve's sinful act—like those of Antigone—have the power to undermine *la femme capable*. In this way, the subject loses confidence in her own ability to understand herself.

This section has tried to demonstrate that significant changes in the culture and content of French philosophy have taken place since the moment when, in 1980s Oxford, Montefiore edited his collection of essays, including Ricoeur's "On Interpretation." Montefiore aimed to bridge the gap between the UK's island of philosophy and the land of understanding on the Continent.<sup>6</sup> I have dedicated myself to uncovering a process of gendering in modern philosophy on both sides of the English Channel. This recovery is itself an ongoing process. It remains rare to find attempts to expose the mechanisms of gender oppression in philosophical texts. Yet these texts offer evidence of confidence being lost in the ability to achieve self-understanding in contemporary philosophy.

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<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, on and off the Continent modern philosophy is a part of a culture in transition. This is already evident in philosophical issues like those of the split Kantian subject; of Kantian autonomy and vulnerability; of epistemic injustice and ethical confidence, of gender identity and its intersectional relations to religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on. In other words, contemporary approaches to the modern philosopher's own self-definition reflect the significance of the recent history of, as relevant here, French and British philosophies.

<sup>6</sup> To see this change, we only need to consider the evidence that, since Ricoeur's own death in 2005, his legacy has already resulted in a new foundation being set up in Paris, *Fonds Ricoeur*, along with new societies in the USA and in the UK for the study of Ricoeur, generating an international series of new books, a new international, bilingual journal, and a significantly wide range of international conferences.

GENDER AND THE LIVED BODY: TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONFIDENCE

In 2010 I turned to phenomenology in order to elucidate loss of confidence as a social phenomenon and an ethical relation. As a social phenomenon, confidence has been undermined by the imposition of a fixed gender type. As an ethical relation, confidence between two gendered subjects has been damaged by epistemic injustice. In “The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence,” I elucidate the story of Eve as the first woman who suffers a loss of confidence in her own intrinsic significance. Eve is portrayed in texts of ancient culture and in ongoing religious traditions. We can read the texts of Western culture as they capture the philosophical imaginary in portraits of a woman (Eve) in the process of becoming aware of her body physically and cognitively. At the very same moment in the *Genesis* narrative, when this female figure glimpses her own capability<sup>7</sup> she becomes simultaneously conscious of losing confidence in her own body and in her cognitive ability.<sup>8</sup>

My own reconfiguring of the text, especially of the ancient myth in *Genesis*, which has been read to configure Eve’s desire as excessive and her act sinful, in order to support patriarchy, follows the narrative concerning the “first” woman phenomenologically. Unlike a historical configuration of a particular woman, a phenomenological reconfiguration of Eve—as a generic figure of women—can narrate her loss of confidence to capture the lived experience of women generally in their original relation to men. In reading the narrative phenomenologically we can find that Eve’s desire for knowledge of good and evil leads her not only to disobey a divine command, but to seduce the “first” man (Adam). In this narration, a clear difference appears between Eve and Adam. In other words,

<sup>7</sup> Note that my account of capability derives from a range of Ricoeur’s later writings. More work could still be done on exactly how to define this idea of capability. Is it pre-personal in Merleau-Ponty’s sense? Capability might be both metaphysical and ethical in Ricoeur, especially since informed by Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and Spinoza’s *Ethics*; yet Ricoeur himself clearly appeals to “the phenomenological point of view” to describe the multiple expressions of the capacities of “the ‘I can’” (“Autonomy and Vulnerability” 75). Hermeneutic phenomenology enables Ricoeur to describe “selfhood” and the “I” through “the mode of different abilities”; this includes, “I can speak, can narrate, can act” (“Autonomy and Vulnerability” 76; cf. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 10–23, 298–317).

<sup>8</sup> These points are supported by the depiction of Eve about which Le Doeuff (*The Sex of Knowing* 67–68) and Hersch (“Eve ou la Naissance éternelle du Temps” 27) speak. This depiction comes from the twelfth-century sculptor Gislebert (also known as Gislebertus) whose depiction of the temptation of Eve appears a *linteau* constructed above the north door on the early twelfth-century cathedral at St-Lazare in Autun, France. However, this sculpted depiction of Eve is no longer part of the cathedral; it is in the Musée Rolin in Autun.



this reconfiguration of the *Genesis* text supports differentiation by gender. Gendering the lived body (of Eve) becomes a process which moves from pre-personal capability to personal awareness of moral values.

In addition, although traditionally the patriarchal gendering of the same text had portrayed man (Adam) passively as seduced by woman (Eve), a feminist phenomenological reconfiguration would seek to subvert the configuration of the female protagonist's action as setting in motion "the fall" from an original condition of innocent capability. Instead the feminist reconfiguration of Adam and Eve can demonstrate that the specifically gendered loss of confidence in the power to act and to know under patriarchy left woman doubly disadvantaged by human desire: not only was she wrong to follow her desire for her own moral knowledge by ignoring God's moral command, but she led man to follow her in turning away from the good. This gendering assigns a greater moral guilt to woman than man. And yet, the proposed feminist reconfiguration of this myth turns on the fact that both of these gendered subjects remain capable. Thus, assigning different degrees of evil to one or another of the heterosexually gendered pairs does not lessen human capability: capability remains a human possibility precisely because it is an original power of human action, however the subject is gendered.

Returning to my phenomenological reconfiguration, we can see how Eve becomes aware of, as in the phenomenological terms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "the embodied modalities of her existence" when she is thrown open into a "mortal situation of listening" (Merleau-Ponty 158–70).<sup>9</sup> Becoming attuned to her situation, the woman's self-discovery involves both surprise and terror. Crucially, in moving from pre-personal to personal awareness, Eve remains incarnate; that is, she retains her bodily awareness, movement and entanglement in intersubjective, fleshy existence. At the moment when the gendered subject emerges out of pre-personal existence, she is aware of her own lived through body (Anderson, "The Lived Body" 163–64, 178–79).

Contemporary feminist accounts of the subject and her body have criticized Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and, more generally, the phenomenologist's conception of "the lived body" as the medium of all perception. For example, Judith Butler contends that Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* presupposes heterosexuality and traditional male-gender norms for the body ("Sexual Ideology" 85–100). According

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<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty does not state this about Eve. Instead I employ his phenomenological terms to describe the however implicit, dominant configuration of Eve as her story unfolds from an originally given account of human capability to the apparent "loss" of what was originally hers.



to Butler, the lived body tends to be confused with a “naturalized” body; and the latter is, in any case, always already an interpreted body. For another example of a feminist reading of Merleau-Ponty, Michèle Le Doeuff accuses the *Phenomenology of Perception* of objectifying the female body:

Merleau-Ponty says that for a normal subject, the body of another person is not perceived as an object. The perception that might have been objective is in fact inhabited by another, more secret, perception, which, he says, accentuates the erogenous zones of the visible body of the other according to a sexual schema peculiar to the perceiving subject so that this body will call forth “the gestures of the masculine body.” He was speaking of the visible body in general, perceived by a normal subject; however, it becomes clear that this visible body is a woman’s body, seen and redrawn by the gaze of a man, who before long will move unhesitatingly from gaze to gesture! Not only is the subject necessarily male, the visible body necessarily that of a woman, but also the gaze (of a man directed at a woman) can remake what it sees, to accentuate what he finds erogenous. A form of visual violence is normalized here in all its generality. On principle and as a general procedure, the (masculine) gaze re-creates the visible body of a (feminine) other precisely as it wishes. (*The Sex of Knowing* 79; cf. *Phenomenology of Perception* 180–81)

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler discusses Michel Foucault’s critique of “the trans-historical subject” in phenomenology (115–17). Can there be such a subject? Clearly for existential phenomenologists like Simone de Beauvoir the subject is always embodied and situated in a world, transcending history. And yet, at the time when Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur developed their respective phenomenological accounts of one’s own body (*le corps propre*) in Paris, even though they had read Beauvoir’s phenomenology in *The Second Sex*,<sup>10</sup> their descriptions seem to assume a male-neutral body as, quite possibly, a trans-historical subject. In particular, they attempted no explicitly gendered description of Eve and her gradual awakening to the pre-personal capability to which her body will in some sense cleave, but from which she will in another sense be separated by the critical process of gendering the male as “subject” and the female as “abject” (Anderson, “Abjection and Defilement”). The dual sense of the body both cleaving to and separating from pre-personal form creates an ambiguous condition for the lived body.

Today, if we like, we can read the dual sense of this ambiguous condition as it appears in Ricoeur’s later phenomenology of pre-given human

<sup>10</sup> For useful references to the influence Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty had on each other’s phenomenological writings, see Morris 129–34.

capability that nevertheless struggles with misunderstandings of self and of others. In his last text, Ricoeur admits that the course of “recognition” for the capable subject encounters existential difficulties of identity, alterity, differences, violence, inabilities undergone, failures of memory and endless conflict on the level of lived through experiences (*The Course of Recognition* 249–54). I see an opening in this text to take up the loss of confidence in the ability to understand oneself and be understood in terms of the gendered body.

Let us now return to the story of Eve who is configured as a figure of abjection. Appropriating Merleau-Ponty’s use of “flesh,” we can describe the pre-personal form of Eve’s incarnate capability constituting a “fleshy” intersubjective field of affection. Flesh connects bodies and world(s) intersubjectively. Moreover, at the same time as constituting an intersubjective field, this living body can be surprised by the upsurges of transcendence which “fly up like sparks from a fire” (Merleau-Ponty xv) setting off new, more personal discoveries in relation to the “lived through” world. Flesh constitutes a generality from which particularity emerges. Imagining how Merleau-Ponty would portray Eve, she would gradually emerge as the lived body and person (subject): but this is she who will be abjected. Describing her in Merleau-Ponty’s terms of “flesh” and “fleshy” is to a certain degree at least consistent with the biblical description of the first woman’s body. Yet the negative imagery of female flesh has been rejected by those philosophers and feminists who think we have—and should have—left mythical stories and images behind once we have been educated by history, biology, genetics, etc. Nevertheless, descriptions of flesh, especially including the female body’s association with the nascent subject who is abjected, remain part of the ethical, social and spiritual imaginary of Western cultures.<sup>11</sup>

Arguably the term “fleshiness” captures how Western philosophers still imagine and connect sexed bodies. In the (feminist) terms of Merleau-Ponty’s contemporary and friend, Simone de Beauvoir, the female body becomes “the second sex” or even “the sex.” In the present context, our focus is the manner in which confidence (*la confiance*) and lost confidence, or mistrust (*méfiance*), of individually gendered bodies becomes a critical issue for contemporary feminist and non-feminist philosophers. For the sake of argument, confidence has been identified as a social phenomenon; and it is something that can be lost. It can also be elucidated, in phenomenological terms, at the point (in time) when the lived body intersects with the personal realm of that body-subject’s history and culture. In France, Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir each offer highly significant descriptions of the

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<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Catherine Tomas for directing my attention to the concept of “enfleshment” as ideology inculcated in the body, as found in McLaren 66–70.

ambiguous condition of the lived body. They uncover the manner in which the pre-personal realm of (capable) flesh surges forth in sensual, spiritual and ethical life creating the possibility of intersubjective communication. In other words, this existential phenomenology makes manifest fleshiness as an original medium of communication enabling body-subjects to remain entangled in an intersubjective world.<sup>12</sup> Thus, body-subjects become aware of themselves as vulnerable selves in their relations within the world.

Feminism has a crucial role to play in a phenomenology of lost confidence and, in the present case, in the loss of a self's ability to understand herself. What makes loss a useful focus? First, a feminist critique of lost confidence in a woman's own capability challenges an uncritical and non-reflexive stance on the self; and, second, this critical focus elucidates a capacity for understanding gender in a time of philosophical transition. Claims to gender-neutrality in Western philosophy conceal highly significant issues of loss of confidence, loss of epistemic justice and loss of reflexive self-understanding. Loss not only damages subjects of knowledge and action, but this damage obscures that which was in phenomenological terms originally given: capability. Admittedly, there are problems with phenomenological philosophy. However, phenomenological terms enable us to explore given conditions, and then, following Ricoeur, we can add hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is interpretation; and, in this context, the hermeneuticist interprets the opaque, in order to make the capacities of the subject more transparent. So, hermeneutics can help women and men to make sense of themselves, to understand their own cognitive and conative abilities, and to achieve greater self-awareness. The present appropriation of Ricoeurian hermeneutic phenomenology aims to keep women and men critically open to the gendering of philosophy in cultural transition. All too roughly, philosophy as part of a changing European culture can help to articulate the material, social and cognitive dimensions of a subject's conditioning. In particular, hermeneutical philosophers can seek to understand those dimensions of a subject that phenomenologists would describe as "non-natural."

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<sup>12</sup> The critical question for a feminist philosopher is: in what sense does an individual body exist? It should be stressed that Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* elucidates the general pre-personal (motor) intentionality of which an individual body is not its own cause and for which it is not responsible. At the same time what is called a pre-personal fleshiness remains inseparable from the body's personal life. It is as if this phenomenology employs a transcendental argument to deduce the necessity of pre-personal flesh for the possibility of any personal experience. It follows that the capable fleshy body exists as the necessary *a priori* form for all of the modes of incarnate life; in turn, these modes are both attuned to a field of sensations and located within a larger situation of historical change and cultural variations.

## GENDERING THE SUBJECT: LOSS AND CHANGE

44 | Text matters for my Ricoeurian hermeneutic phenomenology of gendered confidence. In “The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence” I experiment with a phenomenological reading of a text about the awakening of a woman to her cognitive and non-cognitive capacities. As already suggested, the exploration of the philosophical imagery in the texts written by French phenomenologists—like the philosophical imagery found in Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception* or in Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*—can help to elucidate the gendering of the lived body. Merleau-Ponty’s highly significant, even if contentious, conception of the lived body has been understood to be “a kind of” post-Kantian *a priori* insofar as its flesh knits human bodies together and to a world (“The Lived Body” 163, 168). As a synthetic form capable of creating unity out of multiple sensations, the lived body appears to be capable of generating differentiations in its relation to the world. Yet what Merleau-Ponty portrays as the openness and the relational ties of a “fleshy” existence creates a deeply ambiguous picture: the body is located in a world it did not create and over which it does not have ultimate control. Given this awareness of the lived body in such a world, we are not surprised that the subject loses confidence in her own capability.

Now, for a Ricoeurian phenomenological interpretation of the gendered, but capable body, it is necessary to recognize that gender becomes a factor in regulating the cognitive capacities of the body-subject as it emerges in a personal and social world of loss and discord. Such a loss is especially the case for the gendered subject who is inhibited by personally and socially debilitating configurations of her actions in (religious) myths. In turn, the doubt and loss which we have seen portrayed in the traditional patriarchal configurations of the myth about Eve bear a strong similarity to twentieth-century portraits of the young Beauvoir who desired philosophical knowledge, yet who in the end actually gives in to the philosophical superiority of “the philosopher,” Sartre (“The Lived Body” 176-77). In the past twenty years, feminist philosophers have been especially perplexed by the young Simone (as Beauvoir appears in her memoirs), who after a single disagreement with Sartre in the Luxembourg Gardens in 1929 Paris gives in to him from that moment forward. Why, when Beauvoir attempted to defend her own philosophical ideas for a pluralist morality, did she give up and accept defeat not only for those philosophical ideas on that day in 1929 (when she had just successfully passed her philosophy exams), but for the rest of her life? From that moment she never calls herself a philosopher (cf. Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia’s Choice* 136).

Adding Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of a capable subject to Beauvoir's existential phenomenology of "the second sex" enables us to interpret the bodily situation of a woman as originally capable, yet vulnerable to gender norms. Insofar as a woman recognizes herself already born capable, alive with a capacity to increase actively the power to exist, she has the capacity to overcome at least that vulnerability which results from a profound, yet unnecessary loss of ethical confidence. Like the mythical figure, Eve, Beauvoir as the young woman seeking moral knowledge is awakened to the incarnate modalities of her existence, to her cognitive capacity for knowledge of her own body and of her own goodness; and yet Beauvoir's self-doubt and what seems to be her gendering lead to a loss of self-confidence, in her own ability to understand self (and to think philosophically). In the terms of hermeneutic phenomenology of the gendered subject, we could say that a woman's fleshy incarnation appears timelessly destined to action that results in disabilities; and yet, the always capable subject still possesses the power to restore her ability to strive for greater self-understanding.

The question is no longer: "why . . ." the loss of confidence? Instead it is: how can the subject grasp that her loss is not permanent? Intuitively the answer would seem to be that she cannot lose what is fundamentally and originally hers. A real and urgent problem emerges for the hermeneutic phenomenologist who tries to interpret the actual ambiguity surrounding the subject's incarnation within a fleshy, bodily existence. Transcendence of this incarnation is strictly speaking impossible. The woman in that phenomenological account of a fleshy existence becomes aware not of confidence in her own capability, but of lost confidence. Extending this phenomenology, with the help of Beauvoir's 1949 text, it can be argued that what made a particular person "a woman" at a certain historical moment, and within a certain Western philosophical tradition, had also marked her out as "the second sex." Moreover, the variations of gender distinguish her confidence as a relational phenomenon. The difficulty is that neither women nor men in phenomenology have employed the necessary hermeneutical tools to adequately address gender relations.

My proposal is that a Ricoeurian hermeneutic phenomenology of the gendered, yet *capable* subject would address the interpersonal reality of gender, transforming negative relations into something positive. This would require the balancing of confidence between subjects; that is, ethical confidence requires the appropriate degree of confidence—neither under- nor overconfidence—for each and every gendered subject. Today an interpersonal conception of reciprocally related levels of confidence for gendered subjects seems (to me) a necessary condition for self-understanding within our bodily and cognitive life. And this self-understanding

would be supported by a fundamentally human, cognitive-conative capability.

An ethical account of reciprocally related degrees of confidence requires recognition of, on the one hand, a fragile belief in being part of material nature as an active, infinite power, in which each individual can come to understand both the power to act and the power to suffer, and, on the other hand, an ontological grounding of confidence in the infinite power of capable humans to affect and be affected productively. Together the ethics and the ontology of a capable subject could, according to Ricoeur, reverse personal doubt with belief, interpersonal dissymmetry with the practical goal of mutuality, and social-material deprivation with the regulative ideal of fullness of life.

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To illustrate the relation of a pre-given body-mind unity to the confidence of a capable subject, one has to consider a practical issue: that of a cognitive disability. According to Ricoeur, “To believe oneself unable to speak is already to be linguistically disabled, to be excommunicated so to speak” (“Autonomy and Vulnerability” 76–77). Decisive damage can be done to the ability to speak when a subject loses belief in herself as a speaker. Linguistic disability might strike us as a strange example for unearthing how pre-given capability helps to restore confidence; yet it is meant to point to the relational and contextual nature of lost confidence. In “Autonomy and Vulnerability” Ricoeur re-establishes the moral power of human capability, even though vulnerability renders autonomy fragile. The moral power of knowing that she is capable—as implied in she “ought” because she “can” speak—helps the subject to confront with confidence in a fragile belief in her autonomous capability. With this knowledge of both autonomy and vulnerability in the power of (her) language to communicate, she can recognize that her lost confidence in, for example, speaking is not irreversible.

The critical issue here rests in the degree to which gendered subjects maintain an appropriate self-confidence in relation to each other and, in our example, as speaking subjects. In other words, the subject’s confidence in her own capability seems to be a variable of gender; and gender is both intersectional and interrelational. Why does “he” have so much confidence? Why does “she” have so little? Gender’s relation to sexual identity, race, class, religion and so on affects who she is and how much confidence he has. The worst extreme is the point at which a subject’s loss of confidence in her own abilities is so great that she barely exists in her own right. The complication is that, whether in a lack or an excess of confidence, subjects reflect their gendering without any consistent lines of demarcation.

To repeat, gendering does not have to occur only in terms of a binary of sex. And similarly, feminine and masculine abilities are not simply

mapped onto the female and male sex, respectively. Moreover, gendering is not a fixed process which neither an individual nor a collective can control. On these grounds, it is my contention that the social and material mechanisms controlling gender roles and relations can and must become the object of philosophical debate, if we are to strive for hermeneutical justice.

### CAPABILITY: ETHICAL CONFIDENCE AND INCREASING POWER

Ricoeur makes another bold, yet initially strange claim that “The confidence I place in my power to act is part of this very power. To believe that I can is already to be capable” (“Autonomy and Vulnerability” 76). Understanding this claim requires returning to Ricoeur’s assumptions about self-reflexivity, but also to his later discussions of power (“Autonomy and Vulnerability” 77). The power as interactive moves subjects to strive rationally for life with and for others; but this is only if power can be enhanced relationally, not inhibited. An adequate understanding of the latter remains crucial to giving an account of confidence. Earlier in the present essay, confidence appeared as ethical and social; and it is a distinctive characteristic of a capable body. A body’s loss of confidence can be understood in relation to historical and social structures which inhibit or prohibit her cognitive and conative activities. Constraints of both culture and nature become evident in gendering the lived body; that is, whether or not gender inhibits confidence makes a decisive difference to the capable subject. In my previous discussions of the lived body, gender’s intersection with various mechanisms of oppression has had a critical role to play; gender on its own cannot make sense of whether or not a subject’s confidence is ethical. So, together the question of confidence and that of power guide us back to human capability.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology of human capability reflects the changes in twentieth-century European philosophy. His early reliance on French neo-Kantianism by way of his friend and colleague, Jean Nabert, was already signposted in Ricoeur’s account of reflexivity (“On Interpretation” 187–97). Later self-reflexivity informs his phenomenological reading of both ethical confidence as a mutually empowering relation between subjects and power-in-common as a human capability. Briefly, in Ricoeur’s terms, “the ‘I can’” reflects confidence and power. Coincidentally, feminist philosophers in the twentieth century moved their interpretations of the subject of philosophy away from an exclusive Cartesian “I think.” Women in philosophy began to challenge a Cartesian separation of mind and body for privileging mind as masculine and body as feminine. In response, both men and women philosophers began to turn away from



Cartesian dualism; some feminist and non-feminist philosophers turned to Spinoza's monism.

Ricoeur himself reflects this Spinozist trend in his conception of human capability. In particular, Ricoeur's appropriation of Spinoza's *conatus* makes sense of capability as a conative power. And my interpretation of capability as both conative and cognitive depends upon understanding *conatus* as the human striving for complete understanding within the whole of nature (or life). Roughly, but importantly, "cognitive" in the context of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology describes the knowledge-element in a rational power to act; and "conative" describes the element of striving to understand life. Both the cognitive and the conative elements of human capability remain necessary for the Ricoeurian acting and suffering subject, in order for it to increase in activity in this life. Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology uncovers a subject who is originally capable of increasing simultaneously in knowledge and in joy. If lost, this capability can be restored through actively increasing the cognitive and conative powers of interacting subjects.

In brief, my reconstruction of a Ricoeurian cognitive-conative capability has aimed to capture at least two of the elemental powers of the human subject. Ricoeur derives these ideas of power from the Spinozist dimension of the French neo-Kantian reflexive philosophy in early twentieth-century France. These ideas are most frequently associated by Ricoeur himself with the influence of Nabert, whose philosophy in the 1940s made a profound and lasting impact on Ricoeur ("On Interpretation" 188).

Ricoeur's Spinozism more than his Kantianism might attract contemporary gender theorists and feminist ethicists. An additional attraction in the later Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of the capable subject is the power in compassion. This moves us to a just distance in friendship; that is, an increase in power becomes apparent in highly distinctive forms of love and respect. Here friendship implies a certain type of love (*philia*) for the sake of a mutually good life. In his last writings, Ricoeur describes a mutual sharing, or an accompanying one another, in life together. He illustrates this compassionate gaze in the extreme experience of dying, or of accompanying the dying, in "living up to death." This means that "the dying person [is] still living, [insofar as] calling on the deepest resources of life" (Ricoeur, *Living up to Death* 14).

Yet it is important to note that Ricoeurian compassion is meant to be a responsible human practice, as such there is no fusion with the person dying, or the person attending to the dying. Instead an active passion retains the possibility of moving—with appropriate confidence and increasing cognitive-conative power—towards what Spinoza calls an intellectual love of the whole; that is, an infinite power of nature, in which we each



play active parts. As long as each of us is increasing in power, each increases in knowledge of nature's dynamic activities.

Ricoeur insists that compassion is like friendship. But here he also seems to have in mind an Aristotelian activity for the sake of the good; this activity is a becoming in the incomplete actualization of a power. The activity of playing parts in the dynamic of nature, then, constitutes a continuously active, positively powerful life. In this way, we have the capability to become confident in "living up to death," that is, we are confident in what we are capable of, including goodness and mutually empowering activity right to the end of each singular life. Crucially, there can be positive power in the activities that make up friendship, compassion and increasing knowledge; such activity increases the infinite relational powers of autonomous, yet vulnerable subjects.

It is important to note here that for Ricoeur compassion means attending to a dying person without fusion. And yet we can still uphold Spinoza's idea of free emotion whereby a person both loves herself and participates in the infinite intellectual love of life as essential to a self-sustaining love, even in the movements of living-dying. Ironically, this brings us to a fairly Kantian point. While Spinoza conceives the role of power in transforming inactive passions into active ones, Kant recognizes the role of respect in maintaining the right distance between subjects. Ricoeur adds the distinctive characteristic of treating oneself as other in the active and responsible practice of compassion. In the spirit of French reflexive philosophy, "the difficult art of existence is distilled not only in (and thanks to) the love of one's neighbour as oneself but also in loving oneself as another" (Jervolino 536; cf. Anderson, "From Ricoeur to Life" 21–29). This mutual love encourages ethical confidence and so, the increasing ability to understand ourselves.

## CONCLUSION: THE EPISTEMIC LIMIT OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

To sum up, my own work on "the subject's loss of self-confidence in her own ability to understand herself" began in the 1980s with study of Kant and Ricoeur. An awareness of gendering was beginning to take place, but the awareness of what gendering has done, or could do, to the subject's confidence was not immediately apparent. Nevertheless, I have tried to demonstrate here that Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology can be used to elucidate how philosophical cultures shape the process not only of gendering, but of giving an account of the identity of human subjects; the challenge is to uncover how gendering as a hidden process in determining human identity intersects with other material and social mechanisms as well as cognitive disabilities and human vulnerabilities.

We will not have arrived at any consensus on the subject's gender identity, or, in Butler's words, "of giving an account of oneself." Yet we have hopefully understood that the process of gendering is highly complex, especially in cultures in rapid transition. This is precisely because life exceeds any account we could ever give of ourselves. In Butler's highly significant words,

If the identity we say we are cannot possibly capture us and marks immediately an excess and opacity that falls outside the categories of identity, then any effort "to give an account of oneself" will have to fail in order to approach being true. As we ask to know the other, or ask that the other say, finally or definitively, who he or she is, it will be important not to expect an answer that will ever satisfy. By not pursuing satisfaction and by letting the question remain open, even enduring, we let the other live, since life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it. If letting the other live is part of any ethical definition of recognition, then this version of recognition will be based less on knowledge than on an apprehension of epistemic limits. (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 42–43, also 34; cf. Cavarero 92)

Although not a self-confessed Kantian, Butler articulates extremely well the epistemic limit of any phenomenological attempt to give an account of oneself. But this limit is not a reason for despair or inertia. Instead, within epistemic limits each of us can recognize the significance of both confidence in our cognitive-conative capability and power in increasingly understanding one another. No matter what the limit to our self-knowledge, together the ethical confidence and the interactive power of capable subjects could still animate the life of each and every self.

To conclude, let us return to Kristeva's reading of Antigone. As I have already proposed, Kristeva's re-configuration of Antigone serves in re-visioning gender for women today. In "Antigone: Limit and Horizon" Kristeva herself clearly follows after Kant in giving a central role to "limit." She asserts that

a growing number of women confront the limit states of human experience with the indestructible serenity of Antigone. And who reveal themselves as a horizon—for better and for worse. A horizon at which the laws themselves, because this all takes place in the social order, are susceptible of being transformed; but this transformation takes place first in the depth of the psyche, before being consecrated, eventually, by political justice. (227)

I cannot help, but interpret this “indestructible serenity” as an image of woman’s capability: and so, she becomes confident in striving for self-understanding. Moreover, in living the intensity of this human striving to be the confident, self-reflexive subject of a Ricoeurian-inspired hermeneutic phenomenology, we endeavour not only to understand life for and with other subjects, but to live the life of subjects whose ethical confidence maintains the right negotiation of gender in interpersonal relations. So, despite the epistemic limit, a Ricoeurian hermeneutic phenomenologist might agree with the gender theorist’s (Butler’s) conclusion that the crucial message is to let ourselves and others live!

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“Eyes wide shut”: Paul Ricoeur’s  
Biblical Hermeneutics and the Course of  
Recognition in John Milton’s  
*Paradise Lost*

## ABSTRACT

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The author of the paper analyzes John Milton’s great epic narrative through the lenses of Paul Ricoeur’s biblical hermeneutics and his philosophical reflection, in particular the second chapter of the philosopher’s last book, *Parcours de la Reconnaissance (The Course of Recognition)*, devoted mainly to the prospects and pitfalls of recognizing oneself. Two excerpts from St. Paul’s Letter to Romans (14:23b) and the Letter to Corinthians (1, 13:12) highlight the main points of reference in this argument: (1) the concept of involuntary wrongdoing and (2) the contrast between the present opacity and the projected transparency of the knowing subject, connected with the promise of seeing face-to-face, whose fulfilment is rooted in God’s antecedent knowledge of a human being. It is argued that Ricoeur’s focus on the precarious fate of the “fallible man” and his simultaneous desire to outline the destiny of the “capable man” elucidate Milton’s masterpiece evocations of the Aristotelian *anagnorisis* in *Paradise Lost*.

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**ABSTRACT**

The witty title of Stanley Kubrick's film reminds us of the manifold paradoxes involved in the process of self-recognition which are presented in great works of world literature. The tragic hero is often forced to see in retrospect his own errors through the gaping wounds of the "eyes wide shut": from the eyeless Oedipus to blind Gloucester in *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Moreover, Kubrick's joke bears an oblique trace of yet another great narrative of Western culture which begins with the seductive prospect of infinite knowledge ("your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like gods"), culminates with the eating of the forbidden fruit, and ends with the painfully exact, but at the same time most unwelcome fulfilment of the devil's equivocation: "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig trees together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:5, 7). As we all know, the biblical myth of the Fall provided the canvas of John Milton's great epic poem about "man's first disobedience"; and, like the anonymous author of the biblical narrative, Milton shows that sin hinders the moment of self-recognition and leads the First Couple into the thicket of self-deceit. Does that mean, however, that Milton's sinners and sufferers must put up with this impaired vision of themselves until death definitively "shuts wide" their already sightless eyes? This question will inform our reading of the poem viewed from the perspective of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical reflection and his biblical hermeneutics.

Seeking to disentangle the lacunas of *anagnorisis* in *Paradise Lost*, we ought to invoke two famous Pauline assertions concerning the problem of human guilt and the concomitant issue of the accessibility of self-knowledge, which allows the human agent to assume responsibility for his/her deeds (not only wilful transgressions, but also fatal mistakes). As we shall soon find out, these assertions are crucial both for the readers of Milton's Christian epic and the addressees of Paul Ricoeur's last major book, entitled *Parcours de la Reconnaissance (The Course of Recognition)*. Since guilt comes first in the order of biblical narrative (Genesis 3), let us start with St. Paul's definition of sin—which, as we all know, in the Greek of the New Testament is called by the same name which Aristotle had used way before St. Paul to describe the predicament of tragic guilt: *hamartia*. In the Letter to Romans 14:23b we read that "whatever . . . is not of faith, sin is" (14:23b). In the Greek original this warning reads: *pan de ho ouk ek pisteos, hamartia estin (Bible Hub)*. If then, as Ricoeur reminds us, the Greek playwrights already recognized the fact that even unwilling actions have a bearing on the future, since in their course reality is re-shaped by the

protagonist in such a way that s/he cannot return to primordial innocence, it is only in the letter of St. Paul that we are confronted with further implications of the concept of involuntary wrongdoing. The Pauline definition, we could say, offers a pointed retort to all the self-acquitting protests of Greek tragic heroes who, as Ricoeur accurately observes, strive to distinguish between acts done willingly, in accordance with oneself—*bekon*—and deeds committed against oneself, unwillingly—*akon* (*Course* 91). This is precisely where St. Paul enters the stage with his definition of guilt. Our understanding of the notion of *hamartia*, he seems to imply, cannot be separated from what we mean by *pistis*, which denotes not only “faith,” but also “inner conviction,” “self-assurance,” in other words, the very core of our “self.” In other words, St. Paul seems to imply that all acts performed unwillingly, against one’s *true* self, must be deemed sinful. The argument that the ancient Greek heroes used in self-defence now turns against them, as self-ignorance and especially deliberate self-deceit are not just the main reason for, but the very essence of, sin.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, though, St. Paul knows only too well that that full self-awareness (apparently a necessary prerequisite for upright behaviour) is an unattainable ideal in this life. This allowance is expressed in the widely-known passage from 1 Corinthians: “We see indeed presently through a glass in obscurity, then moreover face to face; presently I know in part, then moreover *I will know as also I have been fully known*” (13:12; emphasis added). Let us also invoke the original version: *Blepomen gar arti di esoptrou en anigmati; tote de prosopon pros prosopon; arti ginosko ek merous; tote de epegnosomai, kathos kai epegnosthen* (*Bible Hub*). Usually quoted as the promise of the saints’ participation in divine mysteries (“I will know God”), the Pauline confession certainly does preclude another possibility involved in that face-to-face encounter, that of an ultimate *self*-recognition (“I will know myself”; “I shall regain my own likeness, disfigured by sin”). Whichever interpretation we choose, we cannot miss the fact that the contrast between the present opacity and the projected transparency of the knowing subject entails a promise whose fulfilment is rooted in God’s *antecedent* knowledge of a human being (the English “I have been known” well renders the Greek *epegnosthen*), just as our imperfect love

<sup>1</sup> A reader familiar with Søren Kierkegaard’s concept of demonic despair will immediately recognize the influence of Pauline theology on Kierkegaard’s understanding of sin. In *The Sickness unto Death* the philosopher somewhat misleadingly asserts that Scriptures offer no spiritual definition of sin, other than equating it with disobedience; later on he provides his own definition which in fact can be very well reconciled with St. Paul’s stance: “Sin is: before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself” (66). Both states imply a separation from and disagreement with one’s present self, articulated either by a flight away from it, or a desire to achieve it.



derives from His love, which comes before our love, and our justification rests on His antecedent grace. St. Paul's vision resembles thus both the assurance given to the prophet of the Old Testament: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5), and the soothing awareness of the Psalmist who responds with gratitude to God's continual presence:

*You have searched me O Lord, and known me...  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; I cannot attain unto it.  
Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or wither will I fly from your  
presence? . . .  
Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day:  
the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.  
(Psalm 139:1–12; emphasis added)*

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Moreover, the fulfilment of the promise is guaranteed by God's infallible memory, which makes up for constant human betrayals and inevitable forgetfulness.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, though, the accomplishment of the ideal is postponed until the end of time, so that "now," in this life, self-recognition signifies a partial, intermediate and unstable course of action. Yet again, the fact that all the moral, epistemological and ontological possibilities which characterize a human being (Kearney 50) ultimately refer to the eschatological possibility of Salvation only enhances their value.

We may now confront St. Paul's promise with Ricoeur's illuminating essay on the winding paths of the human journey of self-discovery. His analysis comprises three primary meanings of recognition: (1) simple and straightforward identification, (2) recognizing oneself, with recollection and remembering as instruments of obtaining self-knowledge, and (3) mutual recognition that involves not only the struggle between individuals demanding recognition from their fellow human beings, but also signifies bonds of gratitude, mutual acknowledgement and appreciation.<sup>3</sup> Although Ricoeur's major concern seems to be teasing out the consequences of the Hegelian understanding of the struggle for recognition, all three stages of his argument are equally relevant for the reader of *Paradise*

<sup>2</sup> Memory and promise, as we remember, are two pillars of recognition in Ricoeur's philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> All these three aspects play a crucial role in the New Testament account of the hour of darkness. First, while saying "I recognize this man," I mean "This is the man I have seen before"; like during Christ's trial in the high priest's house the maid recognized Peter as one of His disciples: "This man was also with him" (Luke 22:56). Then the bond of gratitude, acknowledgement and appreciation is broken by Peter's denial: "Woman, I know him not" (Luke 22:57). Also, Peter obtains self-knowledge only after he wants to conceal his true identity ("Man, I am not" [22:59]), precisely when the crow of a cock makes him recall Christ's words: "And Peter remembered the word of the Lord how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (22:61; emphasis added).



*Lost*. In our analysis attention will be most paid to the second chapter of his book, devoted mainly to the prospects and pitfalls of recognizing oneself. It is there that Ricoeur invokes the Aristotelian concept of *anagnorismos*, which denotes a sudden reversal of fortune, resulting in the protagonist's transition from ignorance to self-knowledge. He illustrates his argument with references to the *Odyssey* and two plays about Oedipus (*Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*), which anchor the meaning of the term in family relations. Accordingly, Ricoeur begins by reminding us that the story of Odysseus' return focuses mainly on the episodes showing how the protagonist step by step reveals his true identity: first to his son, then to his wife and his father. An analysis of this literary example is the starting point of Ricoeur's project of the "phenomenology of the capable human" (Greisch 94). Since the Homeric message concerning the epic hero's capacity for "recognizing himself as responsible" remains limited, as Ricoeur concedes, "to the role that tradition assigns to those that stand in the entourage of the master" (*Course* 77), this one-sided, one-way *anagnorisis* can only be the first step on the way to the concept of mutual recognition, and seems to have little bearing on the protagonist's self-recognition. What is more, the course of recognition in Ricoeur's account does develop in a linear succession. The philosopher's next example after Odysseus' stepping forward is Oedipus' withdrawal. The title of this section reads: "At Colonus, Oedipus retracts." Yet behind Oedipus' consistent preoccupation with undeserved suffering and "the irresistible character of the supernatural forces that govern human destiny," Ricoeur perceives a dramatic persona who is capable of recognizing himself as the "author of the innermost action consisting of his evaluating his acts, particularly retrospectively" (*Course* 77). Even if the gods manipulated Oedipus into fratricide and incest, they cannot take over his suffering "endured in a responsible manner" (77). Towards the end of this section, Ricoeur quotes Bernard Williams, who reminds us that "in the story of one's life there is an authority exercised by what one has done, *and not merely by what one has intentionally done*" (79; emphasis added) and in the light of Williams's observation he calls Oedipus a "suffering human being who recognizes himself as agent" (79). Then Ricoeur stresses the role of human effective capacities, when he claims that "happiness has its source in us, in our activities" and, following on from that, locates "the deepest-lying possibility" of self-recognition in its "anchorage in the goal of happiness in those activities that make up the human task as such, our task" (81). But we should not miss the fact that in the section devoted to the "guilty-innocent" Oedipus, the emphasis on human agency which involves a capability to achieve happiness seems overshadowed by the tragic hero's negative capacity for doing wrong, which in turn reminds us of

Søren Kierkegaard's definition of "the human task as such" as being continually "educated by the possibility" of choosing the *wrong* path at the crossroads of recognition (Hanson).<sup>4</sup>

We may indeed claim that Oedipus "retracts" because the tragic hero does not plead guilty of crime even when he confesses that he is the very man who has committed all the deeds of which he is now accused. At the same time, though, Oedipus' admission that he was "capable" of doing what has been done (92), marks an important step forward on the way towards self-recognition.<sup>5</sup> His discovery also involves the human negative propensity for evil, which later will become part-and-parcel of the Christian project of knowing oneself. But again, this gloomy reminder shows only one side of the coin, as indicated in the promise recorded by St. Paul: *arti ginosko ek merous; tote de epignosomai, kathos kai epegnosthen*. Also in Ricoeur's account, potency cannot be separated from limitation and the other way round. His "capable man" and fallen/"*fallible* man" are Siamese twins.<sup>6</sup> In effect, instead of seeking with Aristotle the *moments* of recognition (as fixed points on the axis of narrative time), the French philosopher invites his readers to trace the "*movements* of recognition" (Greisch 95), which better correspond with the ebbs and flows of the process of questioning and recognizing oneself.

Bearing all this in mind, let us see if Ricoeur's observation can throw light on the story of the Fall recounted in John Milton's poetic theodicy, in which the voice of a suffering human can be distinctly heard in the poet-narrator's self-reflexive incursions. The aim of Milton's epic, as we all remember, is not to dwell on "mortal woes," but "to justify the ways of God to man" (I: l. 26).<sup>7</sup> If we choose to read the verb "justify" in the legal sense (meaning: "to find not guilty") or even the theological one ("to absolve, free from guilt"), we are not far from the risk of blasphemy, but Milton's project consists primarily in understanding the

<sup>4</sup> In his presentation Hanson discussed the reader's possible responses to the story of an Indian ascetic who, after tasting wine, became addicted to drink, included in Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*. He argued: "The point of such proverbial pieces of partial wisdom is that 'I could just as easily be that fellow.' But the person educated by possibility . . . thinks 'I *am* that fellow.' For the basis on which the student of possibility can be absolutely identified with the Indian ascetic is the basis of shared sin-consciousness."

<sup>5</sup> "In an ethical vision not only is it true that freedom is the ground of evil, but the avowal of evil is also the condition of the consciousness of evil. For in this avowal one can detect the delicate connection of the past and the future, of the self and its acts, of non-being and pure action in the very core of freedom," argued Ricoeur in his Preface to *Fallible Man* (xlix).

<sup>6</sup> I am alluding here to the title of Ricoeur's book: *Fallible Man*.

<sup>7</sup> Most future references to Milton's poem in this essay come from Book IX, therefore they will be followed by line number only.

human predicament which informs the biblical narratives of the Origin and the Fall. Viewed in this light, *Paradise Lost* can be called a “tale of recognition,” and should be interpreted as a paradigmatic example of recognition through narration. Moreover, we are invited to read Milton’s work not only as an epic story told in verse form, but also as a poem in its own right: a hymn of creation, a penitential psalm and a song of redemption. The structure of this poem discloses an intricate architectural plan: in Book VI, precisely half way through the text, Raphael gives a detailed description of the battle in Heaven and the Fall of Satan, which thus becomes the central episode of the story re-told by the poet and the axis of symmetry of the entire narration. In Book VII, as if to remind the reader of the seven days of creation, Raphael tells Adam how the world was created. Earlier, in Book III, one third of the poem’s length, the image of the Holy Trinity shines bright: after another Invocation to God’s Wisdom identified with the Holy Spirit, the Son offers himself a ransom for man and the Father ordains the Incarnation of the Son. The Fall of Man is shown in Book IX, two thirds of the poem’s entire length, symmetrically corresponding with the preceding promise of Salvation. Moreover, unlike the former episodes of Holy History which were mediated by angelic messengers who reported to Adam the action that took place in Heaven, this time it is Adam and Eve’s turn to become the chief actors in the drama of Original Sin. The action of the tragic plot, as during a theatrical performance, enfolds on two planes simultaneously, while the reader is to recognize himself in the protagonists of the story “shown” by the poet, almost as if he was looking into the enchanted mirror of the stage.

In this dramatic re-enactment of the Fall, the Puritan poet follows most accurately the account provided in Genesis 3. Beguiled by the serpent’s deceitful eloquence, Milton’s Eve tastes the forbidden fruit, but the fatal effects of her deed do not become obvious to her at once. Intoxicated “as with wine,” she sings pagan hymns to the tree, rejoicing in her allegedly new, heightened clear-sightedness and expecting to learn even more from future experience:

O sovereign, virtuous, precious of all trees  
 In Paradise, of operation blest  
 To sapience, hitherto obscured, infamed . . .  
 Experience, next to thee I owe,  
 Best guide, not following thee I had remained  
 In ignorance; thou opens wisdom’s way,  
 And giv’st access, though secret she retire. (ll. 795–97, 807–10)

Exactly the same trope of eyes wide open and the broad prospects of knowledge and experience recur in Eve's temptation of Adam, when she convinces him that:

This tree is not, as we are told, a tree  
 Of danger tasted, nor to evil unknown  
 Opening the way, but of divine effect  
 To open eyes, and make them gods who taste . . . I  
 Have also tasted, and have also found  
 The effects to correspond—opener mine eyes,  
 Dim erst, dilated spirits, ampler heart,  
 And growing up to godhead. (ll. 863–78)

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Adam, at first anxious about the possible misfortune that the breach of God's commandment must bring, unwittingly repeats Eve's mistake, praising the delicious "taste of . . . sapience." However, as the narrator hastens to explain, instead of opening the path of wisdom, the eating of the fruit displays "far other operation, carnal desire inflaming" (l. 1012). Adam is thus at once infected with covetousness, and his wife responds with equal intensity "he on Eve / Begun to cast lascivious eyes, she him / As wantonly repaid" (ll. 1013–15). They both fall prey to a lusty Cupid (Amor) who as if glides between Milton's lines, leaving but a trace of his invisible presence on the level of lexis: "he [Adam] forbore not glance or toy / Of *amorous* intent, well understood / Of Eve, whose eyes *darted* contagious fires" (ll. 1034–36; emphasis added).<sup>8</sup> Under the cover of the night, the First Parents give vent to their lust, sealing their mutual guilt with love sports, "till dewy sleep, / Oppressed them, wearied with their amorous play" (ll. 1044–45). If we look at this entire episode through the prism of Ricoeur's philosophy, what we discern in it will probably be less an echo of the unfortunate Augustinian identification of Original Sin with carnal lust, than the painful birth of the consciousness torn from itself. We may certainly say that at this stage of the story Adam and Eve not only desire each other, but also desire to be recognized by each other; moreover, they also prove to be as yet totally incapable either of self-questioning or of recognizing their mutual debts and of expressing gratitude. Most importantly, they are not ready as yet to take the leap of faith that would make them accept as their own the story of redemption, which Adam has heard from Raphael and which now promises to the First Couple another level of existence, despite the presently experienced desolation.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly enough, in Book XII, the conventional attributes of Cupid are inscribed in Raphael's prophecy of the Son's victory "Satan's assaults" and his "*fiery darts*."

Tired of love (what a gloomy coda to the promising love scene in Eden!), Adam and Eve fall asleep before sunrise, still before sunbeams drink up the last drops of morning dew, but their second awakening already takes place in full light, and gives a completely new sense to their previous discoveries:

Soon as the force of that fallacious fruit,  
That with exhilarating vapour bland  
About their spirits had played, and inmost powers  
Made err, was now exhaled, . . . up they rose  
As from unrest, *and each the other viewing*  
*Soon found out their eyes how opened,*  
*And their minds how darkened.* (ll. 1046–54; emphasis added)

The previous joy of knowing, suggested by Adam and Eve's frequent repetition of the Latinized form of wisdom—"sapience"—which emphasized the seemingly divine provenience and character of their new grasp of reality, now turns out to be mere illusion. Now they see their own guilt reflected in each other as in a fatal mirror. And only now can they admit the loss caused by the breach, whose immediate consequence is a distorted and opaque vision of reality and of themselves. This paradox has been accurately described in André LaCocque's and Paul Ricoeur's joint attempt to rethink biblical narratives of the Origin and the Fall. LaCocque's argument is worth quoting at length:

It is true that when the humans ate the fruit of knowledge something happened that resembles true science: their eyes opened (*pqb*), a verb that is used to describe the opening of the eyes of the blind (Psalm 146:8; Isaiah 35:5). But what they saw happens to be only a shameful reality, the very contrary of *tob* of divine proclamation in Genesis 1. . . . The humans' vision is a desire to reshape the world; they have an illusory feeling that they can do better than the creator. *What they obtain is the distortion of the given by an interpretation that itself is blurred.* . . . Far from mastering creation, as the humans thought they would, they are incapable of distinguishing what is good for them, their alleged clear-sightedness is myopia (or, on another level, nakedness). *Blindness is alienation from the self as well as from the other, so that they may even entertain an illusion of not being seen by anyone else . . . , of being hidden from the eyes of the One who surrounds them.* (19–20; emphasis added)

It is indeed astonishing how closely this explanation matches Milton's masterly portrayal of Eve's self-deception when she hopes her deed passed unnoticed in heaven. Not only is she deluded in believing that now she can

see more, but she also tries to persuade herself that God's omniscience is limited to that of a vigilant mortal tyrant relying on the reports of ubiquitous secret agents:

*And I perhaps am secret: heaven is high—  
High, and remote to see from thence distinct  
Each thing on earth; and other care perhaps  
May have diverted from continual watch  
Our great forbiddler, safe with all his spies  
About him. (ll. 811–16; emphasis added)*

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Adam, far less ingenuously, retires to a wild thicket (which on the one hand reminds us of the romance heroes' diversion from the path of righteousness into the forest of ignorance and, on the other hand, foreshadows William Blake's "forests of the night") in order to hide there from the judicious, "insufferably bright" eye of the sun. His apprehensive question: "How shall I behold the face / Henceforth of God or angel, erst with joy / And rapture so oft beheld?" (ll. 1080–81) must wait for the soothing answer of the New Testament: "We see indeed presently through a glass in obscurity; then moreover face to face." Until this promise is incarnated in the Resurrected Christ, man can only put trust in seclusion. In despair, he repeats the mistake of the lyrical I from John Donne's "Holy Sonnet IX," who did not seek refuge in God's merciful remembrance, but out of shame prayed that the "black memory of his sins" be wiped out by his tears, and he himself be forgotten by God, rather than granted forgiveness ("That Thou remember them, some claim as debt; / I think it mercy if Thou wilt forget"). Milton's Adam expresses a similar desire:

O might I here  
In solitude live savage, in some glade  
Obscured, where highest woods, impenetrable  
To star or sunlight, spread their umbrage broad  
And brown as evening, cover me, you pines;  
Ye cedars, with innumerable boughs  
Hide me, where I may never see them more. (ll. 1084–90)

This statement is, of course, miles and miles away from the self-consciousness of a capable human being. The irony involved in Milton's presentation of the protagonists' self-recognition consists in the fact that upon eating the fatal fruit the humans indeed become "hidden," "concealed" creatures, as each sinner is a "secret" to him/herself, even though they still

remain perfectly transparent, fully “known” to the Maker. Paradoxically enough, Adam’s despair is the most obvious evidence of his error: overcome by sin, he does not wish any longer to be seen/ known or remembered by God, nor to see, know or remember Him looking at the sky. Man’s first clothes to cover his shameful nakedness are not made of fig leaves, but woven of the immaterial fabric of ominous shadows (“umbrage”), darkness, gloom. The moment of the sinners’ most acute self-awareness is in fact tantamount to the loss of the self. Moreover, no matter whether we attribute this loss to the characters’ self-ignorance or self-deceit, there can be little doubt that the damage cannot be mended immediately. As Claudia Welz reminds us:

One can attribute self-deception to oneself only in retrospect. The grammar of self-deception entails *Nachträglichkeit*. It does not make sense to say, “I am deceiving myself,” but it makes perfect sense to discover after the fact, “I deceived myself at that time.” *Realizing self-deception requires a temporal caesura and a new, revised, self-evaluation.* (159; emphasis added)

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On the other hand, Milton’s Adam is at least partially right when he intuits the importance of memory’s opposite, forgetting, in the complex process of self-recognition. In this way, the fall of Milton’s protagonist into time and history marks the beginning of Adam’s course of recognition. This is in perfect agreement concerning what contemporary theory tells us about the connection between recognition and time:

Forgetting is the other side of recognition, but also its prerequisite, whereas both concepts are necessary to the understanding of oneself and of the past, but also of the present and future alike, and thus acquire a dimension that is truly historical. (Le Huenen x)

This must be the reason why in trying to heighten the paradox of eyes “wide shut” by sin, Milton’s grand epic puts such an emphasis on the patterns of memory, forgetting, recollection and repetition. The consecutive episodes of Adam and Eve’s falling asleep and waking up, which set the pace of their story in the wonderful garden, can thus be read as metaphors of the moments of oblivion and remembering. We should not forget in this context that the Aristotelian *anagnorisis*, akin to un-forgetting: *anamnesis*, is itself a turning point, a moment of reversal and sudden change of fortune. As Rachel Adelman reminds us: “Both the Greek term *anagnorisis* and the English re-cognition, suggest a *re*-turn in thought, a ‘going back’ . . ., perceiving the past anew through the prism of the present



truth" (53). On the surface level, Eve's speech immediately following the plucking of the fruit fulfils this requirement, by re-evaluating past ignorance and innocence from the standpoint of the newly acquired and, apparently still exhilarating experience and knowledge of things "hitherto obscured, infamed," echoed in Adam's complaint: "Much pleasure we have lost, while we abstained / From this delightful fruit, nor known till now/ True relish" (ll. 1022–24). Yet, in fact, in the course of time whose trajectory—as Ricoeur constantly repeats—determines the curving paths of human recognition, both the protagonists of the poem and Milton's readers are soon forced to revise their opinions in order to recognize their own error of judgment. Only then can we undertake the exercise set out by the poet, that of *anamnesis*, un-forgetting the forlorn happiness that should ultimately result in *anagnorisis*: the *recovered, regained* picture of ransomed Man, imprinted in the history of Redemption. (There is moreover a basic difference between the Platonic *anamnesis*, which only allows a hindsight of perfect knowledge, and the Christian project of un-forgetting the divine image, as outlined by St. Paul, which opens the prospect of the future, perfect mutual recognition: *I will know as also I have been fully known.*<sup>9</sup>) First, however, the humans must be reminded of the pre-history, proto-history of the Fall. For *Paradise Lost* not only opens an enticing perspective of un-forgetting Paradise, but, perhaps even more importantly, imposes on the reader an obligation to return to the "time of origins," and retrieve from thence the painful, but necessary memory of Original Sin.

Here again, Ricoeur offers help to Milton's readers, this time with postulating a model of biblical hermeneutics which, on the one hand, takes into account "the caesura between primordial and historical time," which denotes "more than discontinuity" and implies that "the time of primordial events in relation to the time of those in history cannot be fully coordinated in terms of some temporal succession" ("Thinking Creation" 32). On the other hand, however, the French philosopher lays emphasis on the umbilical cord that links the biblical myths of the Origin and the Fall with its actual development in the body of historical time. Ricoeur says: "the Creation arises out of prehistory whose reported events set into movement a broad dynamism operating at the very heart of history" (32). In other words, "the events that occurred in the time of origins have an inaugural value as regards the history that, on the literary plane of narration, follows

<sup>9</sup> This Christian understanding of *anamnesis* is in line with Professor Boitani's suggestion that the Greek prefix *ana-* involves not only a mere coming back to the point of departure, but also suggests a movement upwards: *ana-gnorisis* is then a "spot of time," to use Wordsworth's apt metaphor, when the human being, struck by surprise and wonder, advances and *rises* in the knowledge of himself. (qtd. in Russo xiv)



the primordial events" (33). They are "seeds of time," to use a Shakespearean phrase, in which the history of Salvation germinates. Needless to say, the action of Milton's poem embraces both times, beginning with the creative speech act of Eternal Logos, to the historical events of Christ's birth and the death of the Word Incarnate on Golgotha.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning of Book IX Milton puts stress on the insurmountable barrier separating the bucolic past ("rural repast . . . / venial discourse unblamed" [ll. 4–5]) from the tragic present ("foul distrust, and breach / disloyal" [ll. 5–6]), and emphasizes the distance that after the Fall separates Man from God ("on the part of Heaven/ Now alienated, distance and distaste" [ll. 8–9]) and heaven from earth. Critics argue as to whether Milton's epic should be read in accordance with the rules of psychological realism framed by the narrative coherence of the story (which would stress linear progress from innocence, through temptation and self-temptation to the Fall), or whether the account of Original Sin should take the reader by surprise, suggesting the complete disjunction between the primordial innocence and the post-lapsarian despair.<sup>11</sup> Of course, narrative—"in the strong sense of this term," as Ricoeur would add—always implies causal sequencing, but one cannot fail to notice that Milton's extensive use of prolepsis and analepsis, alongside his masterpiece engrafting various literary genres onto the epic texture of his poem, from pastoral tale to tragedy (Kiefer Lewalski),<sup>12</sup> allows one to perceive in the poet's account both the progression of events on the horizontal plane and a sudden leap on the vertical axis, which certainly involves more than mere reversal of fortune. Even the poet's enjambments, which, in the Invocation to Book IX, break up nominal phrases, rather than "striding over" the lines in order to create the impression of a seamless flow of the narrative, enhance the sense of a sudden disconnectedness and dislocation.

Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics provides a modern reader with interpretative tools which help us better comprehend this double-fold design of Milton's epic. In order to account for the complex structure of the Book

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<sup>10</sup> Ricoeur's argument about the connection between the "time of origins" and the historical time (which is also the time of fulfilment), so prominent in the philosopher's interpretation to Genesis 1, follows the medieval and Renaissance tradition of placing Paradise and the Tree of Knowledge exactly in the same place where the cross stood on Golgotha ("Thinking Creation" 30–67).

<sup>11</sup> The best known proponent of the theory of radical discontinuity in Milton's poem was Stanley Fish (1988). The same line of argument informs John S. Tanner's Kierkegaardian reading of *Paradise Lost*. For the "psychological" readings of the First Parent's motivation cf. for instance John Steadman (1968).

<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur's reference to Pierre Gibert's remark that "no privileged literary form captures Creation" (36) seems to accord with the diversity of genres employed in Milton's rendering of Genesis 1–3.

of Genesis, the philosopher recalls Claus Westermann's concept of *Geschehenbogen* (a "narrative arch"), which allows him to avoid the mistake of speaking about two states of humanity separated by a fault, and instead facilitates our understanding of the unity (not just tropological foreshadowing) of "one complex, integral event" that includes both "the prohibition, the temptation, the transgression and the trial" of Genesis 3, as well as "the histories of disobedience attributed to Israel or other nations" ("Thinking Creation" 42).<sup>13</sup> Following on from that, Ricoeur postulates "progression in the separation, *within the single primordial history*, that culminates in the impoverished condition represented by the expulsion from the garden" (42; emphasis added). Paradoxically enough, this perspective allows him to reach the bright side of separation: not endowed with the negative meaning of "dereliction or alienation" (38), but interpreted as a benign withdrawal of God which gives the humans "access to responsibility *as regards oneself and others*" (39; emphasis added). This, in turn, renders the human agent morally accountable for his or her actions (both the ones s/he committed and those s/he only could have committed), but perhaps even more importantly it also opens a space of dialogue within oneself and with the other/Other.<sup>14</sup>

Although Ricoeur does not say it explicitly, I think we are entitled to add that the most accomplished form of that dialogue would be a prayer of praise, understood as human response to the call from the divine and distant, but not altogether absent Other, in recognition of the fact that "the human task as such" starts with the unconditional, divine gift of "having been known" by the Father. After all, even Milton's Adam, after his first fatal misrecognition (when he assumes that he is a god) and his second, incomplete *anagnorisis* (when driven by despair he does not want to be seen by God and deems himself as good as dead), learns step by step that "guilty and punished, humanity is not cursed," (Ricoeur, "Thinking Creation" 39) and that east of Eden man can also thank for the mercy of God. The best example of such a prayer of gratitude is the already quoted Psalm,

<sup>13</sup> The readers of *Paradise Lost* are immediately reminded in this context of the historical coda in Milton's great epic, where the Puritan poet recounts the blameless origins of the Catholic Church and its subsequent corruption, putting in the mouth of Michael the following prophecy: "Then they shall seek to avail themselves of names / Places and titles, and with these to join / Secular power, though feigning still to act / By spiritual" (XII: ll. 515–18).

<sup>14</sup> Ricoeur says: "We must be very attentive to the composition of the narrative configuration [of Genesis 3] if we are correctly to designate what counts as the primordial history. *It would be an error and a grave mistake for the theological comprehension of this whole sequence to consider the transgression as separating two successive 'states,' a state of innocence that alone would be primordial and a fallen state, which would henceforth be part of history*" ("Thinking Creation" 42; emphasis added).

surely deserving to be called a song of recognition: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Psalm 139:14). Moreover, as both Milton and Ricoeur show us, it is memory enhanced by narration which provides us with an indispensable tool for carrying on the task of recognizing our true selves. Although not free of the risk of self-delusion, in the ultimate perspective this most important human venture has been blessed with the promise of knowing truly and seeing face to face the "something secret," "something divine," which despite the Fall dwells within ourselves.

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## To Look at Things *as if* They Could Be Otherwise: Educating the Imagination

# ABSTRACT

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In this article I would like to argue that Paul Ricoeur can show us how a text matters in its ability to educate the imagination which, in turn, has the capacity to bring about change. The context of my argument is health care, the texts of concern are those written by a health care provider, Rachel Naomi Remen, and the subjects to be educated and transformed include the individual readers (e.g. students) and, ultimately, healthcare students and professionals alike. As a physician herself Remen configures both a personal story of her being healed and her professional story of providing care, in order to imagine new ways to health and healing more holistically. This holistic approach integrates the mind, body and spirit in the healing process. I gain support for applying Ricoeur's theory of the imagination to Remen's texts from Richard Kearney and Maxine Greene. Kearney and Greene focus on the productive role of the imagination for its transformative power within their own academic contexts of philosophy and of education, respectively. I gain from their extension of Ricoeurian and imaginative thinking to the texts of health care to look at healthcare as if it could be otherwise.

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**ABSTRACT**

## INTRODUCTION

This article defends the significance for health care of Paul Ricoeur's conception of the productive power of the imagination and its transformative role in reading texts. In particular, Ricoeur employs the mimetic capacity of the imagination both to configure and to reconfigure texts (*Time and Narrative I* 46). This dual figurative power of the imagination is able to open up new worlds to readers. Ricoeur himself describes the power of the productive imagination as a capacity enabling readers of texts to look at things as though they might be otherwise. He explains that the

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imagination is indeed what we all mean by the word: the free play of possibilities in a state of noninvolvement with respect to the world of perception or action. It is in this state of noninvolvement that we try out new ideas, new values, new ways of being in the world. (*From Text to Action* 174)

Readers of texts can imagine new possibilities for their world and ways to bring about change. Ricoeur expounds, "Because it is a world, the world of the text necessarily collides with the real world in order to 'remake it,' either by confirming it or denying it" (*From Text to Action* 6).

The present application of Ricoeur's theory of the productive imagination and its role in narrative configuration and reconfiguration will be supported by the work of Richard Kearney and Maxine Greene. Kearney and Greene each apply Ricoeur's theory to texts and specific contexts in philosophy and in education, respectively. Greene calls for releasing the imagination, while Kearney calls for re-awakening the imagination. He argues that students need to be freed, in order to release their capacity to imagine a new world. This is made possible in the reading of texts; responses to those texts in multiple contexts provide the impetus to expand student's perception of what is and what could be. She explains, "To call for imaginative capacity is to work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise" (*Releasing the Imagination* 19).

Kearney is equally concerned with the productivity of the imagination, he introduces the Greek word *poiesis* to describe the new possibilities which we can produce. But he insists that the step to another kind of *poiesis* is one that we can take into postmodern parodies or stories. Kearney argues that "imagination . . . explores the possibilities of another kind of *poiesis*—alternative modes of inventing alternative modes of existence. To

disclose how things *might be*, we must follow in the wake of imagination” (*Wake of Imagination* 33).

I continue in their Ricoeurian spirit to explore the ways in which the imagination can be freed and creative. In particular I aim to educate the imagination of those students interested in health and healing, in both science and spirit, by releasing and re-awakening the productive power of the imagination in the creative art of health “care.”<sup>1</sup> With Ricoeur, I seek to demonstrate that the imagination exhibits a capacity that can be developed in configuring and reconfiguring texts: configuration and reconfiguration are the second and third moments, respectively, of what Ricoeur calls “triple mimesis,” while the first moment is prefiguration.

In this article, I argue that Health Care in the United States in particular has become unbalanced due to a tendency to be fixated on technology and non-human scientific practices, and not on the art of caring. Health care touches people’s lives in profound ways, influencing their sense of self, their physical functioning and emotional well-being. There is a real and urgent need to redress the balance between the scientific and the spiritual and attention to the whole person. So, in order to address this need I urge readers to consider, with me, texts which can educate the imagination, to integrate the science and the art of medicine holistically. And my focus is on reading the texts of, in this context, Rachel Naomi Remen<sup>2</sup> with the insight of Ricoeur’s theory of productive imagination.<sup>3</sup> A key component of change in health care is through the education of healthcare professionals. Therefore, I take as my central example for a Ricoeurian reconfiguration of contexts the responses

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<sup>1</sup> “Care” can be either objective scientific or subjective patient centered.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Naomi Remen is the author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom* and *My Grandfather’s Blessings: Tales of Strength, Refuge and Belonging*, and numerous articles. She is medical director and co-founder of the Commonweal Cancer Help Center in Bolinas, California. She is also a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center.

<sup>3</sup> It was in 2004 that I myself initiated a dialogue with Ricoeur’s narrative theory and with health care. I looked at the stories of particular female healthcare professionals and the power in each of their stories to incite change in health care. Already at that time, I was hoping “to educate the imagination” by writing narratives about female health care, focusing on both health and healing. In that earlier project I claimed that

The goal of the narrator is to take the writing forward to the life of the readers who will bring their own interpretations to the story and new insights to cultivate change. These stories might initiate change in the various relationships readers might have with female health care professionals who care for them as patients, work with them as colleagues, learn from them as teachers or supervise them as managers. It is in recognizing and addressing similar barriers and frustrations in readers’ lives that the change begins. (Anderson Sathe 121)

of students to Remen's highly distinctive configuration of texts about health and healing.

Remen, a physician and a professor of medicine, employs narrative in her holistic vision for health care, including the story of her own healing journey, patients' stories of their illnesses and physicians' stories of their experiences. My contention is that Remen's pedagogical use of her own narrative texts of "healing" can help to educate the imagination of healthcare professionals. They learn to imagine health care as if it could be otherwise: that is, as if the integration of the mind, body and spirit matters in health and healing.

My hope is that by reading stories from healthcare professionals like Remen, students might imagine new possibilities for caring more holistically. This would mean caring for others emotionally, spiritually and physically. In this way, we would begin to shift toward a balance of the art and science of care in the process of transforming the world of health care through a Ricoeurian productive reading of texts, especially narrative texts by health care workers themselves; these narratives can be about their lives and their work in caring for others.

Ricoeur states that "stories are recounted, life is lived" ("Life in Quest of Narrative" 25). In writing stories authors narrate the past while life is lived moving forward. And yet, the imagination can help to imitate new forms of life in stories which will be told; this means life is lived before it is configured into a text. To examine one's own life and to tell one's story also makes possible the opening up of a new world for others who will read your texts. Through the imagination, readers can enter the world of the text and return to reconfigure the context of their lived worlds, and this is to imagine new possibilities for living life more fully. Ricoeur explains the role of the imagination in moving between "the world of the text" and "the world of the reader":

Allow me to stress the terms I have used here; *the world of the reader* and *the world of the text*. To speak of a world of the text is to stress the feature belonging to every literary work of opening before it a horizon of possible experience, a world in which it would be possible to live. A text is not something closed in upon itself, it is the projection of a new universe distinct from that in which we live. To appropriate a work through reading is to unfold the world horizon implicit in it which includes the actions, the characters and the events of the story told. As a result, the reader belongs at once to the work's horizon of experience in imagination and to that of his or her own real action. (Ricoeur, *Life in Quest of Narrative* 27)



ON CONFIGURING TEXTS AND RECONFIGURING WORLDS:  
EDUCATING THE IMAGINATION

Texts matter in the opening up of possibilities to readers. A good (holistic) text on health care should allow readers to look at their lives differently. Thus texts develop the capacity to imagine new directions, avenues and opportunities in life. Kearney argues that Ricoeur's conception of a threefold mimesis of prefiguration, configuration and reconfiguration challenges those structuralist theories which celebrated the "death of the subject": that is, Ricoeur's circle of triple mimesis restores the subject as author and as reader to narrative theories of the text. In Kearney's words, the "referral of the narrative text back to the life of the author and forward to the life of the reader belies the structuralist maxim that the text relates to nothing but itself" (*Stories* 133). Thus, readers can reconfigure lives based on the author's configuration of her life in a narrative text; and it is a *new* world that will be opened up beyond the world of the text. Meaning is made by human subjects—women and men—in the reading of a text and the reconfiguring of a world.

Regarding the philosophical role of the imagination, Kearney presents Ricoeur's argument that imagination is a crucial element in philosophical hermeneutics as a tool for interpretation of meaning in the human sciences, "The adoption of hermeneutic acknowledges the symbolizing power of imagination. This power, to transform given meanings into new ones, enables one to construe the future as the 'possible theatre of my liberty,' as an horizon of hope" (Ricoeur, "Herméneutique de l'idée de révélation," qtd. in Kearney, "Paul Ricoeur" 118). Imagination then is employed both by the author in configuring her own life/world into a text and the reader in reconfiguring her life/world in response to reading that text. In this dialectical process, imagination both imitates life and produces action for readers/subjects who seek to create new meaning. This action gives meaning to life and opens possibilities for change. Herein lies the possibility of a meaningful life in freedom and in hope. For someone who lives an examined life this is an ongoing process of hermeneutics: of interpreting and re-interpreting how we live with one another.

Ricoeur does not think that there is a grand narrative for all human life. Instead, whether in each individual life or in every collective life we can always find a quest for a meaningful narrative; and stories are written at different points in each life in order to create the meaning. Kearney contends that

*mimesis* is the "invention" in the original sense of that term: *invenire* means both to discover *and* to create, that is, to disclose what is already

there in the light of what is not yet (but exists potentially). It is the power, in short, to re-create actual worlds as possible worlds. (Kearney, *Stories* 132)

This hermeneutic process of mimesis, then, allows for a richer understanding of the present with a hope for the future. If we can imagine alternatives to how we are living and dying, then we can begin to reconfigure our world with a new meaning. Of course, motivation is necessary for transformation. Following Ricoeur, Kearney points out that

the metaphors, symbols or narratives produced by imagination all provide us with imaginative variations of the world, thereby offering us the freedom to conceive of the world in new ways and to undertake forms of action which might lead to its transformation. (“Paul Ricoeur” 120)

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This transformation would provide us the means to “transcend the limits of our actual world” (Kearney, “Paul Ricoeur” 120). Thus, we can work toward possibilities that were inconceivable to us before, because the productive power of the imagination in mimesis provides the means and the desire to create a better world.

Similar to Kearney, Greene illustrates the crucial role of the imagination in configuring texts and reconfiguring the contexts of our lives: the imagination functions to create new possibilities for students and teachers alike. Greene configures her teaching life in writing narratives about education for change. In *Releasing the Imagination*, Greene herself illustrates the role of narrative as follows:

The essays in *Releasing the Imagination* may be read as a narrative in the making. We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives of clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not enough for us to reproduce the way things are. Now in the midst of my life, I view my own writing in terms of stages in a quest, “stages,” as Søren Kierkegaard put it, “on life’s way.” The quest involves me as a woman, as teacher, as mother, as citizen, as New Yorker, as art-lover, as activist, as philosopher, as white middle-class American. Neither myself nor my narrative can have, therefore, a single strand. I stand at the crossing point of too many social and cultural forces; and, in any case, I am forever on my way. (1)

For Greene as for philosophers since Socrates in ancient Greece, only an examined life is worthwhile; such a life is examined life, I suggest in a Ricoeurian spirit, in an ongoing process of configuring and reconfiguring

texts concerning the stages of growth and change and one's place in the world. Good educational pedagogy offers narratives to students so that they can learn how to reconfigure their own worlds. Herein lies Greene's hope for a better world.

Consistent with a Ricoeurian tradition, Greene opens a horizon of meaningful experience to her readers. She uses narrative texts to teach her students about new possibilities for learning in the human sciences. She sees possibilities in engaging the imaginations of her readers: "I have set myself the task of arousing readers' imaginations" (Greene 2). And she thinks that "of all [our] cognitive capacities, imagination is the one [capacity] that permits us to give credence to alternative realities" (Greene 3). She explains that

It is difficult for me to teach educational history or philosophy to teachers-to-be without engaging them in the domain of imagination and metaphor. . . . An ability to take a fresh look at the taken for granted seems equally important: without that ability, most of us, along with our students, would remain submerged in the habitual. We and they would scarcely notice, much less question, what has appeared perfectly "natural" throughout our life histories. (Greene 99–100)

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### IMAGINATION IN THE CONTEXT OF HEALTH CARE

At this stage, I would like to apply Ricoeur's narrative theory, along with the hope and freedom generated by the meaning-making power of the imagination, to the context of health and healing. Ricoeur explains that

the art of narrating is reflected, on the side of following a story, in the attempt to "grasp together" successive events. The art of narrating, as well as the corresponding art of following a story, therefore requires that we are able to extract a configuration from a succession. (*Hermeneutics* 278)

The art of narrating involves looking at one's life over time. Given Remen's multiple perspectives as an oncologist, a storyteller, and a professor, she is an example of someone who uses stories and productive imagination to configure her life and work into new meaningful narratives for health and healing. She configures her life experience in particular as a person with a chronic disease and as a physician working with patients to heal others and herself.

It is important to notice that Remen's life stories reflect changes over time; these changes do not always come easily, nor is healing assured. Instead Remen has lived her life as a physician and as a woman health care professional, all the while managing her own Crohn's disease; the result of

this complex life and work relation is the development of her own holistic and relationship-centered practice. The text of Remen's life story begins with her as a child growing up in a family of physicians and a grandfather who was a Rabbi. Her early life was a mix of the scientific and the spiritual. Her grandfather provided a mystical presence and a connection to the rich heritage of the stories of Judaism. She explains that "the physicians in my family rewarded me for having the right answers. My grandfather for having the right questions" (Remen, *Kitchen Table* xxxii). This background led her to pursue an undergraduate honors degree in philosophy, with a passion for Wittgenstein, followed by a medical degree, and ultimately to create a medical practice with a mix of the science of medicine and the spirituality of stories. In her personal journey with Crohn's disease she nurtured her emotional, physical and spiritual capacities, not only to live a healthy life, but also to manage her medical practice and to teach in a medical school and eventually, to become a writer of lived experience in theory and practice.

In the process of configuring her own experiences, she describes life as "coherent, elegant, mysterious, and aesthetic." However, she admits that "when I first earned my degree in medicine I would not have described life in this way" (Remen, *Kitchen Table* 3). Her medical training focused on scientific objectivity and tended to deny the emotional and spiritual aspects of healing. Over time, she learned to listen to her patients' stories, especially those stories which reflected an integration of the mind, body and spirit.

Eventually, these stories would become far more compelling to me than the disease process. I would come to feel more personally enriched by them than by making the correct diagnosis. They would make me proud to be a human being. These stories engaged me at another, more hidden point. I too suffer from an illness, Crohn's disease, a chronic, progressive intestinal disease, which I had developed at the age of fifteen. So for me, these conversations eased certain loneliness. . . . I listened to human beings who were suffering, and responding to their suffering in ways as unique as their fingerprints. Their stories were inspiring, moving, important. In time, the truth in them began to heal me. (Remen, *Kitchen Table* xxxvi-xxxvii)

In the midst of her medical practice, Remen would listen to her patients' stories and then, reconfigure them along with her own life stories. After thirty-five years as a physician and more than forty years of living with a life-threatening illness Remen wrote *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal*, a compilation of stories from her life as a patient and a physician with the intent to reach a broad audience. She also began to weave these stories into articles in academic journals.

In the end, we can explain with Ricoeur's theory that the texts of Remen configure her own chronic illness, her experience with patients and her teaching in a medical school. Remen weaves her personal and professional stories into texts, revealing her conviction that healing only happens completely when a physician learns to listen to her patients. So, we have in Remen what we saw earlier in Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory; that is, the crucial dialectical process of creating meaning in reciprocal relations whether the relations are those of author and reader, or of patient and physician, each subject in her particular context gives and takes from each other; and this is how new meaning is created, and how life is lived in interaction: a meaningful life is one in which we listen to each other's story. In Remen's writing, social reality is interpreted in both the texts and the contexts of the lives of patient and physician alike. This interpretation by way of texts and contexts of life recalls Ricoeur's proposal that "we ought not to hesitate in comparing the production of the configurational act to the work of the productive imagination" (*Time and Narrative I* 68). Again we find that the productive power of the imagination gives the motivation to configure our lives in a text that can be read and re-created. In this way, readers of Remen's texts are given an incentive to imagine health care that is patient-centered and holistic. In this context, patients are healed and healthcare professionals find meaning in actually caring for themselves in relation to others who, like them, hope for a more meaningful life that is attentive to the physical, emotional and spiritual. Over the course of her life, Remen gradually reconfigures medical education by engaging the imagination of her students. As a professor she reintroduces compassion and meaning into medicine. In her courses on patient-centered care, students read her stories and write their own. Students are exposed to a new way of working in health care: but this can only be made available to students who then can choose to engage with it. Creativity in health care cannot be imposed or mandated. Rather, students and teachers must be willing to engage freely with their lives and the stories which they are to both hear and share. In reading Remen's texts students can be at most urged to imagine new possibilities for themselves and their future patients. In class, Remen would seek to provide students with an opportunity to share their own experiences with health care. She asks her students to pay attention to the activities of care as these happen, as well as how they feel about that care. She would ask them to write down their discoveries in the form of narratives. As Remen instructs, "Pay attention from the heart. Look at your life experience as if you were a novelist or a poet, not a doctor" ("Mission" 9). In the process of writing about their experiences as a novelist or a poet her students could gain new perspectives on life and care: the aim is to restore health and meaning to living.

Ideally, students in health care can come to recognize qualities of love, devotion, loyalty, and courage both in their own lives and in the lives of other health care professionals. But this requires commitment to a daily process of writing down what they see in their own and others' narratives they create in their own healthcare diaries in relation to and with others. Some students will find that meaning emerges in writing stories of compassion, in which students and physicians alike attend to the personal aspects of healing. Remen explains that "it is only through connection that we can recover true compassion, or any authentic sense of meaning in life: a sense of the mysterious, the profound, and the sacred nature of the world" ("Mission" 2). In the reading of Remen's stories and the writing of their own daily narratives, students should be able to imagine new possibilities of caring for, with and about others. Through these possibilities for connection, a new meaning in their work may emerge that can provide the vision of reconfiguring the world of health care.

## CONCLUSION

In a Ricoeurian spirit, and with Ricoeur's own theory of the productive power of the imagination, especially in engaging with a triple mimesis of text production, I have tried to suggest new and constructive ways in which the imagination of students and teachers can be educated through stories such as Remen's in health care. These stories matter precisely because they help to develop the ability of each subject of health care to educate the imagination individually and collectively—and in this way, they will have followed Ricoeur's inspiration to look at things as if they could be otherwise. Health care does not need to be only scientific and objective where patients' stories are excluded from consideration. It can be patient-centered with an understanding of the complex relationship of the mind, body and spirit in healing. Patients can be recognized as individuals whose lives matter not only physically but emotionally and spiritually, who require to be cared for, cared about and involved in their own care. With Ricoeur, I suggest that life is lived and stories are told, but health and healing bring life and stories together in a productive process. Thus, to develop the capacity to bring about change requires creativity in the productive power of the imagination; educating the imagination can only happen if students and physicians are attentive to life in all of its varied and complex dimensions.

If, for example, students can reconfigure healthcare practices by seeing new ways of caring for, about and with patients, they might be motivated to change the way they actually care for their patients and one another. Ideally, the changes in what individual healthcare students see and do can

in turn begin to shift the broader context of health care. A crucial step for changing the act of caring is to be able to imagine other possibilities for care. Ricoeur asserts that “Without imagination, there is no action, we shall say. And this is so in several different ways: on the level of projects, on the level of motivations, and on the level of the very power to act” (*Text to Action* 177). Educating the imagination on the level of projects in health care means fixing the direction of vision for change, on the level of motivations it is to change the reasons for caring, and on the level of the very power to act it means transforming care; these levels come together in locating the hope for better health care between the science and the art of medicine. I end here with the mandate to look at things in health care *as if* they *could* be otherwise, rather than shaped primarily by the objectivity of science and technology, to a subjective patient-centered approach to health and healing more holistically. It would be a real tribute to Ricoeur if his hermeneutics and his concern for the human sciences were not forgotten, but were instead embraced in educating the imagination of all readers in health care, and not only health care professionals, but all human subjects who care for and are cared for by others in the process of health and healing today and/or tomorrow.

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## Testimony, Responsibility and Recognition: A Ricoeurian Response to Crises of Sexual Abuse

# ABSTRACT

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How can we, as individuals and as members of religious, educational, and/or social institutions, more adequately respond to the crises of sexual abuse that have come to light in recent years? This paper will address this question through the philosophical lens of Paul Ricoeur. The argument proposed here is that through Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony, responsibility, and recognition, we can begin to approach, address, and evaluate the crises of sexual abuse we face by grounding our ethical reflections, and actions, within a more robust philosophical framework. Therefore, this paper will proceed as follows. The first three sections will investigate Ricoeur's writings in order to glean from them three distinct hermeneutical approaches to three different sets of criteria at play in contemporary crises of sexual abuse: first, a hermeneutics of testimony, related to memory and history; second, a hermeneutics of responsibility, related to authority and justice; and, finally, a hermeneutics of recognition, related to forgiveness and forgetting. Insofar as each of these hermeneutical approaches offers us some insight into the problematics underlying crises of sexual abuse, the fourth section will offer an evaluation of these approaches by focusing on the specific case of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. The final section will consider possible avenues for resolution of these crises through Ricoeur's notion of exceptional "states of peace," at the heart of which lies mutual recognition. My hope is that this contribution provides new avenues for conversation and deliberation, as well as new resources and frameworks for articulating and implementing responsible action in the face of sexual abuse.

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**ABSTRACT**

## INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

In 2002, the Boston Globe broke a story about allegations of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Boston (“Spotlight Investigation: Abuse in the Catholic Church”).<sup>1</sup> Not only did these allegations prove true, but the sexual abuse scandal in Boston turned out to be a watershed moment for victims of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church worldwide. Not only have individual cases of sexual abuse come to light in diocese around the world, but compounding this scandal is the fact that, since 2002, it has come to light that for decades before, and since, the public exposure of this abuse, the Church—at the local and international levels—actively pursued a strategy of “cover-up” and sought to keep this information from being publically revealed (see Hamilton 67–96). Since 2002, the Church has remained ineffective in addressing its sexual abuse crisis, and unable to provide an adequate explanation for its secrecy.

In 2010, the Boy Scouts of America were ordered to pay over \$18.5 million to a Scout who had been sexually abused in the 1980s by a Scout leader (Associated Press). Once again, what made this case problematic—beyond the sexual abuse—was the evidence presented in court that indicated the organization’s knowledge of the problem, and, consequently, the actions they took, not to protect the scout in question, but to protect the reputation of the organization (McGreal). Secrecy and cover-up prevailed, where responsibility and justice should have been the order of the day.

In 2011, a former assistant football coach at Penn State, Jerry Sandusky, was indicted by a grand jury for sexually abusing a number of young men while employed at the university (“Times Topics”). Once again, the scandal of Sandusky’s sexual abuse took on new life when it came to light that when brought to the attention of Sandusky’s superiors in the football program, as well as to a number of administrators at the university, the decision was made to cover up the situation, and keep it out of the public eye, rather than report it to the proper authorities. These individuals chose to protect their own interests and their own personnel, at the expense of the young men who continued to be abused.

The aforementioned examples of sexual abuse point to two things: first, the phenomenon of the sexual abuse of minors—a phenomenon that

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<sup>1</sup> The source is the Boston Globe archive page dedicated to the unfolding of the sexual abuse crisis in the Archdiocese of Boston. It begins with the original two-part story from 6 January 2002 on Fr. John J. Geoghan and documents the unfolding of the crisis in the years after 2002. See also *Betrayal* by the Investigative Staff of the Boston Globe (Boston: Back Bay, 2003).

is both shocking and frightening; second, each of these institutions, when faced with the reality of sexual abuse within their ranks, chose to actively conceal this information from the public eye, and cover up the transgressions of their respective communities. The sexual abuse of minors is a tragedy in and of itself, but the compounding of this tragedy through decisions and actions taken to cover up, rather than address and end, the problem of sexual abuse calls for pause—at the very least—from all those involved in these, and similar, communities.

The question must be asked: how can we respond to crises of sexual abuse more adequately? What are the resources we can enact to achieve this end? This, therefore, is the question I would like to address in this article, and I will do so from within the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur, however, is not just an accidental conversation partner in these deliberations. The philosophical resources Ricoeur provides—specifically through the concepts of testimony, responsibility, and recognition—shed light, not only on the challenging phenomenon of sexual abuse itself, but on the potential avenues for attending to these crises latent within the dialectical tensions grounding these hermeneutical possibilities. Thus, the question from this point of view becomes: what resources does Ricoeur provide to help us approach crises of sexual abuse, understand—as much as possible—what happened, and evaluate potential avenues for us to move forward in the shadow of these crises?

In order to address this question, this article will proceed along the following lines. The first three sections will investigate Ricoeur's writings in order to glean from them three distinct hermeneutical approaches to three different sets of criteria at play in contemporary crises of sexual abuse: first, a hermeneutics of testimony, as it relates to memory and history; second, a hermeneutics of responsibility, as it relates to authority and justice; and, finally, a hermeneutics of recognition, as it relates to forgiveness and forgetting. Insofar as each of these hermeneutical approaches offers us some insight into the problematics underlying crises of sexual abuse, I will, in the fourth section, offer an evaluation of how the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, for example, can be viewed in light of a Ricoeurian understanding of testimony, responsibility and recognition. My hope is that this contribution can serve to open new avenues for conversation and deliberation, as well as new resources and frameworks for articulating and implementing responsible action in the face of sexual abuse.

## PART I: MEMORY, HISTORY, AND TESTIMONY

When we begin to think about the phenomenon of sexual abuse, we must first ask a pair of interrelated questions: "What happened?" and "To

whom?” Without addressing these two questions, any attempts to address crises of sexual abuse would be misguided. This pair of interrelated questions finds a parallel in Ricoeur, who structures his discussion of memory between a similar set of questions: “Of *what* are there memories? *Whose* memory is it?” (Ricoeur, *Memory* 3). The impetus behind these questions becomes important insofar as Ricoeur wants to draw an important distinction—though, admittedly, a fragile one—between memory and imagination. What is the content of this distinction? Pellauer suggests that “it is easy to confound [memory and imagination] in that they both appeal to the idea of an image . . . but in the case of memory [the image] is not absent in the sense of being unreal or feigned [as it might be in imagination], but rather as ‘having been’” (Pellauer 110). Ricoeur himself, in an interview with Richard Kearney, makes the same point:

there is a positing act in memory whereas there is an unrealizing of history in imagination. It is very difficult to maintain the distinction; but it must be kept at least as a basic recognition of two opposite claims of the past, as *unreal* and *real*. (Kearney, *Owl of Minerva* 154)

Memories are therefore related to images and events that “have been”—that were, at one point, “real.” This brings to the foreground the important category of history, without which we would be unable to distinguish between memory and imagination—between the “having been real” and the “unreal.”

This is not to suggest, however, that history is the precursor of memory in a linear sense. The relationship between memory and history is one of dynamic interaction and mutual dependence. Memory can only be distinguished from imagination because of history, yet history can only be understood as a collection of memories. Borrowing from Michel de Certeau, Ricoeur’s epistemological approach to history is that of the “historiographical operation.” Within this operation, Ricoeur distinguishes three distinct, yet interconnected methodological movements or phases. The first phase, the “documentary phase,” is the one that spans the time from “the declarations of eyewitnesses to the constitution of archives” (*Memory* 136). It is in this phase that the historiographical operation concerns itself with the establishment of “documentary proof.” The second phase is the “explanation/understanding” phase, which concerns itself with “the connective ‘because’ responding to the question ‘Why?’: why did things happen like that and not otherwise?” (*Memory* 136). The third phase of the historiographical operation, according to Ricoeur, is the representative phase, in which we encounter “writing that plainly states the historian’s intentions, which is to represent the past just as it happened—whatever

meaning may be assigned to this ‘just as’” (*Memory* 136). This final phase is, very basically, the writing of history. As the historiographical operation moves through each of these phases, we are once again confronted with the question of memory and how we come to know and believe some memories over and against others. How does the historian know what memories are “real,” and thus memory, or “unreal,” and thus imagination? Ricoeur’s response to these inquiries—his articulation of the place where the dynamic relationship between memory and history is located—is in a hermeneutics of testimony.

Testimony takes us with one bound to the formal conditions of the “things of the past,” the conditions of possibility of the actual process of the historiographical operation. With testimony opens an epistemological process that departs from declared memory, passes through the archive and documents, and finds its fulfillment in documentary proof. (*Memory* 161)

Testimony makes a bold claim to credibility: “I was there! Believe me!” Nevertheless, testimony is not free from suspicion. While testimony declares “I was there! Believe me!”, it cannot escape a nagging question: “Why should I?” For Ricoeur, the criteria for this suspicion are always already inherent in testimony. While testimony is always open, as Pellauer notes, to the retort “‘I don’t believe you’ . . . this does not disprove it, and . . . Ricoeur thinks in the end we must appeal to the conviction expressed by some testimony . . . if we are to say anything at all” (Pellauer 119). Greisch agrees with Pellauer when he suggests that “the credence which characterizes attestation is also the ‘trust’ which copes with suspicion” (Greisch 86). As for Ricoeur, while he does acknowledge the centrality and importance of an element of suspicion in the act of testimony, he ultimately comes down on the side of credibility, rather than suspicion, when approaching testimony, and for the following reason:

We must not forget that everything starts, not from the archives, but from testimony . . . whatever may be our lack of confidence in principle in such testimony, we have nothing better than testimony, in the final analysis, to assure ourselves that something did happen in the past, which someone attests having witnessed in person. (*Memory* 147)

Testimony, memory and history are crucial for initiating an investigation into crises of sexual abuse, and these themes will follow us throughout this analysis. Before applying these concepts to a concrete example of a crisis of sexual abuse, e.g. in the Roman Catholic Church, we must first develop two additional lines of thinking pertinent to this analysis: first,

a hermeneutics of responsibility, as it relates to the tensions between authority and justice, and, second, a hermeneutics of recognition, as it relates to the tensions between forgiveness and forgetting.

## PART II: AUTHORITY, JUSTICE, AND RESPONSIBILITY

86 Ricoeur understands authority to be “the right to command, the power (recognized or not) to impose obedience” (Ricoeur, *Reflections* 91). This definition, he argues, “immediately underscores the dissymmetrical, hierarchical aspect of a notion that brings face-to-face those who command and those who obey. But what a strange power that rests on a right, the right to command, which implies a claim to legitimacy” (91). Through a simple definition of the term authority, Ricoeur is able to articulate the complexity of the issue at hand: authority claims a right to power, but what is this “right” and how is it legitimized? If the power is not legitimized—i.e. the power to command is not the right of the authority—then such power borders on, and in most cases spills over into, violence. In such a case, an authority no longer commands because it has the “right” to do so, but rather it commands through domination. The key distinction Ricoeur makes between, on the one hand, an authority that has a legitimate right to command obedience and, on the other hand, an authority that commands through domination, is the question of credibility. “Authority does border on violence as the power to impose obedience as domination. But what distinguishes it from violence is precisely the credibility attached to its character of legitimacy” (*Reflections* 93). The question of credibility, then, becomes central to any discussion of authority in our contemporary situation. How does an authority earn and maintain such a level of credibility that it can hold the legitimate “right to command” and “power to impose obedience”? One possible articulation of the credibility criteria most pertinent to our contemporary situation would be the criteria of justice. An authority can claim a legitimate “right to command” and “power to impose obedience” if that authority can be seen and understood to be a just authority.

In turning to the question of justice and the just, I want to focus on three pieces by Ricoeur: “Justice and Love,” “Justice and Truth,” and “Justice and Vengeance.” In “Justice and Love,” Ricoeur addresses an age-old question in religious, and specifically Christian, discourse: what is the relationship between justice and love? For Ricoeur, there is an inherent and inevitable disproportion between justice and love because “love [speaks] . . . in a kind of language other than that of justice” (*Figuring* 317). Ricoeur notes that love speaks the language of praise, the complicated language of

command, and the language of feelings, but none of these are the language of justice: “neither the circumstances nor the means of justice are those of love . . . love does not argue . . . justice does argue” (*Figuring* 321). What is more, justice must come to a decision. Both justice and love are directed toward action: justice is directed toward the action of fairness and equality, articulated in the golden rule; love, on the other hand, requires one to go beyond the golden rule to the hyperethical and hypermoral commitment to the love of neighbor manifested in the love of one’s enemy. Ricoeur, nevertheless, offers the following caveat to this articulation of love: “If the hypermoral is not to turn into the nonmoral . . . it has to pass through the principle of morality, summed up in the golden rule and formalized by the rule of justice” (*Figuring* 328). Thus, in the justice/love dialectic, love is greater than justice, but irresponsible without it. Justice, in requiring the argumentation, deliberation and decision making love does not, grounds love in the moral realm. The relationship between justice and love, then, is an intimate dialectic, with each term requiring the other.

Next, in “Justice and Truth,” Ricoeur argues that the quest for justice—particularly as we find it in his practical ethical formulation: “aiming at the good life with, and for, others in just institutions”<sup>2</sup>—is the quest for “a just distance among all human beings” (Ricoeur, *Reflections* 61). Understood in a framework of “just distance,” the question of truth takes on the force of an injunction for the acting agent, insofar as truth becomes the sieve—or the norm—through which justice must pass. Is Ricoeur speaking of “objective truth” in these cases? No. Rather than “objective truth,” Ricoeur is speaking about “the certitude that in this situation this is the best decision, what has to be done” (*Reflections* 70). Passing through the sieve of truth, justice—and the agent behind the “just” action—becomes, in language Ricoeur adopts from Kant, imputable. That is to say, having passed through sieve of truth, justice—as “just distance”—becomes imputable to the agent acting “justly”: the agent becomes responsible for their actions.

Finally, in “Justice and Vengeance,” Ricoeur analyzes the challenging relationship between these two concepts. The primary aim of justice, Ricoeur suggests, is to move beyond vengeance, yet “the first stage of this emergence of justice beyond vengeance coincides with the feeling of indignation, which finds its least sophisticated expression in the simple cry: ‘It’s not fair!’” (*Reflections* 223) This indignant cry, we can see from the discussion in the previous section, lacks “just distance”—a clear break—“between the initial tie between vengeance and justice” (*Reflections* 223). What Ricoeur suggests, in order to overcome this lack of “just distance,” is the involvement

<sup>2</sup> This ethical formulation is both articulated and addressed in the seventh and eighth studies of Ricoeur’s “little ethics,” *Oneself as Another*.



of a third party to arbitrate between an offender and their victim (*Reflections* 224). Insofar as both justice and vengeance are action oriented—i.e. directed toward others—a third party is required to ensure that the “rule of justice” is observed. Ricoeur offers a number of “third party” alternatives for maintaining the “rule of law” as the “just distance” between parties: written laws, courts, judges, the trial process, etc. Here again, however, the questions of authority, legitimacy, and credibility come to the fore. Any decision rendered by a third party will be received as violent by the punished, even if the punishment is fair and just. Thus, the third party—as a source of authority—must be legitimate and credible; otherwise the decision rendered will be perceived as violent domination rather than just punishment. Regardless of its justification or objective, however, Ricoeur reminds us that “punishment remains in the grip of the spirit of vengeance, which the spirit of justice has the project of overcoming” (*Reflections* 230).

As previously argued, authority maintains its credibility and legitimacy through a commitment to the just. Thus, it is the concept of responsibility that presents itself as the most reasonable hermeneutical framework for understanding the relationship between authority and justice. Ricoeur admits that the term “responsibility” is relatively new in philosophical discourse, and, as such, is not used with the precision that such a term requires. For example, the term responsibility can be understood within the framework of civil law, where “responsibility is defined by the obligation to make up or to compensate for the tort one has caused through one’s own fault” (*The Just* 11). Additionally, it can be understood in the framework of penal law, where responsibility is “the obligation to accept punishment” (*The Just* 11). Responsibility extends beyond the legal sphere, as well, in a vagueness that, at the limit, articulates a sense of responsibility in which “you are responsible for everything and everyone” (*The Just* 12). For the purposes of our present discussion, the hermeneutics of responsibility we want to develop comes out of the ancient concept of imputation, through Kant, and into the contemporary understanding of responsibility as accountability for one’s words and actions. With such an understanding of responsibility, we begin to see more clearly why it may well be the most appropriate hermeneutical lens for understanding the relationship between authority and justice, and for addressing contemporary crises of sexual abuse, where questions regarding authority and justice are paramount.

### PART III: FORGETTING, FORGIVENESS, AND RECOGNITION

In what is probably the most challenging matrix discussed in this paper—particularly when we integrate it into our conversation on crises of sexual



abuse—we turn now to the relationship between forgetting and forgiveness, through a hermeneutics of recognition.

For Ricoeur, forgetting—like forgiveness—designates the horizon of the entire investigation in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, insofar as forgetting exists within a “problematic of memory and faithfulness to the past” (*Memory* 412). Forgetting stands as the challenge *par excellence* to memory insofar as forgetting puts into question the very claim memory makes to reliability (*Memory* 414). This is not to say that forgetting is a category that we must overcome, but rather it is “the enigma constitutive of the entire problematic of memory” (*Memory* 414) that we must understand differently. Ricoeur acknowledges that we cannot remember everything at each given moment in our lives, but notes that this form of forgetting—where something is not lost to memory, but is rather reserved in the mind to be recalled later—can, in fact, be foundational to the phenomenon of memory. As Pellauer notes, this type of forgetting—i.e. memory held in reserve—allows us to “speak of this kind of forgetting as forgetting that founds memory” (Pellauer 124). Thus, according to Ricoeur, we “absolutely cannot speak of a duty of forgetting” (*Memory* 418) because to do so would undercut the entire foundation for memory. Ricoeur suggests, then, that “forgetting has a positive meaning insofar as having-been prevails over being-no-longer in the meaning attached to the idea of the past. Having-been makes forgetting the immemorial resource offered to the work of remembering” (*Memory* 443). What remains to be discussed is the relationship between forgetting and Ricoeur’s three “abuses of memory”: blocked memory, manipulated memory, and obligated memory.

In discussing the relationship between forgetting and blocked memory, Ricoeur turns his attention to Freud, psychoanalytic theory, and the reality that “many instances of forgetting are due to impediments blocking access to the treasures buried in memory” (*Memory* 444). In the Freudian analysis, blocked memory is the result of the mind’s repression of traumatic experiences. While the traumatic experience appears to be “forgotten,” psychoanalysis shows that, despite this “forgetting,” “the trauma remains . . . entire sections of the reputedly forgotten past can return” (*Memory* 445). This is what makes blocked memory, paradoxically, unforgettable. Manipulated memory, on the other hand, does not deal with repressed memories, but rather with memories that have been subject to, and influenced by, ideology. Ricoeur notes that “everything that compounds the fragility of identity also proves to be an opportunity for the manipulation of memory, mainly through ideology” (*Memory* 448). As noted earlier, Ricoeur acknowledges that we cannot remember everything at once. The danger of manipulated memory comes to the fore when higher—i.e. authoritative—powers play on the “blank spaces” of memory and “impose

a canonical narrative [on social actors] by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery. A devious form of forgetting is at work here, resulting from stripping the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves” (*Memory* 448). Forgetting becomes, in such cases, both semi-passive and semi-active. The social agents, while manipulated to a certain degree, still bear certain responsibilities for their situation, especially when forgetting becomes avoidance, or a wanting-not-to-know. Ricoeur, in response to this willingness to allow ourselves to be manipulated by authoritative powers, reformulates the Enlightenment’s *Sapere aude!* into the exclamation, *Dare to give an account of yourself!* (*Memory* 449). Finally, in addressing the relationship of forgetting and obligated memory, Ricoeur turns to the phenomenon of amnesty. As the commanded forgetting of the socio-political authority, amnesty’s aim is “the reconciliation of enemy citizens, civil peace” (*Memory* 453). Expanding on Ricoeur’s definition, Kearney reminds us that, for Ricoeur, “amnesty is never amnesia. The past must be recollected, re-imagined, rethought and worked through” (*Owl of Minerva* 97). This is distinct from, say, pardon, where amnesia is the goal—a forgetting of the past, particularly when that past is problematic for the authority authorizing the pardon. Latent within this conversation on forgetting, and the next topic for discussion, is the challenging question of forgiving:

Against the “never” of evil, which makes pardon impossible, we are asked to think the “marvel of a once again,” which makes it possible. But the possibility of forgiveness is a “marvel” precisely because it surpasses the limits of rational calculation and explanation. (Kearney, *Owl of Minerva* 96)

As Kearney quite eloquently demonstrates, forgiveness is rather distinct from the principle trajectory of Ricoeur’s work in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Nevertheless, it is with a discussion of forgiveness that Ricoeur ends this work. If, Ricoeur suggests, the concept of forgiveness exists at all, then it must exist along the same continuum as memory, history, and forgetting, but as an extension beyond them. The concept of forgiveness presumes that there are, in fact, situations in which “we can accuse someone of something [and] presume him to be or declare him guilty” (*Memory* 460). Thus, the notion of imputability is essential to a Ricoeurian understanding of forgiveness. Imputability allows us to bind an agent to his or her actions and to find fault with particular agents and/or actions. Fault, for Ricoeur, “consists in transgressing a rule . . . [or more] fundamentally, a harm done to others” (*Memory* 461). Thus, suggests Ricoeur, “fault in its essence is unforgivable not only in fact but by right” (*Memory* 466). Yet, in the end,

“there is forgiveness” (*Memory* 466). For this reason, Ricoeur understands forgiveness to be beyond the traditional systems of ethics and morality. Forgiveness goes above and beyond what analytical philosophy can argue for or understand. Quoting Derrida, Ricoeur notes that “forgiveness is not, and it should not be, either normal, or normative, or normalizing. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary” (*Memory* 469). Otherwise, were forgiveness understood as normative or normalizing, “it would consist in lifting the punitive sanction, in not punishing when one can and should punish. . . . Forgiveness creating impunity is a great injustice” (*Memory* 470). Nevertheless, insofar as imputability binds an agent to his or her action, forgiveness—without becoming a substitute for impunity—“should release the agent from his act” (*Memory* 489). Thus, under the sign of forgiveness, says Ricoeur, “the guilty person is to be considered capable of something other than his offenses and his faults. He is held to be restored to his capacity for acting, and action restored to its capacity for continuing” (*Memory* 493).

The question, however, remains: how do we navigate the terrain between forgetting and forgiving? How do we know the role of forgetting, and when (if at all) are we to release an agent from his or her action through forgiveness? The most promising way, according to Ricoeur, is through a hermeneutics of recognition. When he speaks about recognition, Ricoeur refers to it “as a minor miracle” (*Memory* 416). Through this “minor miracle,” we “recognize as being the same the present memory and the first impression intended as other” (*Memory* 39). Recognition, however, is not simply limited to images and impressions. For Ricoeur, our understanding of recognition develops beyond this initial stage and, as Pellauer notes, moves “from recognizing a thing to recognizing oneself, to recognizing others, to, finally, being recognized as oneself by others” (127). The danger here, of course, is the threat of misrecognition—a phenomenon which “runs the spectrum from disregard to disrespect, to contempt and even denial of the other’s humanity . . . [this] is always possible because of the fundamental dissymmetry between oneself and others” (Pellauer 133). While we can appreciate the centrality of the concept of recognition in general, how, we might ask, does this understanding of recognition relate to forgetting and forgiveness? With regard to forgetting, recognition allows us to distinguish between the “having-been” and the “being-no-longer” of the past. Recognizing the “having-been,” over and against the “being-no-longer,” makes the space for forgetting to become a foundation for memory. It is in light of this that Ricoeur can make the claim that “every act of memory . . . is thus summed up in recognition” (*Memory* 495). As for forgiving, recognition plays a central role in its procedural unfolding. Forgiveness requires an act of recognition insofar as one must recognize the agent, the action, and the link between the

two in order to impute responsibility. This act of recognition is especially pertinent in the case of faulty actions. Without recognition, we are unable to impute responsibility to an agent and bind them to their action. Without this imputation of responsibility, we are unable to release the agent, through an act of forgiveness, from his or her action. Thus, a hermeneutics of recognition must hold a central place in any discussions on forgetting and forgiving.

In the final section of this paper, I will turn to a specific example of a crisis of sexual abuse in order to try and concretize the more conceptual analysis provided up to this point. As such, I will turn to the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in order to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the proposed Ricoeurian hermeneutics of testimony, responsibility, and recognition, within the matrices of memory, history, authority, justice, forgetting, and forgiveness.

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#### PART IV: A RICOEURIAN RESPONSE TO CRISES OF SEXUAL ABUSE: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The first set of questions we must ask about any crisis of sexual abuse, and specifically the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, deals with the category of memory: “What happened?” and “To whom?” In approaching the category of memory, the first step we must take is toward those persons whose experiences constitute the “what” of memory and who, as persons, constitute its “whom”: the victims. This move toward the victims themselves goes against the more “typical” move made in these cases toward the “record keepers” or the “institutional archives” that house the official accounts of “what happened” and “to whom.” In the case of the Catholic Church, the “record keepers” are the hierarchy of the Catholic Church themselves: priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes. I would argue, however, that such movement is misdirected. The first step in any process of attending to sexual abuse ought to be a step toward the victims of sexual abuse themselves. In speaking to the victims—in listening to their stories—we are given access to their memories of what happened through their testimony, characterized in the Ricoeurian phrase, “I was there! Believe me!” Their testimony provides access to the embodied and embattled memories that are not stored in the “documentary proof” of the official institutional archives. This attention to the testimony of the victims also aids in addressing the testimonial injustice many victims have experienced, and continue to experience.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For an interesting reflection on, and analysis of, testimonial and epistemic injustice, see Fricker.

When we consider this category of testimony with regards to the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, we are tragically faced with a phenomenon that Ricoeur himself acknowledged as latent within the concept of testimony—namely, the “criteria of suspicion” that accompany all acts of testimony. The “criteria of suspicion” are that which responds to the claim “I was there! Believe me!” with the retort “Why should I?” This highlights the unavoidable ambiguity of testimony, and gestures toward one of the challenges facing the victims of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. Victims must overcome this oft-heard retort to their claims for recognition and justice. The perpetrators of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and their protectors, have frequently and systematically incubated these seeds of doubt, inherent in testimony, in order to foster scenarios whereby suspicion, rather than trust, becomes the *modus operandi* for understanding testimony. What Ricoeur offers, in these cases, is the important response to the response (of suspicion) that while we must acknowledge the ambiguities of history and memory that reveal themselves in testimony, if we are to say and/or do anything at all, we must have, on some level, trust in the validity of the testimony we receive. Ricoeur is not suggesting that we “turn off” the voice of suspicion—this would be impossible—but, rather, that we must keep an ear out for those moments of truth in testimony if we are to say anything about anything at all. Not to orient ourselves towards others in this way, suggests Ricoeur, will give rise not only to suffering, but to *the suffering other*. For Ricoeur, suffering is defined “by the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity for acting, of being-able-to-act” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 190), and this is precisely the suffering incurred by the victims of sexual abuse. When the seeds of doubt sown by suspicion are favored over the moments of truth in testimony, the testifying other is made to suffer: their self-integrity is violated and, as a result, their ability to act in a given situation is impaired, if not eliminated. As a remedy for this unequal form of relationality—as a response to the suffering other—Ricoeur offers friendship—that form of relationality constituted by equality:

While equality is presupposed in friendship . . . equality is reestablished only through the recognition by the self of the superiority of the other’s authority . . . equality is reestablished only through the shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality. (*Oneself as Another* 192)

This balancing act between attending to suspicion, while simultaneously recognizing the need for trust in, and friendship with, the suffering other, is one of the important contributions Ricoeur makes to the discourse on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

Another prominent Ricoeurian theme that arises from this discussion on testimony, suspicion, and trust is the concept of authority, and within this concept, the concept of justice. Authority, for Ricoeur, consists in “the right to command” and “the power to impose obedience.” The right to command, of course, rests on a claim to legitimacy—a claim that the commanding authority deserves to be obeyed and respected. If this is the case, then any claimant of such a right must recognize that, if it is not seen as a legitimate wielder of the right to command obedience, then it cannot be seen as authoritative because it has no legitimate claim to credibility. In the example of the Catholic Church, if its authority and credibility were not lost over the decades of sexual abuse, then they were certainly lost when civil court documents revealed that the Church had, in fact, been aware of the crisis and chosen to cover up and conceal it. Without the criterion of credibility to legitimate its right to command obedience, any such exercise of authority—or, one might say in these cases, of domination—demands that the question of justice be more openly and directly addressed.

Ricoeur offered a number of insights into the question of justice, but what remains most important for the discussion at hand is that justice, in the Ricoeurian paradigm, rests on a foundation of fairness and equality. It is, of course, only with a foundation in justice that love even becomes possible for Ricoeur. Love—*agape*—is at the heart of the Catholic Church’s mission in the world, and this is precisely what becomes impossible for the Catholic Church to embody and endorse without justice. Recall that, for Ricoeur, “it is first in contrast to justice that *agape* presents its credentials” (Ricoeur, *Course of Recognition* 220). *Agape* pertains to the realm of the hypermoral and the hyperethical, embodied in the Christian mandate to “love one’s enemies.” In order, however, for *agape* to avoid becoming the epitome of the non-moral, the epitome of the unjust, there must be an underlying conceptualization of justice through which, in addition to the Golden Rule, *agape* must pass. The apparent opposition between *agape* and justice is overcome through the recognition that the former, at least in practice, must be in some way dependent on the latter. While it is also true that *agape*, for Ricoeur, speaks a different language than justice, if we bring Ricoeur into conversation with the Catholic Church on *agape*, particularly in light of the Catholic Church’s crisis of sexual abuse, we see more clearly the need for articulating this relationship between *agape* and justice. While it is true that “*agape* declares itself, proclaims itself” while “justice makes arguments” (*Course of Recognition* 223), we cannot avoid the fact, in practice at least, that “the test of credibility for any talk about *agape* lies within the dialectic of love and justice” (222). Ricoeur’s discourse on *agape* provides the Catholic Church, particularly in light of its crisis of sexual abuse, with the transformative possibility of a renewed language of *agape*. The

justice and authority claimed by the Catholic Church today must account for the dialectic of love and justice, and this through an acknowledgement and acceptance of responsibility for the injustice the Catholic Church has perpetrated against the victims of clerical sexual abuse. Avoidance of this responsibility fundamentally undermines the claim of the Catholic Church to being a credible, legitimate authority that embodies the hypermoral and hyperethical realm of *agape*. Only through the lens of responsibility can this rupture be addressed, and it is only through this same approach that we can begin down the pathway of forgetting, forgiving, and recognition.

Analyzing the concept of forgetting, and the possibility of forgiveness, is difficult in itself, but especially in light of crises of sexual abuse. Many of the memories of sexual abuse have been blocked by a victim's own psyche; other memories have been manipulated by institutional authorities that have, over the years, been determined to keep these crises within their control; still other memories have been lost through commanded amnesia. The loss of these memories undercuts their reliability, yet returning to Freud, as Ricoeur does, can prove to be invaluable in these cases. While memories may be blocked, manipulated or commanded, they still remain in the psyche. In the case of sexual abuse victims, the trauma of what they suffered is not likely to be forgotten completely. Thus, the type of forgetting pertinent to these situations will not be the "being-no-longer," but rather the "having-been" of memory—memory held in reserve. This is the form of forgetting that, as Pellauer notes, founds memory. It is precisely here that Ricoeur's analysis of forgetting impacts the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. Insofar as it pertains to the "having-been" of memory—a designation that requires a fundamental trust in testimony—forgetting becomes the discursive space for recalling memories held in reserve in the hopes of retrieving those memories that have been blocked, reclaiming those memories that have been manipulated, and naming those memories that have been commanded. Challenging though it may be, analyzing the forms of forgetting is integral for understanding what we mean when we speak of recognition.

The possibility of forgiveness is even more difficult to address, but in a substantially different way than the question of forgetting. For both Ricoeur and Derrida, "each time that forgiveness is in the service of some finality . . . each time that it tends to reestablish a normalcy . . . then 'forgiveness' is not pure—nor is its concept" (Ricoeur, *Memory* 469). Forgiveness, if it is to be understood as forgiveness, cannot be expected, it cannot be counted on, and it cannot be demanded. Forgiveness, like *agape*, is a gratuitous gift—one that goes beyond reason and calculation. Forgiveness could be understood as violent or unjust if it went down the road of pardon or amnesia, but in such cases it would, in fact, cease to be genuine



forgiveness. What forgiveness can, and often does, do is grant amnesty. It does not forget, or discard, the fault that led to the transgression of rights. What forgiveness does is acknowledge the wrong committed, then proceeds to release the agent from his or her guilty actions. As has been said, the act of forgiveness is beyond reason—it is supererogatory. This also goes to show that an act of forgiveness—a genuine act of forgiveness—is not something that we can “work towards” or “argue for.” It can only be something freely and gratuitously given by the victims themselves.

If this is the case, that forgetting—of all things—is that which grounds memory and, consequently, the possibility of forgiveness, which cannot be “worked towards” or “argued for,” then we appear to be left without a comprehensive, all-encompassing response to sexual abuse, particularly in the Catholic Church. Perhaps, however, this is Ricoeur’s point exactly. What Ricoeur offers us, against a one-size-fits-all response to crises of sexual abuse, are what he, and others, call “states of peace.” These are “peaceful experiences of mutual recognition,” the exceptional character of which “underscores their importance, and precisely in this way ensures their power to reach and affect the very heart of transactions stamped with the seal of struggle” (*Course of Recognition* 219). Mutual recognition within states of peace—this is what Ricoeur offers the Catholic Church as it faces its sexual abuse crisis. The Catholic Church must attend to what it means to be recognized as oneself by others—especially by suffering others. Even—perhaps especially—in the brokenness of abused bodies and identities, the Catholic Church must experience the “other” who demands recognition, not only as a victim of sexual abuse, but as a person whose very self-identity has been fractured by the (in) actions of the Catholic Church. It is only in this passive form of recognition—“where the subject places him—or herself under the tutelage of a relationship of reciprocity” (*Course of Recognition* 248)—that the necessary mutuality, constitutive of Ricoeur’s states of peace, comes to fruition. It is only in true sympathy that the self, or in this case the Catholic Church

. . . whose power of acting is at the start greater than that of its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return. For from the suffering other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing but precisely from weakness itself. This is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity of exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands. (*Oneself as Another* 191)

While these moments of mutual recognition—these states of peace—are exceptional, we are, perhaps, not without examples of such moments in the



wake of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. In February 2011, the Archdiocese of Dublin, led by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and Cardinal Sean O'Malley, held a Liturgy of Lament and Repentance at St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland. This liturgy was offered as a space for the victims of sexual abuse to join with the Catholic Church in a ceremony that was, at the same time, an act of repentance and an attempt at an act of mutual recognition. The Archdiocese of Dublin exposed itself to its victims, seeking forgiveness, while the victims of sexual abuse exposed themselves to the community that failed them, yet which they sought to recognize as something—in hope at least—that could be better than its past actions constrained it to being. Though almost unheard of—and unrepeated—elsewhere, the Liturgy of Lament and Repentance embodies the possibility of a way forward for both the Catholic Church and the victims of its sexual abuse crisis—the possibility of mutual recognition. As Ricoeur notes,

[the] struggle for recognition perhaps remains endless. At the very least, the experiences of actual recognition . . . confer on this struggle for recognition the assurance that the motivation which distinguishes it from the lust for power and shelters it from the fascination of violence is neither illusory nor vain. (*Course of Recognition* 246)

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this investigation, we have attempted to address two sets of questions. First, how can we more adequately respond to crises of sexual abuse? Second, what resources do the writings of Paul Ricoeur provide to help approach these crises of sexual abuse, understand—as much as possible—what happened therein, and evaluate potential avenues for moving forward in the shadow of these crises? In the end, I hope to have shown that Paul Ricoeur offers us not only tools, but avenues, for doing precisely this. Ricoeur's categories of testimony, responsibility, and recognition offer us three distinct, yet interrelated, ways of approaching and attending to the dynamics of these crises, as well as offering an avenue for the articulation of states in which forgiveness and reconciliation become possible. It is my hope that this article can serve to open such avenues for conversation and deliberation, as well as provide resources and frameworks for articulating and implementing responsible recognition and action amidst, and within, circumstances that are grievously irresponsible and which can only be described as moments of mis- or non-recognition.

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Reading *The Road* with Paul Ricoeur  
and Julia Kristeva: The Human Body  
as a Sacred Connection

# ABSTRACT

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Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* confronts readers with a question: what is there to live towards after apocalypse? McCarthy locates his protagonists in the aftermath of the world's fiery destruction, dramatizing a relationship between a father and a son, who are, as McCarthy puts it, "carrying the fire." This essay asserts that the body carrying the fire is a sacred, incandescent body that connects to and with the world and the other, unifying the human and the divine. This essay will consider the body as a sacred connection in *The Road*. Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach will help to explore what is sacred. In addition, their works elucidate the body as a present site of human connection and sacredness while calling attention to what is glaringly absent yet hauntingly present in McCarthy's text: the mother. In the aftermath of destruction, primitive, sacred connections become available through the sensual body, highlighting what is at stake in the novel: the connection of body and spirit. The essay will attempt to show that McCarthy's rejection of a redemptive framework, or hope in an otherworldly reality, shrouds spirit in physicality symbolized by the fire carried by the body. This spirit offers another kind of hope, one based on the body's potential to feel and connect to the other. The thought and works of Ricoeur and Kristeva will broaden a reading of McCarthy's novel, especially as a statement about the unification of body and spirit, contributing a multi-dimensional view of a contemporary problem regarding what sustains life after a cataclysmic event.

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**ABSTRACT**

## INTRODUCTION

The chillingly desolate, post-apocalyptic world of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* confronts readers with a question: what is there to live towards in a barren, forsaken world? McCarthy locates his protagonists, and his readers with them, in a grim setting, breathing air tinged with ash. The main characters, an unnamed father and his son, journey south seeking food, water, and a warmer climate. Possessing little, they confront death and destruction upon the road, coming upon a newborn infant roasted on a spit and male and female captives being gradually harvested as food. Annihilation is certain: the father moves closer to death throughout the text, and readers never come to know the mother, already dead from having committed suicide. Even in the wake of cataclysm, the tender relationship between the father and the son remains, and they proceed on a mission, as McCarthy puts it, "carrying the fire" (24–25). Feeble and dilapidated, their bodies hold this fire, which marks them as "good," or as not susceptible to alleviating their hunger by eating other human bodies.

This essay will consider *The Road* in terms of its treatment of the body as a sacred connection. In the analysis, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach will help to explore what is sacred.<sup>1</sup> In addition, their works elucidate the body as a present site of human connection and sacredness while calling attention to what is glaringly absent yet hauntingly present in McCarthy's text: the mother. The essay will then illustrate how, in the aftermath of destruction, primitive, sacred connections become available through the sensual body, through sight, smell, sound, touch, and through breath. What is at stake in the novel, the connection of body and spirit, emerges through corporeal sensations and connections. Primary paternal and maternal relationships will serve to illustrate this connection. For instance, the tender compassion in the father and son pair illustrates what occurs when sacred bodies meet. Lastly, the essay will attempt to show how McCarthy rejects a redemptive framework, or hope in an otherworldly reality. Instead, he shrouds spirit in physicality symbolized by the fire carried by the body. This spirit offers another kind of hope, one based on the body's potential to feel and connect to the other.

<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva and Paul Ricoeur both have impressive *oeuvres*. This paper treats their works in light of McCarthy's novel and, therefore, will not go deeply into the philosophies or theories of either writer, an unfortunate limitation of this piece. Rather, the essay seeks to draw the reader to an important point in all three writers' works: that the body is sacred and that "hope" lies in the body and in the "other" of continued existence.

The body carrying fire is a sacred, incandescent body that connects to and with the world and the other, unifying human and divine. The thought and works of Ricoeur and Kristeva will broaden a reading of McCarthy's novel, especially as a statement about the unification of body and spirit, contributing to a multi-dimensional view of a contemporary problem: what sustains humanity with no past and no future?

The dire predicament posed by *The Road* forces the characters to face the idea of ultimate destruction, questioning the method and teleology of living after apocalypse. The question turns back on the reader: what are you living for and how are you living? The book does not give an unequivocal answer; it only shows the body containing a fire, serving as a connection, and seeking a mother. McCarthy concentrates on the body, keeping readers in the present. His protagonists are two human bodies, bodies among bodies, fighting, moment by moment, to stay alive in a world where cannibalism represents an option for living.

## THE SACRED

In *The Road*, the sensual is sacred. Simple moments like eating canned peaches and bathing disrupt and unite distinctions between divine and human: finding peaches is so rare that eating them is venerated, and immersion in clean water is a form of rebirth. In the novel, mundane experiences grounded in the body become sacred. Further, McCarthy hallows and makes indispensable the body even when it is threatened, injured, or dying. He transposes the traditional view of holy, meaning whole and perfect, to associate holy and sacred with those "carrying the fire." The fire carriers regard all bodies, even injured ones, as sacred and view cannibalism as blasphemous. In contrast, the cannibals see the body as a physical thing to possess and consume; to them, the body is a determinant object without a sacred aspect.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade's conception of the sacred merges the divine and the creaturely establishing the sacred as "preeminently real," the source of life and fecundity (28). The sensory experiences of the body in this novel are "preeminently real" or radically present. Destruction and death are real. Eliade states that, "religious man's desire to live *in the sacred* is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality . . . to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion" (28). Paying special homage to Mircea Eliade's contributions to his formulation, Ricoeur develops a phenomenology of the sacred in *Figuring the Sacred*. He organizes the sacred around four traits: its experience as "awesome" and "overwhelming," whose power has the capacity to escape

articulation in speech; its ontological foundation and emergence in the world, or hierophany; its nonlinguistic quality and connection to ritual; and its emergence in nature, which participates in hierophanies (49–55). All of these points are founded on the sacred’s manifestation in capacity of the cosmos “to signify something other than itself” (*Figuring* 54).

For Kristeva, what is sacred is a perpetual fixation visible in our preoccupations and lying at the edge of the unconscious and personal relationships. Sacred is “not religion or its opposite, atheistic negation, but the experience that beliefs both shelter and exploit, at the crossroads of sexuality and thought, body and meaning” (Clément and Kristeva 1). Corresponding with Catherine Clément, Kristeva posits that the sacred is “rooted in a certainty about life” and asks “what if what we call the ‘sacred’ were the celebration of a mystery, the mystery of the emergence of meaning?” (13). Kristeva envisions a dimension to mystery that is particularly fruitful in a reading of *The Road*, that women’s bodies function as a site where biology and narrative meet, disrupting patriarchal categories that classify the masculine as producing meaning. She also calls readers to be attentive to what is present and absent in the role of the mother. The mother’s body serves as an intersection where rootedness and obscurity meet. Her body, especially related to birth, represents a link between the human and the divine.

Disrupting the connection between the body and the meaning and between the human and the divine, in *The Road* the body *sans* fire indicates evil. Ricoeur states precisely that evil is “the threat of the dissolution of the bond between man and the sacred” which “makes us most intensely aware of man’s dependence on the powers of the sacred” (*Symbolism* 6). In the novel, sacred space is body guarded as “carrying the fire”; this life is held in tension with other life precisely because not having the fire means that one is more than willing to damage another body. The man and the boy see the burning bodies; they confront three bodies hanging from the rafters and look upon the horror of an infant roasted on a spit. These ghastly images illustrate mortality, but they also indicate a lack of respect for the body’s holiness and the soullessness of the transgressors: those who do not “carry the fire.” Fire is the classic symbol for the soul and characterizes the incandescent body (Heraclitus 96–99 and Boehme 26). Further, the body is distinguished from the destruction in the setting, but not completely set apart from its bareness and primordial nature. What is at stake in this novel is the connection between body and spirit; the body physically presents what is most crucial, the holding of the fire, marking sacred space.

“Carrying the fire” can be read as carrying the soul, but not the soul in the prophetic sense that lifts the characters up to an other-worldly existence; this soul is divine as it is rooted in apotheosis. Entirely being in the body

and respecting that body is the only way to have the fire. Many times the father tells the boy that they will not succumb to starvation by destroying the body because they carry the fire, the fire that signifies that they are the “good guys,” those who seek to preserve human life and sanctify the body. In spite of the post-apocalyptic scene of destruction, their bodies, set apart from cannibalism, are powerful sites of the sacred; their bodies’ sensual experiences validate this sacredness. The father tells this to the son:

“You have to carry the fire.”

“I don’t know how to.”

“Yes, you do.”

“Is the fire real? The fire?”

“Yes it is.”

“Where is it? I don’t know where it is.”

“Yes you do. It’s inside you. It always was there. I can see it.” (278–79)

The fire inside, perceived through the eyes and emblematic of the sacred connection, distinguishes the protagonists and their allies from the cannibals. This manner of identification is not far from the adage that someone’s soul is visible through the eyes. The cannibal, without the fire inside, fails to operate as holy or divine because it assumes imperfection. The flesh, as it is, does not suffice. The cannibal relegates flesh to the realm of the larder. The fire carriers are capable of connection because they see the body as holy, whereas the cannibals are incapable of connection because they fail to see the sacredness of the body. The protagonist’s sense of the holy in the novel then illustrates that the body in any state is not denigrated; instead, the body is complete and whole regardless of its condition. According to the religiously holy, the body’s containing the fire makes it more holy, not because it transcends the body or will remain after the body, but because it marks the body as holy, as carrying the spirit, as incandescent.

## THE BODY AND THE SENSES

McCarthy’s text has fragmented dialogue and little plot. Without evolving action, *The Road* carries readers forward through sets of repeated events, all associated with and grounded in sensual, bodily experience. Bodily senses, particularly those of the protagonists, drive the plot and establish, in lieu of speech, a connection between the characters. McCarthy’s novel cannot do without the body or the connections between the bodies. Driven by the needs of the body, action is also driven by the need for the mother and water; without the mother the novel has no frame, the man has

no memory, there is no child; without water, the characters seek nothing but the south and certain death.

Propelled to go forward on the road without the mother, the man and his son endure as two threatened bodies. An event of recognition, or revelation, marks the post-apocalyptic scene in the apprehension by a body, the father's, of a body that is something more, such as a fire carrier. The man repeatedly reassures the boy that they are "the good guys" who are "carrying the fire." Their threatened bodies at once also become illuminated bodies when the fire they contain signifies the soul and the sacred.

Sensory data helps not only to compose the body, to render it present, but also to distinguish between what is dead and alive. McCarthy's novel echoes phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who writes, "by sensation I grasp, on the fringe of my own personal life and my own acts, a life of given consciousness from which these latter emerge, the life of my eyes, my hands, my ears, which are so many natural selves" (50).

For Ricoeur the senses, and the experience of sensation, transpose what is literal into what is figurative. In so far as McCarthy's text is poetic, fictional, aesthetic, the language moves readers from the literal to the figurative quite rapidly. McCarthy writes through the voice of the father,

This is my child, he said. I wash a dead man's brains out of his hair. That is my job. Then he wrapped him in the blanket and carried him to the fire. . . . All of this like some ancient anointing. So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you've nothing else, construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them. (74)

For Ricoeur, the movement from the literal to the figurative is also a movement from the sensory to what the sensory represents. For instance, hearing and seeing are never simple receptions but are complicated and attached to the indeterminate. The transfer, both determinative and through language, takes place in some metaphysics. Said another way, the twofold movement illustrates first the adoption or assertion of meaning; the second posits it within a spiritual order, an order Ricoeur asserts exists *a priori* the sensory experience (*Rule* 280–95).

A critical component of Kristeva's theory and practice are the senses, which support carnality. For Kristeva, the analytic technique has two possible solutions, reliant on human connection and related to the return to affect or the manifestation of emotion (*New Maladies* 99). The mobilization of affect permits the signifying process of which the analyst is an explicit part. Verbalizing sensation and perception liberates this signifying process; intellectualization is subsumed, and memory is released. Kristeva writes, "the taste of Proust's madeleine depends on the possibility of remembering



it" (*New Maladies* 100). Furthermore, Kristeva reports, "the discourse of sensations directed toward the other, and the discourse of the self as other, is by nature an uninhibited discourse" (*New Maladies* 100). Applied to McCarthy's text, Kristeva's psychoanalytic technique replicates Ricoeur's recognition of the move from the figurative to the literal; in Kristeva's terms, the move is from affect to sign to sensation and perception, the latter being the element that links one to another, intimately, viscerally.

This is not a war of the reason versus the senses. McCarthy's writing and use of metaphors leave readers vacillating between what is sensual and literal and what is metaphysical, while he simultaneously calls that metaphysical world into question. For instance, in McCarthy's novel, holy as traditionally complete and as perfect emerges in the sensory relationship between people, when two bodies connect. Some of the most touching moments include the man swaddling the boy in blankets, in tarps, and holding him after a dream. McCarthy teases readers with the messianic vision of the boy, but that hope falls short because these moments are interrupted by the reality of the barren, desolate, dangerous landscape. When they come upon an abandoned home with a shed that has yet to be pillaged, the father tells the boy to hold his hand in front of the lamp so the father can see if behind the shed's door there are more horrid sights, because, he says, "This is what the good guys do. They keep trying. They don't give up" (137). Once the door is opened and the reader is in suspense, the father reaches to hold the lamp. "He started to descend the stairs but then he turned and leaned and kissed the child on the forehead" (137). A sacred connection, in the firelight of a lamp, marks the transition from the known to the unknown depths, here into the shed.

Apprehension by the body of the body is conducted through the senses. These sensual experiences establish the point of origin for all experiences. Eliade discusses religious experiences as primordial experiences, the most central points for orientation in the world, and for both Eliade and Ricoeur, senses orient the sacred. Merleau-Ponty also accepts originations of experience in the sensations, "the most rudimentary perceptions," which connect us to each other (281). This sensual connection to the other is the most crucial aspect of the novel. Not only is the body, as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology establishes, active, as "our general medium for having a world," it also, through its sensual experiences and bodily sensations, "gives us access to some form or other of being" (252).

Considering McCarthy's use of the senses more particularly reveals how the stark simplicity of situations highlights the extraordinariness of touching, seeing, smelling, tasting, and hearing. Touch in the novel, as for the ancient Christian saints, renders the body preminent, present,

and holy.<sup>2</sup> Touch is pivotal not only because it confirms life, signified by McCarthy's continual use of and reference to warmth to be found in the south or in the sand on the beach, but also because it furthers a sacred act: the holy connection between one and the other. The father touches the child to see if he is warm, awake, present, and has a heartbeat. Similarly, when the boy touches the old man they have stumbled upon on the road or touches water, he has an experience of the sacred; a body touching another body is a sacred moment. The father ruminates: "Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing? Can there be? Hold him in your arms. Just so. The soul is quick. Pull him toward you. Kiss him. Quickly" (114). The embrace signifies tenderness tinged with a sense of urgency and immediacy that such a moment is really all there is left in the world replicating Ricoeur's notion of the non-linguistic aspect of the sacred.

While touch emblemizes a physical connection, seeing represents a sacred connection of another sort, especially when seeing is related to insight. In *The Road*, seeing is employed in its usual narrative sense, but sight also signifies presence, life, and intuition. To see something substantiates its presence; it is a method of locating or identifying things, especially living, moving things. When the boy recognizes himself in a mirror, a device he has never seen before, readers are moved. Most importantly, sight helps, as the father tells his son, to distinguish who carries the fire; in this sense, sight operates in unison with intuition helping the boy to see who has an inner fire and who does not. "Seeing is not of the same order of penetration as insight" (Ricoeur, *Rule* 332). Insight is what is needed to identify an incandescent body; insight also assists the identification of dreams, regardless of their being disturbing, as a source of life. Seeing also happens in dreams. The father tells an awakening, shaken son, that apparitions in dreams let the dreamer know he/she is still alive and fighting to stay alive. In addition, the father sees the mother in his dreams; through dreams readers realize that she marks the beginning of the novel's story, walking out as the apocalypse began. Her absence is haunting, where her presence in dreams marks what she symbolizes: life and fecundity.

Furthermore, the absence of the sensual, in this case sight, marks the termination of the sacred connection. The mother's refusal to see is striking as she walks out from the family's home into the darkness. The father implores her to stay, "you can't even see." She responds, "I don't have to" (48). What does she refuse to see: apocalypse? False hope after apocalypse? Death and destruction? The father and son's struggle towards death? Or

<sup>2</sup> On how, in late ancient Christianity, hagiographic texts employed sensory realism in terms of sight and touch to articulate the presence of the holy in the world in a non-idolatrous way see Patricia Cox Miller 404–05.

is she meant to draw readers to grapple with what life is without a mother? The mother's not seeing signifies a loss, a loss of the body, and death. To be sightless, to be blind, is to fall victim to the impenetrable darkness. Walking and feeling his way through the dark, the man "could see no worse with his eyes shut" (57).

Sight also has another function. The dangerous enterprise of living is intensified by the possibility of being seen by those without the fire. If the bad see the good, if they recognize the fire (this is a literal reference McCarthy makes, which alludes to the figurative notion of the fire inside as good), the bad will attempt to eradicate the good. Danger in the novel emphasizes the body as a threatened, even if illuminated, body. The peril illustrates the body's vulnerability, emphasizing that what the protagonists possess after apocalypse is only their bodies and each other; accrual of something more is dim. As Kristeva indicates, well-being (for her in the analytic encounter) relies on human connection and the return to affect (*New Maladies* 99). McCarthy communicates a similar concern in his cataclysmic world. Readers faced with his fictitious reality are stimulated to ask what is dangerous now, today, that interferes with bodily connection and well-being.

Smell, too, links the boy and man to what is radically present and fecund; smell intensifies the moment's reality and its sacredness. Within the novel, water, a life-giving source, is also indicated by smell. McCarthy describes, "water so sweet he could smell it" (103), and the boy recognizes water by the scent of the rocks within it. Further, smell and taste emphasize what is lost in apocalypse, signifying absence and presence. The man describes the taste of life, which he associates with pleasure. This pleasure transcends taste as a hedonistic experience and moves toward the sacred in the simple experience of tasting water, pears, and a peach.

The sensation of hearing also facilitates a sacred connection. This manifests in the hearing of the breath as life's remnants. In addition, the father continually tells the son that they will always be able to hear one another, dead or alive. The sense of hearing bridges a gap between presence and absence, between life and death. Hearing, like sight and touch, marks what is sacred—the connection between people—and also has a power to protect. "I'll hear you if you call" (158), the father tells the son. And to his dead father the son whispers, "I'll talk to you every day. And I won't forget. No matter what" (241).

## FATHER AND SON

The pairing of a father and a son in *The Road* inevitably leads to a consideration (at least for a theologian) of the parallel between the protagonists

as the Father (God) and as the son (Jesus Christ) in Christianity. The allusion to the child as a messianic figure, both in general and through the father, has resonance throughout the novel, and in the novel this is a word made flesh. The father says at the beginning of the novel: “if he is not the word of God, then God never spoke” (5).

In *Conflict of Interpretations*, Ricoeur considers fatherhood from several points of view: psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex, the phenomenology of the spirit, and the representation of fatherhood in religion. Ricoeur makes an argument that leads readers to consider the relationship between desire, spirit, and God. This argument is also the move from the non-specific “a” father to the particular “the” father. Desire is one impulse, or starting point, that leads from consciousness to self-consciousness, the drama of which is wrapped up in Freud’s version of the Oedipus complex. The economy of desire comes to fruition, according to Ricoeur’s analysis, in Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*; through a psychoanalytic lens, killing the father, or killing Moses, represents the repetition within which religion (Christianity) situates itself.

Further, for Ricoeur, spirit represents a Hegelian self-consciousness synonymous with self-awareness, where divine nature and the human are united (“Fatherhood” 489). When the father is dead, he transpires into a symbol in two senses, as a signification of an ethical substance and as a tie, which binds the members. Literally, the father is the tie that binds the son to him and the mother, but he is also the tie that binds the son to God in the end of the novel, or perhaps, in McCarthy’s terms, to mystery. This sense of connectedness is consistent with Ricoeur’s move from Freud to Hegel, from phantasm to symbol, “from non-recognized fatherhood, mortal and mortifying for desire, to recognized fatherhood, which has become the tie between love and life” (“Fatherhood” 481).

However, the death of the father in Christianity, noted by Freud and Ricoeur, leads to a religion of the son. This is for Freud the neurotic outcome of the Oedipus complex. However, Ricoeur notes the possibility of another outcome, significant in this analysis, because McCarthy does not provide, according to my argument, a redemptive narrative bound up in the notion of a salvific son. The alternate outcome is the death of the father, which “belongs to the conversion of the phantasm into the symbol” (Ricoeur, “Fatherhood” 492). Ricoeur states that then,

We could speak truly of the death of God as the death of the father. That death would be at the same time a murder on the level of fantasy and of the return of the repressed, and a supreme abandonment, a supreme dispossession of self, on the level of the most advanced symbol. (“Fatherhood” 493)

For Ricoeur, this symbol culminates in the “spirit among us” (my emphasis), specifically, “the spirit of community” (“Fatherhood” 495). The death of the father leaves the boy to seek the spirit among us, the spirit of community with those fire carriers who remain, just as the death of the mother did for the father and son at the beginning of the novel.

Ricoeur discusses the lack of the use of father as a label for Yahweh in the Old Testament, noting the evolution of God as Father in the New Testament. In this analysis, Ricoeur states, “The name is a proper name. Father is an epithet. The name is a connotation. Father is a description” (“Fatherhood” 485). Father is a metaphor dependent on context. In his essay, Ricoeur recognizes the significant repetition of the father figure as a designation of sense, as “a declaration of the father” and finally as an “invocation to the father” which culminates in the Lord’s Prayer (“Fatherhood” 487). McCarthy seems to use the father in Ricoeur’s terms, emphasizing the connection rather than the individual. Thus, “the Father” becomes a metaphor contingent on the apocalyptic context, stripped of individuality to heighten the importance of the connection.

Viewed through a Christian lens, the father and son’s setting out on a journey in search for water alludes to their attempt to complete a trinity with the Holy Spirit. Further, in the Old Testament, water symbolizes life and is used as a means of purification. In Genesis, water is present prior to the beginning of God’s created act (*The Jewish Study Bible*, Genesis 1:2, 6–8). The spirit of God hovers over the waters (Genesis 1:2). The earth is founded upon the waters (Genesis 1:6–7, 9–10), and God commands the water to bring out myriad living souls (Genesis 1:20–21). The water mystery in Christianity accomplishes rebirth as in Baptism (John 3:5–6; Acts 8:39; cf. Acts 1–2). The imagery and symbolism regarding the water, especially aligned with baptism that implies the birth source of the mother, is another lack the trinity has to negotiate. It cannot be skipped over in McCarthy’s novel, not the least because he sets up an allusion to this kind of reading by calling the son the word of God.

In addition, McCarthy complicates the narrative with the suicide of the mother. Dead, her presence haunts the characters in memory and in the search for water, a symbol for the feminine. When the mother is the source of generation and aligned with water, drinking and eating become her way of being radically present. Furthermore, Ricoeur acknowledges that:

To recognize the father is to recognize him with the mother [there is a father because there is a family, not the reverse]. It is to accept the father’s being with the mother and the mother’s being with the father. Thus, sexuality is recognized—the sexuality of the couple that has begotten me; but it is recognized as the carnal dimension of the institution.

This reaffirmed unity of desire and spirit is what makes the recognition of the father possible. ("Fatherhood" 480)

Therefore, according to Ricoeur, reading the father demands a reading of the mother, and interestingly, his view of the connection is extremely physical and not psychic.

Kristeva offers another reading of the father: "the father dies so that the son might live; the son dies so that the father might be embodied in his work and transformed into his own son" (*New Maladies* 183). Within this Christian construction, Kristeva writes, "we must search for the woman" (*New Maladies* 183). Kristeva's recognition of the son concurs with Ricoeur's: "the father's body carries the memory of the mother's body," as does the son's in a more concrete way (*New Maladies* 183). Ricoeur's trajectory from desire to symbol in the hermeneutics of "father" can also be applied to "mother." Reading McCarthy in terms of the father and the mother leads to an understanding of the distinct difference between the non-particular and the particular underlined by the base experiences of the senses. At the end of *The Road*, there is "a mother" but this is not the mother that binds relationships. The final mother serves as bodily substitute. "The mother" lost at the beginning of the novel, sought for in mystery to which the father also succumbs, is the foundation for the sacred, wholly bodily connection; from her womb the son is born. Desire for the mother transposes into spirit; in the text, she is recalled through memory. She ultimately evolves into a symbol represented by water and, ultimately, another mother.

## THE MOTHER

Julia Kristeva recognizes the role of the mother in much of her writing, a recognition that must be made when considering *The Road*, not only because the search for food and water is so profound, but also because the novel is framed by "the mother" and "a mother" respectively. The novel starts with a catastrophe while the mother is pregnant with the son. Although McCarthy does not recount the story chronologically, the journey on the road begins just after the mother walks into the darkness to kill herself. In the end, the father dies to leave the son with a mother near the sea for which they have been searching incessantly. This mother is not the birth mother, but a mother nonetheless. McCarthy creates a strong image of the mother whose photograph left beside the road by the man reverberates in his dreams. And yet, her physical presence is absent and figuratively desired.

Kristeva discusses this mother on margins as an absent presence. In *New Maladies of the Soul* and “Stabat Mater” in *Tales of Love*, Kristeva points to Christ made flesh through the mother, a mother who stands on the periphery. Kristeva also reflects on mother’s absence from the trinity in Christianity, and then extends that to a psychoanalytic consideration (Freud’s Oedipal conflict) of the internalization of the absence of the mother. This internalization of a lack of the mother, so apparent in McCarthy’s novel, leads to a representation of the mother through water. Kristeva labels this kind of representation in the mother’s physical absence: *représentance* (*Hatred* 181). Affect, language, and idea, or an emotional response grounded by a sensation, combined with language, manifest into a representation of the mother. Perhaps for Kristeva, this interplay is not only evident in the Oedipal cycle, but also expresses itself in the Christian notion of the virgin mother: “deployed around this archaic link of the child [son] and the mother is the entire continent that extends just this side of and beyond language: a profusion of sensorial and drive-related races that connect Word to flesh” (*Hatred* 69). Language and body merge in McCarthy’s literary expressions, his story of an absent mother, a son, a dying father, and the perpetual search for nourishment, the symbolic site of the breast.

“Stabat Mater” facilitates further consideration of the mother’s body. The maternal body is, for Kristeva, “immeasurable, unconfined” (*Tales* 253). The maternal body is the womb, the ultimate connection, and upon birth signifies the ultimate disconnection. The son’s birth in *The Road* is marked by apocalypse: the catastrophe having occurred during his mother’s pregnancy facilitates the reading of the novel as the ultimate disconnection followed by the dread of death and the mother’s absence. Kristeva’s reflection in “Stabat Mater” responds to this dread:

Man overcomes the unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place—in the place and stead of death and thought. This love, of which divine love is merely not always a convincing derivation, psychologically is perhaps a recall . . . of the primal shelter that insured the survival of the newborn. Such a love is in fact, logically speaking, a surge of anguish at the very moment when the identity of thought and living body collapse. The possibilities of communication having been swept away, only the subtle gamut of sound, touch, and visual trances, older than language and newly worked out, are preserved as an ultimate shield against death. (253)

Considering the novel through a psychoanalytic lens fosters an understanding of the symbolic relationship between water (and food) and the mother. The mother is the most absent figure in the novel; water is the



most absent element. The elusiveness of water and food symbolically parallels the absence of the mother. The journey on the road is propelled forward by the search for the ocean, where ultimately *a mother* is found. Just as fire is a symbol for the soul in the classical Greek system, the sea signifies the maternal. According to Carl Jung, “the maternal significance of water is one of the clearest interpretations of symbols in the whole field of mythology, that even the ancient Greeks could say that ‘the sea is the symbol of generation’” (218). In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud connects bodies of water to fantasies about birth and escape into the mother’s womb (243). Likewise the search for food is significant: “love and hunger meet at the mother’s breast” (Freud 218). The breast becomes a site of sacred connection, through the body, symbolized in the story by the perpetual search for the sea, for food, or nourishment, and water, or sustenance.

At the moment in the novel when the man and boy discover a body of water, the body becomes most alive:

The man turned and swam out to the falls and let the water beat upon him. The boy was standing in the pool to his waist, holding his shoulders and hopping up and down. The man went back and got him. He held him and floated him about, the boy gasping and chopping at the water. You’re doing good, the man said. You’re doing good. (33)

In the midst of post-apocalypse, water delineates a sacred space, a preeminently real moment enjoyed and experienced wholly by the body. This particular venture *into* water is nothing less than baptismal. The image McCarthy presents creates a feeling of the holy, of completeness, and the family structure seems substantiated in the water. Ricoeur’s notion that the son implies the mother’s presence comes to fruition in the actual immersion into water, which represents a symbolic return to the womb. Jung says, “the projection of the mother-imago upon water endows the latter with a number of numinous or magical qualities peculiar to the mother . . . water symbolizes the mother” (219). For Jung, water achieves numinosity, for instance in the act of baptizing, as a result of the mother-imago. Furthermore, for Kristeva the womb is a kind of beyond that is not above our heads but radically present in the corporeal.

Reading McCarthy’s use of the senses with Kristeva locates their power glaringly apparent in the text, to elucidate the body as a site of memory, healing, hope, connection, even as a potential connection to what is absent in the maternal body. In the novel, it is precisely sound, touch, and vision that act as barriers to death, literally and figuratively. At the end, near the sea and with a mother, the boy still hears his father. McCarthy never



completely disabuses the reader of sacred connection from the father or the mother.

## CONCLUSION

The body represents the apocalyptic moment in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, when apocalypse is defined not only as a moment of the end of the world, but also as a revelation or prophecy. Although dilapidated, the body remains after apocalypse, whether it does so full of life or in death. Much like in Revelations, as St. John is exiled to Patmos, removed from all he knows, the protagonists of this novel are removed from what they know. Or, rather, all that they know has been removed from them. Their commonly held earth has been eradicated. In the moment of erasure, though, there is something elevated; that something is the sensual body, which comes from the mother and is sanctified through water. Further, all that is sensual plays a critical role in the novel's sequence of repeated events. The senses highlight the tensions between life and death while they emphasize the sacred and profane, holy and sacrilegious. The text reveals the holy (as in sacred) and whole (as in complete) body, yet it still leaves readers with a lack associated with aporia.

At the end of the novel, whether or not McCarthy's work generates a sense of hope, is a question that occupies many critics of his text. Instead of a promise facilitated by the metanarrative of apocalypse promoted by a Biblical reading, McCarthy leaves readers suspended between fear and hope, death and life. The characters and readers alike are challenged to face the end times forthrightly—unable to deny death and destruction posed with the perpetual question of what to live towards. The road's ending in aporia disabuses the reader of the ability to hold on to a biblical, apocalyptic metanarrative offering redemption.

McCarthy's novel leads readers to a questionable place and to a life that has no future; however, the boy lives on. The uncertainty of his future existence is grounded in an acceptance at the end of the novel of what is impossible to achieve: clean water, "the mother," and continued existence of the father. The question for the son is further pressed: how and for what does he move forward? And again, the question is left unanswered, but a mother, water, and fire persist. The book ends in two paragraphs. One about a woman who serves as a mother reassuring the boy that his father's breath was "the breath of God," which would pass "from man to man through all of time" (287). This is the key to the sacred connection; the breath of God passes from one body to another through all of time. The second entails a memory about trout in streams and glens full

of mystery. In the end, this is all that is left of hope: mother, father, son, water, mystery, and sacred connection.

Ricoeur locates two words that compose what he considers a contrasting language of hope: “meaning” and “mystery” (“Christianity” 243). For Ricoeur, meaning is the basis of courage to live in history. However, this meaning is hidden; it is mysterious; “no one can define it, rely on it, draw assurance from it against the perils of history” (“Christianity” 250). Applied to *The Road*, such meaning in hope derives from the fire inside, the incandescent body, a mysterious source that marks the appreciation of the body. Hope, for Ricoeur, should never really be tied to an answer, as in the Christian narrative of redemption; it should not subvert the ambiguous or deny the rational. McCarthy’s text does neither. Instead, hope is submerged in absurdity and provokes a search for meaning; a meaning, as Ricoeur says, that is ultimately hidden.

For Kristeva, hope appears within an ethics of care (“Joyful Revolt” 65); it is like love, where neither hope nor love is ideological. Kristeva asserts that hope has religious connotations. She states that she is not a religious person and that she does not put faith into ideological structures:

As a psychoanalyst, a woman and a writer I have for some time now been aware of what I call the destruction of the psychic space, or at the very least the threat which hangs over that space. . . . If in the face of this [destruction] there is to be any hope for us, to use your term, it resides in what I would call *care*. I am convinced of our ability to restore that psychic space to well-being. (“Joyful Revolt” 65)

In this world, the boy is able, through connection with the father, to come to know himself as a bearer of fire. Ricoeur and Kristeva might both concur that self-knowledge comes through our relation to the world and our life with and among others in that world. The realm to which McCarthy inserts readers is the realm of the body, where touching, feeling, seeing, and tasting become so crucial, because there is so little left to see and touch. What remains after apocalypse is the body, both as a sacred connection in its sensual, corporeal experiences, and as a facilitator of that connection. McCarthy answers the question of what to live toward in the contemporary world where destruction is often an everyday affair. His answer is the sensual body and its capacity to connect us to one another.

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**“When China Meets China”: Sinéad  
Morrissey’s Figurations of the Orient,  
or the Function of Alterity in Julia Kristeva  
and Paul Ricoeur**

# ABSTRACT

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This article attempts to investigate the potential resonances between Paul Ricoeur’s and Julia Kristeva’s theories of otherness as applied to the study of poetry by the Northern-Irish poet Sinéad Morrissey. In all of her five poetry books she explores various forms of otherness and attempts to sketch them in verse. She confronts alterity in many ways, approaching such subjects as the relationship with the body and children, encounters with foreigners, and coming to terms with what is foreign within us. This article engages primarily with her experiences of China, which she recorded in the long poem “China” from her third collection, *The State of Prisons* (2005). Firstly, this article tackles the question of the body, which is interpreted on the basis of Morrissey’s “post-mortem” poems. Their reading prepares the ground for further explorations of otherness, which Morrissey locates at the very heart of human subjectivity. In this way, she also manages to establish a poetic framework for an ethical consideration of otherness. By investigating the working of the human psyche, Morrissey seems to go along the lines of Kristeva and Ricoeur, who claim that otherness is inextricably linked with the formation of human subjectivity. Taking a cue from their philosophical enquiries, the article also attempts to establish where Kristeva’s and Ricoeur’s philosophies overlap.

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**ABSTRACT**

If we were not all translators, if we did not unceasingly lay bare the foreignness of our inner lives . . . would we have a psychic life at all, would we be living beings? (Kristeva, “The Love of Another Language” 254)

Only a discourse other than itself, I will say . . . is suited to the metacategory of otherness, under penalty of otherness suppressing itself in becoming the same as itself. (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 356)

**T**he Ming Dynasty, which ruled China in the years 1368–1644, fostered a spirit of reverence for all sorts of art, but among the various components of its rich legacy there is one special element which has been preserved for centuries within the English language—“china.” Phonetically synonymous with the capitalized “China,” the lower-case name for porcelain, which was eagerly imported and circulated by European art dealers, quickly became a recognized token of wealth and prosperity. After the Dutch captured Portuguese ships which were carrying the brittle cargo, a new fashion or even craze for Chinese ceramics caught on in the continental states, which were aflame with a new culture of curiosity. Commodification of the Orient, uncannily preserved in the gradual shift from the upper-case proper name “China” (not a native name, by the way) to the regular noun “china,” is a process that has continued throughout the centuries, permeating deep into the collector’s mind-set formed by the modern Western material culture. The apex of china-trade was reached in the eighteenth century, when European markets were flooded with earthenware that was decorated with Western motifs, satisfying the growing demand for properly Christian imagery. Soon, European factories were to change the tide by introducing local versions of mass-produced china. More recently, in 2011, one Chinese vase from the collection of Dai Run Zhai, a New York resident since 1950, was sold at a Sotheby’s auction for £11 million to an anonymous telephone bidder, confirming the unique status of such ceramics in today’s art market. Thus, even a brief sketch of the history of china can serve as a testimony to the dialectic between the Orient and the Occident, which has become the crux of later post-colonial criticism. The analysis of this dialectic, as has been lucidly shown by the likes of Edward Said, speaks volumes about the Western epistemological framework and surprisingly little about the real China, whose products we can admire in seventeenth-century still life paintings and in many royal collections. Chinese ceramics may be interpreted as yet another mirror in which modern European culture looks at itself and tenses its cognitive muscles.

When china rose to fame, inciting frenzy among the clientele of the Dutch East India Company's services, another important step was made in philosophy, which was duly reflected in the arts. The arrival of Descartes' theory of the subject, the cornerstone of modern philosophy, not only initiated an abstract meditation on the limits of our cognition, but also harmonized with the vigorous spirit of the natural sciences, which were attempting to emancipate themselves from the power of the church. The voice of *prima philosophia* can also be heard in the emerging discourse of anatomy, which was vividly portrayed by the Dutch painters throughout the seventeenth century. The opening of bodies, which was also done publicly as part of the popular *theatrum anatomicum*, has a distinct air of Descartes' search for certainty. Testing the physical boundaries and probing such basic parameters as thickness, resistance and substantiality of various body parts, constitutes a vivisection that runs parallel to the dissection of our mental capacities. Although the two run alongside the rift of dualism, which does not allow the body to conveniently converge with the soul, they share the same direction since their goal is to establish the proper image of a human being. This paradigm of self-confirmation is a marked trait in the seventeenth-century culture of introspection and its important offshoot—projection. Anxiety entailed in explorations of the self, be it a post-mortem discovery of the body or a philosophical investigation of subjectivity, is often approached from a psychoanalytical perspective. Freud has unmasked the production of such images as projected fantasies, which contain, just like a vase, the by-products of Cartesian "uncertainty." This process may be discussed both in synchronic and diachronic terms. On the one hand, it is a crystallization of an idealized image that masks our fear of disintegration and secures the structural stability of consciousness. On the other, however, we are dealing here with the historical formation of a relationship with that which is distant and, through its otherness, reminds us of how brittle we are.

Although the above two topics may initially seem far-off, I am yoking them together in order to form a potentially insightful dialectical image. The seventeenth century was a period when two powerful discoveries coincided, jointly contributing to the emergence of a mechanism that is still discernible and operative in Western civilization. Firstly, geographical discoveries opened up channels through which cultural otherness seeped inside the European mind. Secondly, the development of modern reflection along the lines of dualism introduced two more spheres where otherness was discovered: the human mind, haunted by the spectre of doubt, and the human body revealing its own incongruity. Looming over the two was of course the question of morality. The intellectual climate of the period did not allow a single strategy to prevail over the flux of new stimuli.

Therefore, the ensuing chaos guaranteed that the above-mentioned types of otherness floated freely and influenced each other before being appropriated by specialists in their narrow fields. The images offered for consideration at the outset of this article can thus serve here as metaphorical cues. Incidentally, however, Paul Ricoeur later reformulated them in philosophical terms in his seminal work *Oneself as Another*. This book tackles the question of subjectivity and the various facets of “passivity,” which are structurally inherent in human consciousness. In the tenth study Ricoeur provides a convenient summary of his investigations in this area:

First, there is the passivity represented by the experience of one’s own body—or better, as we shall say later, of the *flesh*—as the mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and so of foreignness. Next, we find the passivity implied by the relation of the self to the *foreign*, in the precise sense of the other (than) self, and so the otherness inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity. Finally, we have the most deeply hidden passivity, that of the relation of the self to itself, which is *conscience* in the sense of *Gewissen* rather than of *Bewusst*. (318; emphasis in the original)

The map sketched by Ricoeur serves here not only as a phenomenological guide to the three fundamental manifestations of otherness, but can also be appropriated to act as a companion to the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey, a Northern-Irish poet born in 1972. She has already earned the reputation of a writer who not only approaches a wide range of subjects, but also employs diverse and innovative forms, combining a strong ethical approach with a verbal skilfulness which can greatly surprise the reader. Moreover, as Annamay McKernan rightly observed, “her poems have been likened to journeys, not just from place to place but on a more spiritual level,” by virtue of which “she has been able to offer ‘fresh perspectives’ to the Northern Irish audience” (Morrissey, “Fast Movers”).

Most notably, however, Morrissey’s works touch upon all three above-mentioned aspects of otherness, offering unique poetical insight into human subjectivity. Thus, the aim of this article is to show how she picks up on the topic of the body in her “post-mortem poems,” to suggest what kind of reflection her travel poems offer in terms of confronting otherness, as well as to draw ethical conclusions from the attitude she assumes towards those incarnations of “the other.” Since her geographical explorations of alterity are focused on China, as in the long poem “China,” it is the Middle Kingdom that will be of chief interest here. Moreover, I shall attempt to tackle the question of otherness from the perspective of another woman who has paid a significant, intellectual visit to this country—Julia Kristeva. Her discussion of the Chinese writing system and social structures



in *About Chinese Women* remains puzzling and problematic, just as her stance on Maoism. However, her concept of writer-as-foreigner remains very fruitful. These themes resonate in many respects with Ricoeur's remarks on the nature of translation and the task of the translator. This, in turn, brings us back to the issue of a foreignness that necessarily resides within us all and can serve as the foundation of a broader ethical project.

In the poem "Bottom Drawer" from the cycle "Mercury," Sinéad Morrissey transforms the eponymous drawer into a vessel "filled with all her life: / . . . A testimony to . . . every moment when the light gave shape / To that precise outline of who she was" (*There was Fire in Vancouver* 33). "Intricate as a snowflake, intact as childhood," the material container emerges from this meditation as a "Chinese vase being painted in / By time, beautiful and brittle as a bone." This image metaphorically substitutes a bodily anxiety—the fear of losing one's boundaries and being emptied into nothingness—with an aestheticized object of foreign origin. Its geographical distancing becomes the yardstick with which it is possible to measure the repression resulting from the devastating self-knowledge regarding our transience. This function of "orientalization" would therefore strike an important note in the development of the body as an other, as has been suggested by Ricoeur.

Caspar Barlaeus, a seventeenth-century humanist and mayor of Amsterdam, made the following poetic remark with regard to Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*: "Listener, learn yourself, and while you proceed through the individual [organs], believe that God lies hidden in even the smallest part" (qtd. in Schupbach 31). Curiously enough, the divine lesson on the composition of the body is delivered by way of dissecting the flesh of a criminal. It is another figure whose repression from society manifests itself through the devout and laborious opening of the "other" body in public. Its mutilation was meant to show that it was actually inhabited by the "Other"—God, or for that matter, the gaze of the spectators who fall into an anatomical reverie (Ziembra 141–46). The aim of this theatrical spectacle is Foucauldian "subjectification." Under the guise of attaining self-understanding, it installs the image of the body as another. Ricoeur interprets this phenomenon along the lines laid down by Edmund Husserl, arguing that prior to acquiring mastery over one's body one is forced "to make the flesh part of the world." In this way, "the otherness of others as foreign, other than me, seems to have to be, not only interconnected with the otherness of the flesh that I am, but held in its way to be prior to the reduction to ownness" (*Oneself as Another* 326). So, the *theatricum anatomicum* becomes a valid answer to the nagging question voiced by Ricoeur: "How am I to understand that my flesh is also a body?" (326). Husserl, we learn, does not provide us with a viable answer because



he considers the other as another me, whereas the key to solving this riddle lies in the reversal of this formula. Ricoeur’s answer is that I am myself another through a component of otherness that is lodged in the very heart of my subjectivity. This aptly captures the meaning of the two poems in which Morrissey elaborates the theme of a post-mortem.

The poem “Post Mortem” from the collection *Between Here and There* seems to relate closely to the above claim already in the first line, as it declares: “We found ambition caked around *his* heart” (30; my emphasis). The juxtaposition of the first person plural with the third person singular establishes this paradigm. Interestingly though, Morrissey eagerly oversteps the traditional dualism. She locates discursive marks inside the body that is pried open with each subsequent line. “Both kidneys,” we learn in the second stanza, “were filled with the by-product of not speaking.” “Out of the throat,” the voracious narrators continue, “we prised a throat stone— / . . . the stunning span of his vocabulary worn to a solid entity / by being understated.” Is this to suggest that the victim’s death was caused by “silencing”? “He had them fooled,” the autopsy reveals. “They never guessed in all his airy silence / how tuned to the pulse of the world he was.” Although muted, the other as a body—dissected during the “interpretation”—turns out to be a fully articulate being, whose voice had been muffled. The “doctor-reader” performing the post-mortem reports in the closing lines that the “overly gifted” deceased was in fact “burdened with experience, psychically aware.” This diagnosis reveals a bodily self-consciousness whose “silence was the immovable object / the weight of all his talent solidified against.” The last image suggests that the dead person examined in the poem was in fact a budding genius, who had been muffled and caged despite his synaesthetic, poetic sensibility. The discovery of a mute poem, or an unsung song, inside a corpse is a dazzling volte-face that Morrissey uses—as the poem says at the very end—“to prove what sense is.” In this light, her ultimate aim would be to excavate what we have buried deep inside our bodies as part of the Cartesian revolution—the image of an otherness which stirs and thinks, but has too rarely been granted a voice of its own.

The second of her *autopsia post mortem* poems—“The Second Lesson of the Anatomists” from the book *The State of Prisons*—takes this subject even further. The anatomists are said to be “showing us how freakishly we split” (11). They evacuate from the feeble body one “wonder” after another: “lung-wonder held over the heart-wonder / and the heart-wonder bleeding” (11). Morrissey, however, counters the miraculous splitting with a broader, philosophical question: “Are all skins as effortlessly deceptive as this?” (11). At that point, the poem seems to “believe its skin,” just as the anatomists have suggested, but it does not reveal the mechanism of

a wind-up divine toy. Instead, we are taken inside another story. Jumping from image to image, we find ourselves inside a “glass room” during an evening party. There is a womb-like, warm atmosphere (“darkness and a river / play mother and father”), which suggests security (11). However, the cosiness quickly breaks down as there suddenly occurs

this spillage

in the centre  
from somewhere stranger and more extravagant  
which has drawn us all here. (11)

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The dialectic seems clear at this point. On the one hand, there is a safe haven, where one can sip wine under “a light fixture being obedient unto itself” (11). On the other, however, there is an unknown leak, or an abrupt intrusion of something odd. The synthesis that follows suggests a breakdown of the traditional relationship between the inside and the outside: “I think of eggshells cracking open / from the inside” (11). The Cartesian “I think” hatches itself open and gives birth to a different reality—one in which “we have hallways to discover in one another like nerves” (11). What we find inside the body are other bodies, or passages from one to another and further on through “childhoods, and love affairs, and drownings, and faithfulness / by which language has occurred” (11). In these final lines Morrissey points toward a language that we discover when we answer to the call of the other. In order to communicate better—Morrissey seems to argue—our bodies need a “second lesson,” which greatly differs from the one given by Dr. Nicolaes Tulp. It is a lesson about the otherness of the body and the fact that its worldly dimension precedes our own mastery of it. The opening onto the world, however, leads toward another dimension of discovery—the confrontation with foreignness, which makes possible not only language, but also literature and translation.

Sinéad Morrissey’s long poem “China” from *The State of Prisons* is a nine-part travelogue in verse, which was inspired by her 21-day-long visit to China. This work constitutes—as she put it herself in an interview with Mark Thwaite—“a document of that journey—nine windows on it if you like.” The train journey to six cities provided the inspiration to conjure nine diverse glimpses of China, “each window . . . written in a different form.” The sketchy form of the poem reflects the disjunctive experience of not being able to penetrate inside the fleeting exotic images. Thus, her method of composition also testifies to the ultimate inability to keep hold of otherness, emphasizing the defiance of the frames imposed by language. So, these poetic windows “are simultaneously windows, walls, and

mirrors.” Moreover, she recollects in the said interview that “I was being denied far more than I was being granted, but the glimpses were tantalising.” The “grant and deny” paradigm is a key concept explored in this poem. Morrissey offers a meditation on the boundaries of translating the foreign experience into a language that would avoid rendering the other as the same. “Trying to pin the experience down in language afterwards,” she recalls in the same conversation, “was almost as exciting as the journey itself.” The strategy she employs in the poem relies on the attempt to locate otherness not outside, beyond the window, but at home, in one’s own frame of language and mind.

The first part of “China” contains an open declaration that the China Morrissey is trying to describe perhaps does not really exist or rather it has not yet been properly invented. This is because the components have not been chosen in the right way for the experiment to succeed: “There is a country which does not exist and which must be shown. / Steady the ingredients” (*The State of Prisons* 22). The first ingredient that Morrissey uses to conjure China is her childhood. The second part of the poem begins with a transitory image of travelling through a tunnel of trees—perhaps through a kind of a “hallway” announced in “The Second Lesson of the Anatomists.” Indeed, we are taken back in time, as she is reminded of “my brother and I on the top / of an empty double-decker in Derbyshire” (22). To complete the dream-like recollection, there is an accompanying song—“In my head I was singing / *This is Happening This is Happening This is Happening*” (22)—whose meaning will become clearer only towards the end of the poem. The reverie is brought to an abrupt halt, according to the scenario outlined in the anatomy-poem, as the lyrical “I” is caught off guard and magically transformed. Like Alice in Wonderland, she grows and falls into a hole: “then I saw I was enormous / and in another kind of tunnel. That I was lost. That there was no going back” (22). It turns out that the first train tunnel, or hallway, leads to Yangtze, but only through the distant personal reminiscence which was essential to switch on the “flickering screen / Which is and is not a window” (23).

Such means of poetic transport, or *metaphors* to refer to the original Greek etymology of the word, rely on uncanny configurations of the familiar and the other. They facilitate shortcuts that allow jumping from one reality to another. Such means of travelling through the wormholes of our experience could be theoretically described as translations. Julia Kristeva discusses this dimension of literary creativity in an essay titled “The Love of Another Language,” where she praises Marcel Proust for making such connections with great skill and artfulness. She observes that “from these communicating vessels a strange speech emerges, foreign to itself, neither

from here nor there, a *monstrous intimacy*” (244; my emphasis). The alienated, diffuse kind of speech, I would claim, is poetry. As a translator of “his unveiled passions,” Kristeva continues, a poet revels in translating “the language of the sensory” (246). This completes the triangular itinerary of poetic navigation, whose vertices are: the subject, the other and the newly discovered otherness-in-myself, or myself-in-other. The movement of speech in search of the right word opens language to reveal before the poet its “true foreignness, more foreign than any already established idiom, that the writer hopes to formulate” (249). Such peregrinations turn the writer into an other, a foreigner and finally into a translator. Towards the end of this journey it thus becomes possible to approach alterity, because all figurations of mastery are shed, making space for an element of otherness to bloom within the writer.

The fifth part of “China” returns to the regular rhythm of “another station, another train, another city, another season” (24), albeit changing the pace of the narrative by considerably lengthening the line. It seems that Morrissey is trying different line lengths on for size, extending or contracting the poetic fingers with which she is attempting to feel the shape of China. The lines of the fifth poem wind down lazily, imitating the lulling tempo of a long-distance journey onboard a train. The steady pace blurs certain boundaries, as the “shunt and click of the carriages over the sidings” become indistinguishable from “the soporific tenderness of a language I do not recognise” (24). The mind plays tricks, mixing subject and object, jamming epistemological mechanisms:

... I see a boy and a woman  
lit up by the flare of a crop fire, but can no longer believe in them.  
Windows have turned into mirrors the length of the train.  
Hours pass, and there is only my white face, strained  
in its hopelessness, my failure to catch the day in my hands like a fish  
and have it always. (25)

The image that crops up in the mirror is the face of oneself seen as another, estranged and made foreign. The gestures of pulling the curtains back, found for example at the beginning of the next poem, number six, may be likened to nervous blinking. This reaction indicates the wish to shrug off the strangeness found at the heart of our precious self-image. In the book *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva employs Freud’s category of the uncanny to show how the resistance to otherness ultimately guides us towards our own repressed insecurity. The revelation entailed in such moments of “hopelessness” stems from the fact that we are unable to give meaning to our own experience. The foreignness, which we have come to

understand as sensory novelty, ultimately reveals a “foreigner within us.” So, “when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious—that improper facet of our impossible own and proper” (191; emphasis removed). Repressed material haunts the narrator in a myriad of skewed reflections, gnawing at her idealized self-image.

The intimate and symbolic images of the sixth part are delivered in regular and melodic quatrains. Among them we find the “semaphore of cranes // Gesticulating deftly to each other” and “a woman washing her waist-length hair” (25–26). Both evoke a need to get closer and come into contact with the alien reality. However, these are false invitations, as in the encounter with “a mother tugging a wayward child” who “pointed down its throat”—“I photographed it dumbly / Lost to what it meant” (26). Situations like these bring to our attention the untranslatable nature of encounters with the unknown, especially when economic alienation erects an impassable barrier. The protective lens of the camera is rendered powerless in the course of such meetings. Desolate and unable to bond with any real other, the narrator calmly coils back into herself, concluding that “I found myself re-caged / Staring through the filter / Of money’s privilege” (26). The almost material resistance manifests itself in the form of an obstacle that separates one from “the other.” This barrier resembles a prison in which all windows close before the eyes of a subject who sinks back into complacency. In a Lacanian detour, Rudi Visker pointedly remarks that this is yet another part of the mirror-stage, during which “the other is an obstacle that prevents it [subject] from reaching the unity that it aspires to.” As a result, it has to accept the fact that “identity will always bear the trace of an exteriority that it cannot fully interiorize” (Visker 433).

The seventh part of “China” continues to exploit the metaphor of a camera, referring to the popular belief that using it may turn people into ghosts. The lyrical persona admits to having caught “your watchful face” (27), implying through the use of the second person pronoun that it may be a direct address or at least an imagined one. Who participates in the conversation? It is possible to imagine a tourist talking to a local. Does this dialogue, however, assume reciprocity or is it just an internal debate held by someone who stands accused in front of his or her own tribunal, interrogated by one’s otherness? Kyoo Lee points out the strangeness of those encounters that do not benefit from the presence of a translating party. “The foreigner,” he concludes, is “the bringer of a dialogical scandal: the forever dumb . . . turn[ed] into a constant structural threat to the formal stability (mirror symmetry) of dialogue” (66). Indicating that the interpretations of silence may vary, he puts forward an important question: how to “read the silence of the other properly”? (67). A fair treatment of the silent other does not only boil down to the relationship with the

other as another person, with whom we may fail to communicate, but also with our own identity, because—as Visker remarks—“my ‘own’ness, what is proper to me, escapes me: I do not own it, it is not something for me or of me, it is rather something ‘about’ me” (438). So, the situation with the camera is indeed an awkward moment, because it does not finally touch upon one or another, but upon the relationship to the untranslatable and to the unbridgeable social gap.

Thus, as a question of translation, it can be read in terms of the methods employed to cope with the foreign and bring it under the rule of our language. The central issue is how to render otherness in a communicative manner while avoiding any unnecessary appropriations. This dilemma—an essentially writerly one—is what Kristeva and Morrissey seem to share with regard to their understanding of China. At the very beginning of her 1977 work *About Chinese Women*, Kristeva performatively reports a certain difficulty that Morrissey also seems to be anxious about. At the outset of the introductory chapter “Who is Speaking?” she records the experience of “Sitting here in front of the typewriter, trying to write about my experience of China . . .” (11). She is deeply aware that she has been caught up in the specific dialectics of “here” and “there.” Thus, she immediately rephrases her concern using the paradigm of “the same” and “the other,” observing that “the otherness of China is invisible if the man or woman who speaks here, in the West, does not position him/herself some place where our capitalist monotheistic fabric is shredding, crumbling, decaying” (13). In a sense, otherness can be approached only from the perspective of a subject who has put him- or herself—as Kristeva likes to say—“on trial,” or “in process.” A self-sufficient and stabilized subjectivity can know nothing of otherness, as it conveniently ignores its own unconscious. However, such a strategy freezes the subject in a tower of fixed identity and ossified national language. This could be the source of a psychosis, whose overcoming Kristeva identifies with the *Kulturarbeit*, the task of civilization (*Strangers to Ourselves* 189).

Extending the scope of the Chinese investigation, it should be recalled that in the 1970s the Tel Quel group took a special interest in Mao’s Cultural Revolution. Its members attempted to theoretically translate the Chinese revolution into a possible Western revolution in language—one that would especially accommodate the experience of alterity. In her work on Chinese women, Kristeva boldly states that the proper lesson we could learn from Mao is how to “introduce this breach (‘there are others’) into our universalist conceptions of man and history” (12). This naturally includes the experience of women, who have been the age-old victims of a monotheistic and patriarchal order, which is upheld by the current capitalist *status quo*. Taking inspiration from China, where Kristeva saw intact matriarchal structures,

she proposes to stage theatrical performances “that show and contain what divides each of us in ourselves” (Visker 439). This would also amount to the introduction of a commandment “not to reify the foreigner, not to petrify him as such, not to petrify us as such” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 192). Although *Tel Quel* was later heavily criticized for siding with Maoism, the aims of the French intellectual circle were not strictly political. Members of this group were not interested in a potential coup by way of which one political option would establish firm mastery over all others. On the contrary, taking a cue from Mao’s dictum that a revolution has to put a sword right through the heart of the symbolic, Kristeva argued that the reinvigoration of Western language should have its source in the repressed, maternal, pre-Oedipal, or “semiotic” sensibility that had been buried beneath the phallogentric culture. She implies that the goal is to account for the otherness within us, which in many cases is synonymous with the feminine, or values associated with other repressed groups. After all, a better political future would be possible after overthrowing all limitations of rights, along the lines of a dictum that the “foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 192).

In her informative essay on Mao’s revolution and *Tel Quel*, Joan Brandt concludes that

Kristeva’s re-volte is designed to save us from this robotization of culture, and it attempts to do so not by merely pitting the revolutionary potential of the semiotic against the symbolic but by inscribing the symbolic into the notion of revolt as well and thus giving voice, perhaps more successfully than did *Revolution in Poetic Language*, to the contradictory, heterogeneous processes that lie within the most intimate reaches of the self. (35)

The task of the poet-cum-translator, the absolute foreigner, is to testify to the “highest contradiction” within subjectivity (Brandt 30). Morrissey incorporates many subtle images illustrating such experience in her poems and one particularly gentle image can be found in the eighth part of “China.” Reminiscing about once getting her finger burned after touching a heated cooker, she recollects her mother taking the finger to the cold tap, offering “an ironic remedy of extremes” (28). The contradictory sensations provoke an interesting conclusion that confirms the vitality of the contradictory states:

And it was oddly

uplifting to be suspended  
there with your body peeled



back to the nerve all  
 over again in a matter  
 of seconds, so disarmingly

alive. (28)

Guided by this intimate, yet common childhood drama, Morrissey wonderfully prepares the ground for a similar experience of being washed by a crowd of people at a train station, “marooned / in the midst of them” (29). The otherness pressing forward on the narrator is described as a reverse of the gaze that previously revealed its impotence in establishing relationships: “time to stare back / at me the way I was staring / at them, an extravagance.” The excessiveness involved here is revealed several lines later, as the lyrical persona relates having been seized by an alien rhythm, a beating of another heart: “[I] saw myself / caught in the pulse of their striding” (30). This sudden splitting, a revelation of doubleness, stirred by the crowd, sends the narrator drowning and then allows her to resurface with a sense of having found hope, a chance for redemption:

my greenish skin hurled

under water and hammering *I am*  
*here you are real this*  
*is happening it is*  
*redeemable*—as though touching  
 them might be possible. (30)

The uncanny confrontation with the crowd triggers a relapse into a boundless, “underwater” state of subjectivity. The glimpse of that disorganized psyche is nevertheless redeeming, because—as Kristeva remarked about Freud’s psychoanalysis—it “brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less so to hunt them down, but rather to welcome them to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is ours” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 191–92). For a split second, this reverie sends the narrator back to the childhood song (“*This is Happening*”), which appeared in the second part of “China.” However, its re-emergence heralds no comforting or linearity. The lines are chopped and disjunctive, with enjambments dissecting the subject and putting it, as it were, “in process” or “on trial.” As a result, a new ethical knowledge emerges—a responsibility for the other, to put it in terms used by Emmanuel Levinas. He found similar gestures in works by Michel Leiris, emphasizing the importance of “that special moment when it [meaning] turns into something other than itself” (146). Sinéad Morrissey achieves



in this passage an important goal—by entrusting herself to language, she sinks in it in order to relinquish her mastery and control, opening herself up to otherness. In this way, she creates a rift where an ethical dimension is finally found. “To speak,” writes Levinas, “is to interrupt my existence as a subject and a master . . . I am simultaneously a subject and an object” (149).

The last, ninth, part of “China” provides a memorable image, which summarizes many of the above concerns, especially because it introduces *two* Chinas. It is worth quoting in full:

One day, China met China on the marketplace.  
“How are you, China?” asked China, “we haven’t talked in so long.”  
China answered: “The things we have to say to one another, laid end to  
end, and side to side,  
would connect the Great Wall with the Three Gorges Valley and stretch  
nine miles up towards the sun.”  
“It’s true,” replied China, “We have a lot to catch up on.” (30)

The split within China itself is pregnant with possible interpretations, facilitating several readings. First, it confronts the conventional, Western image of China with the real country in the East. Secondly, it introduces the concept of an internal splitting, or dualism, which needs to be mended through dialogue. Finally, however, it may be read as an instance of linguistic hospitality, which makes room for otherness to blossom within us. After encountering the barrier of untranslatability—of one’s own experience and of otherness—it is time to acknowledge the internal split and start “constructing comparables,” as Paul Ricoeur put it. In his short but significant book *On Translation*, he explores the title concept both in terms of intercultural communication and as an internal mechanism, which we use in order to think. The discovery that equivalence is problematic because there are always endless ways to put the same thing into words leads Ricoeur towards a conclusion that “the inexpressible is above all else the most entrenched incommunicable, initial untranslatable” (26). This enigma demands that we postulate the existence of an irreducible otherness, which we encounter both within ourselves and outside. Since we have to speak in order to sustain our own identities through some kind of a narrative, endlessly saying the same thing in different ways, we have to learn to cope with the otherness of the untranslatable. The only viable possibility, Ricoeur argues, is not to look for equivalents but to “construct comparables” (36–37) which would produce a certain “*linguistic hospitality*” (9–10). Such places would allow otherness to dwell without being reduced to nothing by the universalist machine of our mind, which would

eagerly “try to abolish the memory of the foreign and maybe the love of one’s own language” (9). Thus, the reconciliation of the two Chinas would be emblematic of acknowledging the internal dialectic of sameness and otherness.

Another reconciliation, or dialectical synthesis, found in Morrissey’s poetry concerns the way she further handles and closes off the figure of China. The poem “The Yellow Emperor’s Classic” opens with a declaration that “The body is China” (*The State of the Prisons* 46). Beginning from images lifted from traditional, feudal body politics, Morrissey moves towards the sexualization of that body, providing it with a prod of desire. “There is a highway / of sexual awakening,” we read, and later—“there must be sex” (47). The brittle vase of the body is thus transformed into a robust kingdom of unrepressed feminine energy derived from the maternal, or the semiotic, which has been postulated by Kristeva. Without reducing the bodily energy to any of its partial aspects, or confronting it with a spiritual life that would somehow float freely above the flesh, both Kristeva and Morrissey attempt to translate the experience of women, inscribing it in those discourses which have been traditionally the domain of men: philosophy and poetry, respectively. In this, Morrissey seems to be guided by Kristeva’s idea that the “elimination of the strange could lead to an elimination of the psyche” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 190). Consequently, she employs a reconciliatory politics of constructing comparables through which the two Chinas—her own, intellectual and Western, and the other, bodily and Oriental—can sit down and talk. In a sense, clinging tightly to one’s own geo-Cartesian fortress can be compared, as Morrissey does, to “trying to survive / without our opposite / inside us” whereas in fact “opposites equal life” (47). Acknowledging that painful yet necessary split, figured metaphorically as the Orient, can ultimately save us from disparaging life, whose precondition is radical alterity. Without the discovery of one’s own essential otherness, any dialogue between the two Chinas could never be successful. It would be like trying to speak in two different languages, waiting for them to magically negotiate a middle ground.

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## **Kristeva: The Individual, the Symbolic and Feminist Readings of the Biblical Text**

# **ABSTRACT**

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The aim of this study is to develop from Kristeva's account of time and semiotics the conditions of possibility for a new approach to interpreting the Bible. This will be set against the background of feminist biblical criticism, beginning from Esther Fuchs's assessment of deception. She bases her comparison on the concept of deceptiveness but I will argue, using Lacan, that the aporia of desire undermines this comparison. Through Kristeva's framework of the phases of feminism it will be shown that Fuchs's argument weakness lies in her presupposition of the determinate identities of men and women. By examining passages in Genesis it will be shown that such determined identities are also not easily found in the Hebrew Bible. Then by considering another feminist scholar, Alice Bach, it will be shown that overcoming identity requires a more nuanced approach. In the first version of "Women's Time" Kristeva suggests that identities could be overcome through moving towards the individual but this also operates in the same structure of identity. In fact Kristeva appears to recognize this problem as when she republishes the essay she considers a different way forward. It will be instead suggested that a type of feminism that recognizes its own weakness is needed. This will be used to interpret Proverbs 31 but in doing so it will become evident that this alone lacks the potency to overcome the diffuse nature of the symbolic.

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**ABSTRACT**

## INTRODUCTION

This paper will argue that Julia Kristeva's theory of semiotic/symbolic relation has deep reaching consequences for attempts at creative interpretations of literature.<sup>1</sup> It will be shown, by developing Kristeva's account of semiotics, that authority is incredulously used in the work of Ester Fuchs and Alice Bach. Esther Fuchs argues that "from Eve to Esther, from Rebekah to Ruth, the characterisation of women in the Hebrew Bible presents deceptiveness as an almost inescapable feature of femininity" ("Who Is Hiding the Truth?" 137). Her phrase "characterisation of women" is a concept adopted from literary criticism and she conceives a literary character as produced by the author. This will be challenged through Kristeva, who highlights the vulnerability of the concept of identity in "Women's Time." The weakness of a method presupposing identity, based on an essentialist notion of femininity, will be shown through re-examining the passages in the Book of Genesis used by Fuchs. The extent of the problem of identity includes the interpretation of Alice Bach, another feminist biblical scholar, who has an awareness of this problem. Her approach of rejecting identity fails because she does not recognize a similarly functioning determinacy in her own interpretation.

This problem will then be applied to Kristeva's own attempts at resolving the problem. The first resolution she proposes is to move towards recognizing individuality. However, as Kathy Ehrensperger has correctly observed, this approach falls into the same trap that it attempts to overcome. In fact, Kristeva seems to appreciate this, as she omits this section in the revised version of "Women's Time." Instead she concludes with a reflection on the possibility of a feminism that is aware of its own shortfalls. Her concluding reflection will be developed in parallel to her "Reading the Bible" to indicate how fantasy might be developed to provide a new way forward. However, this will not be sufficient to overcome the power of the symbolic.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the help of Catrin Williams and David Hazell for their comments and feedback in the development of this essay. An earlier version appeared in *The Student Researcher: Journal of Undergraduate Research* (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Sept. 2011).

## THE PROBLEM OF DESIRE

Ester Fuchs's perception of inequality in the Hebrew Bible is based on the inequality of the satisfaction of desire. She argues that women's deception in the Bible is mitigated by their lower status of power. The premise here is that desire can only be satisfied if someone has the power to achieve their "wishes" ("Who Is Hiding the Truth?" 138). Women in the Hebrew Bible are presented as deceivers through the literary devices of the author that, Fuchs claims, supported patriarchy within the author's surrounding culture. The Biblical narratives represent a contradiction; women are not given power due to their social standing, and yet, within the narrative, they are portrayed as wielding power. Their power must then arise from deceptive means and thus Fuchs argues that this deception balances the inherent oppression from their society ("Who Is Hiding the Truth?" 137).

She illustrates this through the story of Rebekah deceiving her husband Isaac, in order for her favourite son Jacob to receive the blessing rather than Esau, her eldest son (Genesis 27). If Rebekah had equal standing to Isaac, she could have achieved her goal through legitimate means without resorting to disguising Jacob to look like his brother Esau. The focus of Fuchs's interpretation is the worldly consequences of Rebekah's deception, in terms of whether men or women can achieve their desire. It follows that Rebekah's deception would produce a satisfactory conclusion for her, given that she achieves her desire for Jacob to receive the birthright.

However, Fuchs must assume that, behind the imbalance between men and women, is the principle that men can satisfy their desire through power. In contrast, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan shows that the fulfilment of desire is impossible because what is desired has already been lost. He situates the origin of desire in the child's break with the mother. When the child is thrown into the world, language stands between the child's needs and their fulfilment (Kesel 27). In order to express her desire in language, the child must be incorporated into the system of language, and she must accept the linguistic order. In language, the child must find satisfaction and so has to settle for a linguistic substitute. This is illustrated when Lacan considers the problem of the declaration: "*I have three brothers, Paul, Ernest and me*" (20, italics in original). The ambiguity of this is that each person can be called a brother and so it seems, by addition, that the total should be three. Instead the practice of omitting the subject in such reckoning produces an inconsistency. This inconsistency reveals that the child has to perform two functions as both subject and object, even though these are contradictory roles.

It also illustrates how the other's desire (as *objet petit a*) is a concern for the child. In language the child must understand itself as an object for

the other (I am his brother) and consequently the other is also understood as desiring. This separation between the other's expectation and primal experiences creates a division between the child and pleasure because the satisfaction is both subjective and objective (I require pleasure and I as his brother require pleasure). In this way Lacan (and following him, Kristeva) develop Freudian theory beyond its biological basis and instead integrate language as the basis for our experience.

Applying this to Israelite culture, Rebekah's actions symbolize a "return" to the Garden of Eden. At the beginning of the book of Genesis, humankind was created in a good world from which humankind was separated after rebelling against God (Genesis 2–3). The Garden represents a lost world in which pleasure was immediate but has now been lost. In the Lacanian framework, its significance is found in what it represents within the social structure. Mankind could never return to the Garden and so it is a symbol of the satisfaction of desire in the Biblical narrative. Jacob's birthright involved the promise of the land of plenitude, which symbolizes the lost Garden of Eden. Rebekah's ambition for her favourite son to receive the blessing is ultimately not satisfied because her desire is to be in the Garden and, as such, Jacob receives land as a substitute for returning to the Garden. Thus male characters also experience the loss of desire. Their desire is not only experienced subjectively but is also produced through the experience of being an object for the other.

Indeed Jacob's desire for the birthright is also the desire of his brother, Esau. The winning of the birthright produces the utterances—for Jacob, "I have the birthright," and for Esau, "my brother has the birthright." Jacob is both subject and object and so his satisfaction is not immediate but set in the face of a lack of desire. With or without deception, Rebekah's actions fail to overcome the problem of desire. In other words, the failure of Rebekah's deception is that she accepts the possibility of the fulfilment of desire rather than recognizing the negativity within desire itself (see Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* 127–32). This means Isaac does not possess the ability to satisfy his own desire, which makes the claim that Isaac does not need to deceive in order to get his wishes incoherent. It is a projection of the feminist reading of the story that Isaac dominates the story. Instead, the narrative is decentred, because there is no ultimate satisfaction of desire that can only be found in the Garden of Eden. Rebekah's desire is not only "woman's" desire, and it cannot ever be truly satisfied under the universal problem of temporality.

This is not to say that "men" and "women" have the same desires; only that humanity shares the separation from pleasure, which makes the satisfaction of desire impossible. Rebekah's desire can never be satisfied because her desire is misplaced. She focuses her desire on Jacob rather than

recognizing her unobtainable desire for the Garden. Therefore Fuchs does not recognize that, in either receiving or not receiving the blessing, there can be no ultimate satisfaction of desire.

### JULIA KRISTEVA'S PHASES OF FEMINISM

In "Women's Time," Kristeva divides feminism into three phases.<sup>2</sup> These phases are developed from exploring the relationship between time and identity; "female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilisations" (Kristeva, "Women's Time" 16/205, italics in original).

"Repetition" is experienced in the passage of time. When one moment passes into the next, the moment is repeated; although, as illuminated by Henri Lefebvre, this does not mean that each moment is the same: "Not only does repetition not exclude differences, it also gives birth to them; it produces them" (Lefebvre 7). The difference produced by rhythm contrasts with the time of eternity, since the difference in repetition means that a particular occurrence cannot be reproduced. The repetition of the passing of time makes the original lost in the passage of the moment; as Heraclitus famously asked whether someone could ever step in the same river twice. Other visible examples of this can be found in the rhythmic structure of nature, such as the repetition of the sun rising and setting or the cycle of the seasons. Repetition would be eternal but for the interruption of death and thus repetition is finite.

The contrasting mode of time is eternity, which "has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits" (Kristeva, "Women's Time" 16/205). The time of eternity cannot be described as "temporal" because it is not the time of human experience. The time of human experience is defined by our finitude; we experience time through a beginning in birth and an end in death. Instead temporality is time as directly experienced by us with a beginning and an end. We cannot understand eternity because we have a beginning and an ending. The problem of eternal time meeting humanity is revealed in what Kristeva describes as the "media revolution" ("Women's Time" 18/206). The need for constant storage of information presupposes that experience can be

<sup>2</sup> This essay was originally published in French in 1979 in *Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*. An updated version of this essay was then included in *Les Nouvelles maladies de l'âme*. Pagination will be in the first English translation followed by the version in *New Maladies of the Soul*. Each version has a subtly distinct tone, which will be noted when these differences interrupt my line of argument.



condensed and its presence maintained in, for example, the video recording or a cloning machine. Thus the modality of eternity supposes that everything can be sufficiently reproduced without loss, but it cannot account for the passage of time (repetition).

The first phase of feminism categorized by Kristeva was the political response to the oppression of women (“Women’s Time” 18–19/207–08). This movement is grounded in the passage of time through history (rhythmic time), but appropriates a universal category of “woman.” Here woman is an amalgamated identity that is applied to all women, in the belief that history would reach an end of equality through the passage of time. The movement of the suffragettes is the foremost example of this phase. The characteristic of this type was concern for the practical effects of oppression, which presupposed that, by addressing the symptom, the cause of women’s oppression would also be cured. However, the practical emphasis of this phase means that it would not be the primary category for feminist approaches to the Bible but could nevertheless show, in the style of Foucault, that feminism could be conceived otherwise.

Kristeva traces the second wave of feminism back to 1968. Feminists were more focused around this time on the psychological experiences of women and sought to challenge the domination of patriarchal symbols. In this generation “linear temporality has been almost totally refused, and as a consequence there has arisen an exacerbated distrust of the entire political dimension” (“Women’s Time” 19/208). Here she observes that in the face of the failure to achieve equality through particular practical movements, feminism attempted to address the issue at its roots in culture on the basis that only when the foundations of the current inequality are quashed will equality be achieved. The rejection of rhythmic time has to depend on a more concrete concept of identity, as identity is equivocated with a person’s being. This process incorporates reading historically significant texts from a “feminist” perspective in order to highlight women’s oppression.

History is reinterpreted through the identity of “woman” in order to highlight historical oppression. The historical re-reading approach that is the signature of this phase shares the feminist biblical criticism of Fuchs. This movement only projects one identity, of woman, and anything falling outside would be disregarded as not significant for progressing emancipation. The problem is that “woman” does not take account of differences within this identity, such as the identity of “mother.” Kristeva explains this through the relationship between the semiotic and symbolic, in which the semiotic is defined as the meta-grammatical effect of language and the symbolic is defined as the functioning of language within a system of grammar or rules. She claims that the symbolic is the attempt to determine

the biological order of things, although the essence of the biological is chaotic, or beyond determination (*Revolution* 17). In the face of this chaos we create symbols that grant us a certainty within order against the onset of chaos. The symbolic emerges from separation between the signifier and the signified. This is the process of *The Mirror Stage*, as developed by Lacan. The image is the signified which is incorporated by the ego overlapping the signifier of the subject (Kristeva, *Revolution* 46–51). Kristeva develops this, through Frege’s “denoting,” as an example of the symbolic, which produces certainty by not referring to any real object (*Revolution* 53). However, Kristeva objects to this system of denotation by arguing that it hides the fact that it is caught in tension between the signifier and signified. The notion of identity follows this structure, whereby it can only determine someone insofar as characteristics that do not fit into the identity are excluded.

This is exemplified in Fuchs’s attempt to redeem the character of Rebekah. She argues that the deception lies not in her character but elsewhere, that is, in the inequality between men and women in Israelite society. The presupposition of this approach is its conception of time, in that it is only possible to judge “deception” in historical texts by claiming an eternal, or transcendental, perspective. A judge has to step back from the immediate temporal rhythm and evaluate each side from a neutral position, with the concern not for the immediate restraint of abuse but with the balance of justice. These transcendental foundations suppress the semiotic dimension in language. When Fuchs attempts to resituate deception in inequality, she has to assume that it is the only stumbling block to desire. The problem of desire shows that her basis is not eternal, but totalized, because she does not consider the validity of desire itself.

Applied to feminism, temporality restricts the optimism of recognition, as succinctly put by Penelope Deutscher: “Feminism might have to renounce its confidence in progress and the supposition that history moves, all going well, from a less feminist past to a more feminist future” (48). On this basis, feminist interpretation of history, including the Bible, is undermined by the temporal positioning of interpretation. Kristeva describes the problem as a “radical *refusal* of subjective limitations imposed by this history’s time in the name of the irreducible difference” (“Women’s Time” 20, italics in original).<sup>3</sup> This is also the case with Fuchs’s presupposition that men are fully satisfied in achieving their desire, whereas women are restrained by society. Time is universal to human experience and

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<sup>3</sup> This section is omitted from the later version of the essay and replaced by the rhetorical questions: “What socio-political processes or events have led to this mutation? What are its problems, its contributions, its limits?” (*New Maladies* 208).

so desire, as temporal, can never be fulfilled. For example, both men and women in Israelite culture were outside of Eden and desired to “return” to the garden. This is not a return as “turning back on oneself” but desire of being in the garden for the very first time (and impossible because of the difference produced by repetition).

## IDENTITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

The feminist approach adopted by Esther Fuchs would be justified if the Hebrew Bible could be shown to, as a whole, employ a determined identity of “woman.” Deceptiveness as a feature of femininity could then be determined, because the identification of femininity is an intrinsic part of the text itself. However, this section will contrast the presentation of “women” in the Book of Proverbs to the presentation of women in the examples used by Fuchs, in order to show that the Hebrew Bible cannot be so clearly characterized as representing “women” as deceptive. Feminist criticism will be, instead, reconstructed in the light of rhythmic temporality.

In the story of Isaac’s deception, there is no identification of “woman.” In Genesis 27 Rebekah is referred to either as Rebekah (vv. 5, 6, 15) or as Isaac’s mother (vv. 13–14). This suggests that she is depicted in the text as an individual character and not as a representative of all women. This description does not merely ignore Rebekah’s identity as “woman,” but instead defines how she should be characterized. The connection between “mother” and “Rebekah” emphasizes the relationship that is of importance for the narrative. This lends itself to Kristeva’s account, because Rebekah is described in terms of her motherhood, rather than in generalized terms as “woman.” The combination of “Rebekah” and “mother” establishes their combined significance for the framework of the narrative.

Fuchs also argues that the author uses different standards to judge the deceits of men and women, thereby demonstrating that the author is producing a patriarchal text (“Who Is Hiding the Truth?” 143–44). Through the illustration of Potiphar’s wife, who seduces the young Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39), Fuchs argues that monogamy applied only to the wife (“Who Is Hiding the Truth?” 139). The husband may seduce other maid-servants without recrimination, but if his wife were to have an affair it would not have been accepted. She argues that deception would not have been reported by the narrator had Potiphar deceived someone after seducing a maid-servant. The evidence for women’s oppression is found in the lack of the recording of male deception or seduction; a claim which she supports by citing Roland de Vaux.

However, Vaux does not explore the Israelite-Judaic context in quite such simplistic terms. He claims that, by the strict definition of the law, a man only commits adultery if the woman is married or engaged (see Deuteronomy 22:22–24). He also states that a “husband is exhorted to be faithful to his wife in [Proverbs] 5:15–19” (Vaux 37). The exhortation may not be a command in law but this does not reduce its effect. Instead, it indicates that the written law is not definitive. There is, as it were, an “unwritten” law to which a man is also subjected. This presents a conflicting set of demands, which is similar to the way the child must reconcile the inconsistency of being a subject and object (described above). The ambiguity between the mere statements of the law and other less formal expectations means that the structure of Israelite-Judaic culture is more complicated than assumed by Fuchs.<sup>4</sup> She is not justified in the assumption that such culture was patriarchal because the difference between Proverbs and Deuteronomy leaves open the possibility that there may have been no unified position about the attitudes to women.

Another prominent feminist biblical scholar, Alice Bach, uses a different approach to this narrative of Potiphar’s wife. She employs a conception of gender identity that reflects Kristeva’s critique of identity: “The emphasis on the constructedness of gender that initially drew me to this investigation has now led me to recognize the fluidity of gender itself” (Bach 35). From this account of gender, Bach interprets biblical narrative in such a way that she emphasizes the narrator’s influence on the text. She argues that the narrator does not tell the story from the perspective of Potiphar’s wife, even though she is the central character (48). Although Bach displays an awareness of the ideology of the narrator embedded in the text, she does not overcome the inequality between men and women, but inverts the structure. This is evident in her description of how to approach the biblical narrative: “I can turn a deaf ear to the narrator’s voice. Then I substitute my own” (6). However, Kristeva’s emphasis on the semiotic means that the only way Bach could “substitute her own” would be to do so pre-linguistically. Yet this is impossible because she is from the first to the last moment analyzing a *text*.<sup>5</sup> She does not have her “own voice” but one that is already incorporated into the multitude of voices, including

<sup>4</sup> The presence of conflicting demands may in fact be a part of the structure required to maintain patriarchy. The appearance of more favourable standards could distract from the dominant oppressive structure and consequently such favourable standards are consistent with patriarchy. However, the present argument merely claims that there is a greater complexity that needs to be taken into account.

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Fuchs claims, against Umberto Eco, that she is concerned with the power relations rather than “mechanics” (“For I Have the Way of Women” 69). However, her approach is all too closely dependent upon the semiotic theory she claims to rise above.

the narrator's. Bach appears to move beyond identity by recognizing the "constructedness" of gender but when she "substitutes her own voice" she ignores this in her own interpretation. This highlights the nuance required in developing a response to the problem of identity.

## THE FUTURE

The final phase of feminism that Kristeva sets out is a movement beyond the determinacy of identity in the first two phases of feminism. In the earliest version of "Women's Time" she describes this possibility as one that, instead of universalizing a particular perspective, calls us to recognize the "*singularity* of each person" (Kristeva, "Women's Time" 35, italics in original). The production of identity assimilates everything into categories that cannot fully represent each individual. However, Kathy Ehrensperger raises the objection against Kristeva that by appealing to the individual she is using a discourse of modernity (108–09).

Kristeva herself appears to recognize this problem in the later version of "Women's Time," in which the proposal of a movement towards individuality is omitted. Instead, she sees that sexual difference has become a less significant issue (*New Maladies* 222–23). The suggestion she makes as an envisioning of what the future could hold is for "an ethics aware of its own sacrificial order and thus retain[ing] part of the burden for each of its adherents" (*New Maladies* 223). This indicates that rather than a positive assertion of individuality the future might be more orientated through consciousness of limitation.

There is a similar line of argument developed by Kristeva in her essay "Reading the Bible," which appeared in the same volume. She argues that, when reading the Bible, we should not seek the definitive and objective interpretation but recognize how encountering the text reveals and develops our own perspective: "We should read the Bible one more time. To interpret it, of course, but also let it carve out a space for our own fantasies and interpretive delirium" (*New Maladies* 126). Kristeva's use of the term "fantasy" does not mean that we should just read the Bible any way we want. Rather, the concept of fantasy is defined within its psychoanalytic context. It is not something pejorative that should be overcome in place of reality but is part of our understanding of reality itself, as she states elsewhere: "We all have fantasies; whether seductive or terrifying, this is inevitable" (*Intimate Revolt* 63). Fantasy is part of our understanding, such that thinking "without fantasy" we would only be convincing ourselves that we had overcome fantasy; in the same way that the temporal is forgotten through the appropriation of the eternal. Thus, fantasy could be

reconceived positively, as Kristeva does through its etymology: “What is fantasy? The Greek root—*fae*, *faos*, *fos*—expresses the notion of light and thus the fact of coming to light, shining, appearing, presenting, presenting oneself, representing oneself” (*Intimate Revolt* 63). Hence, fantasy describes how something is illuminated in human understanding.

When we consider the deceptiveness of women in the Hebrew Bible, we should be aware of how our own nature affects our understanding of these ancient texts. We must interpret from our desire for equality and from our perception of oppression. This forms the basis for interpretation, because it reveals our “moment” in time. To recognize our interpretation as fantasy does not require that it should be rejected, but it challenges the injustice of oppression through a process that is itself vulnerable. Thus the *fantasy* of deceptiveness in the Hebrew Bible recognizes oppression without providing a solution based on a determination or certainty.

Against this point another of Ehrensperger’s objections against Kristeva comes into view. She argues that with no essential core to the subject, there is no grounding for action. The core to the subject describes something that provides a certainty from which actions can be grounded. Ehrensperger claims that Kristeva makes a determinate assertion about the absence of reality, in that the rejection of the subject asserts nothingness in its place (Ehrensperger 100). Without a “core to the subject” it seems that people cannot do anything, such as acting against injustice. The rejection of identity undermines any attempt to gain recognition for the oppression of women.

However, Kristeva indicates that she does not want to make any such move that removes all distinction within subjectivity: “I am not simply suggesting a very hypothetical bisexuality which, even if it existed, would only, in fact, be the aspiration toward the totality of one of the sexes and thus an effacing of difference” (“Women’s Time” 34). This means that the subject cannot be determined, whereas identity determines the subject and so does not truly reflect the individual. Repetition produces differences, while an identity reduces things to sameness. The indeterminacy of the subject is an effect of the production of differences through rhythmic time. Time dissolves the determination of identity so that it can then be said that there is no subject as contained in the identity of “woman.”

The persistent rejection of identity would not reject the practical impact of feminism, but reveals that any practical response is always incomplete. Instead the basis in rhythmic temporality requires that any particular position should be overcome. So, with respect to feminism, the question would become not whether to take action or not but how to reassess our position. This begs the question about what it means to read the Bible. It is not directly related to the emancipation of women but as Kristeva

observes in “Reading the Bible,” it nevertheless has a powerful influence (*New Maladies* 115–16).

Proverbs 31 could provide us with an example of how fantasy can overcome oppression. King Lemuel is told not to submit to women because they will destroy him (Proverbs 31:3). It is set within the circumstance for the king and so could be read in relation to male fantasy. The verse discusses women as perceived by a king. The importance of the fantasy is that it overcomes a spurious perspective of the infinite. By “giving strength” to women the king would give strength to the image of women that fills his own fantasy. Hence the description of “women” in Proverbs 31:3 can be read as not referring to all women, but describing the danger of projecting an identity. The use of identity in this passage does not reflect the understanding set out by Fuchs. In Proverbs 31, the identity is contingent and represents the limitation of human time. However, such a reading of this passage does not overcome the problem of the symbolic. The word “women” is not restricted to such qualified contexts but is also used in an unqualified way. Thus “women” bears both qualified and unqualified meanings. It therefore remains possible to read the verse both ways. The symbolic is not attached to any particular thing but “floats” above and the authority that the symbol has is not undermined by re-interpreting only one usage.

## CONCLUSION

When we approach the Bible we should recognize our finitude. Fuchs exemplified the problem of universalizing that offers a retrospective judgement of characterization in the Hebrew Bible. In this study her presupposition of identifying “women” has been shown as vulnerable to Kristeva’s emphasis on ambiguity. Her response was distinguished from Bach’s interpretation of women in the Hebrew Bible, which was shown to repeat the problem of oppression that she had attempted to overcome. Against Bach’s method our approach has not cast out identity but actively encouraged movement in identity through “fantasy.” Thus a new approach to interpreting the Hebrew Bible recognizing the problem of identity was developed in re-reading Proverbs 31. However, this approach is not the only way to read the passage and no matter how close reading we take we could never prevent someone from taking women here as a universal. Hence re-reading the Bible, to take new and creative interpretations, is an inherently problematic task. Kristeva’s proposal to allow the Bible to affect our “fantasies and interpretative delirium” also falls short. The tradition of biblical interpretation cannot be overcome in one movement. However, we



should be wary of this leading into a cynicism of accepting the traditional interpretation because this fails to grasp the ambivalence of the semiotic/symbolic bind. Instead, the Bible stands, as it were, *between* the resonance of communal language and the excitement of a new possibility.

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**Kristeva, Ethics  
and Intellectual Practice**

# ABSTRACT

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The aim of this article is to revisit the work of the French philosopher Julia Kristeva and ask what place we might give her conceptual framework today. I will focus on one key aspect of Kristeva's work, sexual difference, as that which ties most, if not all, aspects of Kristeva's work. I am hoping to present a concise, yet wide-ranging view on Kristeva's critical contribution to the fields of politics and ethics. My objective will be threefold. First, I will present the main lines of Kristeva's theory on sexual difference; this presentation will also outline her political critique of equality and diversity in the domains of gender and sexuality. Kristeva believes that contemporary politics invested in suppressing inequality through the promotion of diversity will in the long term not only prove unsuccessful, but also create more exclusion. Secondly, I will point out the main objections raised against her theories and show how her critics come to their conclusions. Objectors to Kristeva's sexual difference theory are mostly concerned with the manner in which she associates marginality and unintelligibility. They see little value in her theory, because, on the one hand, it relegates marginal groups to a world beyond social viability, and, on the other, because it effectively disables advancements in equality politics. Finally, I hope to provide the reader with a useful counter-critique to Kristeva's detractors that will show why their views are partly founded on a misreading of her ethical (Freudian) framework and a desire to translate her work into a more pragmatic and user-friendly tool. I will argue that Kristeva's work is best apprehended as a variant of psychoanalytic ethics and that to engage with its rhetoric is to capture the full weight of Kristeva's contribution to politics and intellectual engagement.

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**ABSTRACT**

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to revisit the work of the French philosopher Julia Kristeva and ask what place we might give her conceptual framework today. Kristeva's work has often left critics with ambivalent feelings towards her work. She first made her mark on the Anglo-American academic world in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the introduction of her symbolic/semiotic modalities of language. Some saw in the semiotic "disposition" of the speaking subject (*Revolution in Poetic Language*) the potential for emancipation from hegemonic (symbolic) forces. However, when Kristeva herself objected that it was not what she meant (*Tales of Love* 80–81), she also found herself the target of criticisms. The semiotic "disposition" of the subject lacked the potential for actualization and Kristeva was accused of siding with the enemy in relegating the possibility of an emancipated "semiotized" individual to the fate of unintelligibility (Doane and Hodges 76).

Indeed, the lack of intelligibility would become a recurring complaint made against Kristeva in the 1980s and 1990s. Her work was seen as unnecessarily "hard-core" intellectualism, out of the reach of the uninitiated, too abstract; in short, too removed from lived social experiences. Kristeva herself summed up her position in academic circles:

I believe that much of what has been written in the United States about my conception has been inaccurate. People have either defined and glorified the "semiotic" as if it were a female essence or else claimed that I do not grant enough autonomy to this "essence." (qtd. in Guberman 269)

The vision of Kristeva's work as neither here nor there also provoked a third type of criticism. There is both a wish and a difficulty in labelling her work and tying her to a school of thought. This is particularly obvious when critics attempt to by-pass Kristeva's allegiance to the Freudian framework. Trying to explain what Kristeva is proposing away from psychoanalysis has led many critics to volunteer other labels to describe where Kristeva's work might belong: French feminism and French theory for example are amongst the most commonly found, especially in Anglo-American feminist circles. Attempts to sever Kristeva's work from Freudian legacy raise questions about academic allegiance: on the one hand, Kristeva's own allegiance to established frameworks (I will come back to this) and on the other her critics'. The need to reposition Kristeva's work says

more about those critics' need to contain and appropriate what Kristeva represents for them than what her work actually achieves. While such appropriation opens the door to misreadings of Kristevan theory, it has also had an interesting effect on feminist debates. The Anglo-American importation and packaging of Kristeva's work under the "French feminist" banner has refreshed discussions in Anglo-American feminism regarding the place of otherness (cf. Gambaudo, "French Feminism vs. Anglo-American Feminism: A Reconstruction"). In a context (the 1970s/80s) where feminism was grappling with the very stuff that justified its existence (women's essence, their political rights, etc.), the coining of "French feminism" allowed Anglo-American feminists to regroup around more philosophical questions of inclusion, exclusion, marginality, foreignness, etc. It also enabled some to dissent against so-called "French theory" because of its insistence on the importance of "otherness." As Lechte explained, French theorists (especially those of a Freudian persuasion) are regarded as suspicious because they make central to their thesis the matter of "otherness," a term that an empirical and pragmatic Anglo-Saxon academic tradition deems too elusive to conceptualize (25). Both sides were thus asking pertinent questions to the other: on the pragmatic side, for example, what status shall we give this "other"? How do we incorporate the "other" in political (feminist) demands? On the "French" feminist side, the assimilation of otherness as "diversity" in political rhetoric was seen as a short term solution. If otherness provokes the exclusion of some individuals, motivates projective identification, triggers one's hatred of strangers and in the extreme prompts psychotic acting-outs against fellow beings, then its metamorphosis into issues of "diversity" is questionable. Worse, Kristeva suggests that it may also be what participates in "othering the other" further. This is what this paper is interested in. Before we begin unpacking the relationship between otherness and diversity, I want to make one final point of introduction to address the previously opened question of Kristeva's academic allegiance, or lack thereof.

Kristeva would be too intellectual and too Freudian. The attempts to separate her work from its Freudian roots lead to questions regarding her true academic commitment, at worse to accusations that she lacks academic purity. These critics do have a point. Pegging Kristeva's work with labels is indeed a challenge. Even within psychoanalysis, her work is indebted to many schools: Freudian, Lacanian, Kleinian and Object Relation Theory, to name just a few. Psychoanalyst, philosopher, feminist, linguist, novelist, political theorist, sociologist and critical theorist are some of the terms most commonly used to describe who Kristeva is. Indeed, her interdisciplinary approach is forcing her work into the margin of scholarly disciplines. In an interview, she said: "I'm at the interface of disciplines.

This is still perceived by the French university or media establishment as something that is, if not scandalous, at least disturbing” (qtd. in Lechte and Margaroni 156). She then added that her status as a foreigner had also been a hindrance in gaining academic validation amongst French intellectuals. While this is true in France, Kristeva’s status as a foreigner and her work on otherness has been precisely what has attracted such a huge interest, whether positive or negative, outside France, especially in the United States. But as she says, in France her work tends to be relegated into a certain margin of thought because her foreignness and her interdisciplinarity disturb the academic establishment. The fact that Kristeva links the two ideas together in Lechte’s interview is significant. While she does not explicitly come to any conclusion regarding hostility towards interdisciplinarity *and* distrust of foreignness, there is little doubt that she is talking about the same thing: hegemonic hostility towards “bastardization” of thought *and* “bastardization” of being. To be clear, in Kristeva’s work, the manner body and mind are signified points to the same issue, that of otherness, of difference, or, more precisely, *sexual difference*. And any form of marginalization, for example dismissing interdisciplinarity as a lesser form of thought, or doubting someone’s conceptual frameworks because of its (and her) foreign character, are particular formations of a wider question regarding sexual difference.

This essay will be primarily concerned with “sexual difference,” one area where Kristeva has contributed the most, possibly *the* area as other key themes like otherness, foreignness, the maternal, feminism, etc., can be traced back to her sexual difference theory. In conjunction with sexual difference, I am interested in her response to more pragmatic approaches to difference, that is the integration of difference and its morphing into issues of diversity and equal opportunity in mainstream politics. Kristeva sees such equality rhetoric as attempts to level out difference. I aim to show that Julia Kristeva’s conceptual framework is a valuable tool to evaluate and critique cultural responses to social concerns today. I will begin with an appraisal of what Kristeva has contributed in the field of difference theory and gender discrimination. In a second stage, her framework will be pitched against political achievements that have granted “oppressed” minorities equal opportunity. We will see that behind some promotions of “diversity” can hide the loss of difference in the sense that Kristeva gives it. The trivialization of difference into euphoric messages, for example like those found on diversity posters, would not promote diversity but in fact participate in its repression. To illustrate this, I will look at one significant manifestation of it: sexuality. A recurring theme in the work of Kristeva, sexuality is where she unpacks the hidden face of hegemonic (hetero-)

sexuality, with surprising conclusions critiquing the demands of marginalized sexualities (LGBT, for example) for claiming successful outcomes to activism. Her dedication to challenging hegemonic thought has motivated her to stick to her psychoanalytic “guns” rather than resort to what she sees as uncritical speedy fixes to social unrest (promoting “gay marriage,” for example). This essay will thus emphasize Kristeva’s more discreet form of subversion, one that has a crucial role to play in responding to social unrest and which is part of her ethical framework for a forward-thinking intellectual practice.

### A PLACE IN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY: DIFFERENCE

The hinge pin of Kristeva’s framework is without question the issue of sexual difference or differentiation. In fact, Kristeva occupies an interesting place in the theory of difference. In her essay “Women’s Time” (1979/1981), she famously uses three common historical moments of the feminist struggle to explain key philosophical positions in feminism and clarify the ambiguous relationship between feminism and sexual difference: first-wave feminism also known as “liberal” feminism, second-wave or “radical,” and third-wave or “postmodern/poststructuralist” feminism. The first wave, mostly concerned with issues of suffrage and education, directed their effort at difference to decry its injustice. First-wave feminism aimed to correct inequality between the sexes by denouncing difference as the source of women’s exclusion and seeking its eradication in particular fields of social experience, politics and education mostly. The second wave, politically, sociologically and intellectually empowered by the achievement of the first one, again would locate feminist advancement in revisiting the notion of difference. But second-wave feminists saw the first-wave’s effort to eradicate difference as a selling out of “woman” to dominant politics. Feminists now denounced the effort to reach equality as an assimilation of woman to “sameness” (meaning: to man) and as the cause of women’s servitude. Consequently, second-wave feminists directed their attention at ways of rehabilitating difference as source of woman’s identity. For example, the creation of Virago Press in 1973 sought to promote female writers whose work had not yet been published or had been neglected or fallen into oblivion.

The legacy of the first and second waves of feminists is unmistakable. Today, equal opportunity policies or the right to diversity are omnipresent markers of feminist achievements. While Kristeva nods to these undeniable triumphs of feminism, she also critiques what she perceives as the shortcomings of identity politics. John Lechte summarized those shortcomings as follows:

A failure by first generation feminism (for example de Beauvoir) to recognize the risk of being incorporated into the male power structure, and, with the second generation, a blindness as to the risk of sectarianism and of becoming agents of the violence (terrorism) that the movement expressly opposes. (207)

For Kristeva, the problem with identity politics lies in the very act of speaking in the defence of “woman,” as feminism does. She has consistently warned that to posit collective identity above the singularity of individual experience is harmful. Kristeva does not mince her words and firmly believes that asserting the existence of sexual identity (the existence of men *and* women) is a form of tyranny imposed on the individual. If “woman” (for example) is that which is equal to or different from man, sameness and difference then become the terms by which “woman” is normalized. By extension these are also the terms that deny “woman” the possibility of becoming anything else. “Woman” is then this universal figure that all girls aspire to grow into regardless of their background and that is actualized in the reiteration of what is “same as” or “marginal to” dominant narratives that describe her.

With her 1979 (translated 1981) essay, Kristeva’s complaint announces the coming of age of identity politics, which flourished from the 1980s onwards and found their accomplishment in the work of scholars like Judith Butler.

[T]he premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. (Butler 6)

By this Butler echoes Kristeva’s words: “I think that the apparent coherence which the term ‘woman’ assumes in contemporary ideology . . . essentially has the negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions and structures that operate underneath this word” (“Women’s Time” 18). Noëlle McAfee summarized the risks of un-deconstructed acceptance of “woman’s difference” and of the forces that regulate the representation of that difference. Whether idealized as a good wife/mother or demonized as a dangerous vixen, woman’s difference is romanticized to such a point that real women are denied individuality and specificity of identity (McAfee 100). Kristeva’s objection to identity politics is partly located here. She argues that romanticizing “woman” identifies “woman” with her perceived essence, constraining her to a pre-defined position of inferiority and marginality (qtd. in Guberman 116–17). Difference thus

becomes her and between idolization and vilification, “woman” loses her singularity in favour of other images that become particular formations of the woman spectrum: from the good woman (maternal, caring, etc.) to the bad woman (ranging from alluring to deadly).

The construction of woman as same-as-man is equally unsatisfactory for women, but here Kristeva tells us that it is not just women who face the exclusion of their singularity. I will detour briefly via Luce Irigaray whose framework so aptly shows the dangers of so-called “sexual equality” for women. I will then return to Kristeva to draw attention to a critical aspect of her framework that could be summed up as follows: the conclusion drawn by detractors of identity politics is that the attempt to establish categories founded on sameness and/or difference amongst individuals would achieve the opposite. It would not lead to establishing satisfactory coherent categories of being but instead participating in the undoing of those same categories. If identity politics amounts to the negation of individual identities in favour of coherent pre-set identity types, what is interesting in Kristeva is that she is not advocating the end of difference. On the contrary, she proposes a revisiting of difference theory (the process by which one draws differences amongst people) as the creative path towards individual singularity.

In 1974 Luce Irigaray published *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Her book became one of the key texts describing the risk of unquestioned adherence to patriarchal models for women. In her thesis, Irigaray coins the notion of “phallogocentrism,” a term with which she critiques two key traditional concepts: logocentrism and phallocentrism. Schutte describes logocentrism as the assumption that there exists a “transcendental subject of knowledge [who] coordinates and controls the multiplicity of sensations and impressions received from sense experience, thus forming a unified field of experience” (65). The subject would moderate the transcendence of knowledge, which in turn operates as the referent of all representation. Hence, one’s linguistic experience is the site where what one says is truly what one means. With the term “phallogocentrism” a gender dimension is added. Phallogocentrism is the attitude of one who assumes that epistemic experiences are valid inasmuch as the actor of the experience is male and that *his* experience is the referent for *all* experiences. Hence, experience is “fundamentally hermetic,” operating “according to rules and conventions” that exclude women (Irigaray, *je, tu, nous* 28). Any experience that is not phallogocentric, that is any experience defined as that of woman, must be linguistically territorialized and made to comply “into the production of the same discourse” (Irigaray, *Speculum* 137). Irigaray is proposing that although dimorphic by definition, there are no two gender identities (man/woman) but one since men’s experience is the only one that counts.



Most women's experience tells them . . . that they are first and foremost asexual or neuter. . . . The difficulty they face in order to enter the between-men cultural world leads almost all of them, including those who call themselves feminists, to renounce their female identity and relationships with other women, bringing them to an individual and collective impasse, when it comes to communication. (*je, tu, nous* 21)

So what about women's role in this phallogocentric arrangement? Women's femininity becomes the object of men's subjectivity and acts as catalysts to their experience. What Irigaray means is that "woman" is not anything except that which it needs to be in order to make man's experience meaningful. She is his other, his variable: the unintelligible, the irrational, that which lacks something and is in need of his linguistic input if it is to achieve intelligibility and recognition.

"Phallogocentrism" is by and large what Kristeva is critiquing in first generation feminism and in today's policies of equal opportunities. What she sees as the levelling of difference is similar to Irigaray's idea of the neutering of women's sex. For Kristeva, the recognition of one's strangeness avoids the erasure of one's difference. Yet celebrating diversity is not necessarily the same as recognizing one's own strangeness because diversity is politically recuperated in a narrative of difference that averages out everybody's rights to a common denominator. The cultural expression of this common denominator comes down to a "doing" of diversity, to use Butlerian rhetoric, and becomes the means by which the individual signifies their difference. Kristeva's understanding of difference, however, is not about diversity awareness. Her theoretical framework is explicitly anchored in Freudian psychoanalysis and this means that difference is always mediated by the libido. So, instead of having difference as desexualized diversity awareness, on the contrary, difference is that which is libidinally invested and is manifested in the individual's pleasure and creativity. Kristeva explains that

if you level out difference, given that it's difference that's desirable and provokes sexual pleasure, you could see a kind of sexual anesthesia. . . . That's extremely troubling, first, for the individual's psychic life whose levelling off rules out desire and pleasure, and second, for the individual's creative possibilities. (qtd. in Guberman 126–27)

In a phallus-centred organization of knowledge, the marker of difference (and so of pleasure and creativity) is the female body. The female body, in



particular the phenomenological female body,<sup>1</sup> becomes that object which challenges and ultimately prevents the libidinal disinvestment of individuals of both sexes. Why prevent? Because its difference repositions it as this strange, elusive “thing” every time one attempts to appropriate it to turn into an “object.” The apprehension of the female body and of its experience is the marker of a desire for difference. This desire is manifested in practices which, although experienced as pleasurable, nevertheless always frustrate the individual by virtue of being outside phallogocentric experience. So returning to Irigaray and our critique of equality and diversity, under the guise of encouraging the singularity of individuals, political engagement in fact levels these singularities to a common state of experience: the heterogeneous nature of difference, mediated by the libido, is neutralized in favour of a single (phallogocentric) vision of knowledge. The experience of difference is lost in that process.

There is, however, a big difference between Irigaray and Kristeva. The latter does not advocate the re-writing of theories of sexual difference to allow woman her own different sexual identity. On the contrary, Kristeva is more loyal to the traditional epistemic model than Irigaray. She advocates the maintenance of a phallogocentric model for different reasons. One is an issue of stability. The overthrow of phallogocentrism would, she believes, lead society to the brink of psychosis and self-destruction. The creation of a labio-logocentric or gyno-logocentric, whatever morphological equivalent to the phallus we might use, would not lead to the rehabilitation of woman’s epistemic experience, as would be hoped, simply because Kristeva does not believe there is such a coherent unit as man or woman already there and phenomenologically ready to share its experience. As a result, we cannot say that it is only women who must fight a system that excludes their singular experience. Men also face the risk of neutering in a phallogocentric system. This has important consequences for the understanding of Kristeva’s ethics as an intellectual and I will return to it later.

If Kristeva rejects the re-writing of difference theory to accommodate women, she does, however, come close to it with her symbolic/semiotic model of language. Caught between a romanticized image of woman and one that erases her, Kristeva proposed in 1979 that we should regard the categories “man” and “woman” as metaphysical. In doing so, she was instrumental in questioning the possibility of a coherent form of feminism. Instead of a monolithic understanding of feminism’s essence and objectives, she advocates a form of feminism that promotes the philosophical questioning of identity and of its politics, and the *aesthetic* practice of her

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<sup>1</sup> What Kristeva describes as “the feminine” and what I return to in the next section.

version of “the feminine.” Before we move on to the terms that define “the semiotic feminine,” I want to emphasize the importance of aesthetics in Kristeva’s understanding of feminist engagement. Indeed, one of the critiques addressed to Kristeva’s vision of a third type of feminism is at times a misreading of and at others a disagreement with the wider potential of an aesthetic feminine practice. What I am saying is that a criticism regarding Kristeva’s alleged disengagement from hands-on politics could be criticism of a wider question about the powers and limits of aesthetic practice. In short, can aesthetic production change social reality? If so, which aesthetic practices should we favour? I am not proposing to answer these questions here but I am interested in showing how Kristeva’s aesthetic critique of sexual difference, although seemingly disconnected from, even hostile to the defence of “women,” is in fact a call for more subversive practice at the service of social change. In other words, as I will illustrate below, many of Kristeva’s aesthetic practices *can* be perceived as nothing more than circular bourgeois narratives that only serve the perpetuation of hegemonic thought. But the careful consideration of her psychoanalytic framework shows that the opposite is also true.

### SEXUALITY, HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE OTHER OF OEDIPUS

A critical reading of Kristeva’s *oeuvre* permits the construction of her theory of sexuality, or maybe more accurately theories of sexuality. In what follows, I am recalling conclusions I made in an earlier article (“Julia Kristeva, ‘Woman’s Primary Homosexuality’ and Homophobia”) and using those to emphasize the importance of maintaining sexual difference in seeking subversion of hegemonic (hetero)sexual narratives. While arguing that in order to challenge hegemony one needs to maintain it sounds like a circular argument, Kristeva’s take on it should not be dismissed too quickly. For the past 20 years, her argument has been that the opposite of differential treatment of sexualities, for example seeking equal opportunity for lesbian and gay couples to marry, does not achieve the coveted acceptance of other sexualities but rather levels out these sexualities along heterosexual lines of understanding. This is not a new argument (see Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example). But a careful reading of Kristeva shows that she does something quite subtle and unusual that in my reading amounts to a form of sexuality theory that is new. This is what I want to describe now.

Kristeva has famously proposed a model of language where two modalities, symbolic and semiotic (1974/1984), cohabit within language and contribute to meaning-making. She has consistently and, in my

opinion, very successfully applied this model to many areas of experience: gender, ethnicity, race and what interests us here, sexuality. Effectively, Kristeva challenged the Freudian model with her own. Freud proposed the Oedipal model as universally applicable to all individuals. Castration engenders individuals: men become men because they are threatened with gender emasculation (the fear to lose their phallus) and women become women because they seek gender reparation (the desire to recapture the lost phallus).

Kristeva does not dispute this but slows down the Freudian model of sexual development and pauses on the part just after loss, when the phallus becomes the referent of sexuality. She suggests that while the symbolic filling of the hole may well be reparative, it is never complete. Furthermore, in the case of pregnancy, that filling may not be all it seemed to Freud. In fact, she believes pregnancy is subversive. Kristeva is particularly interested in the manner pregnancy is psychologized and fantasized, so in her work the pregnancy experience is not confined to parturient women, nor is it confined to females in general. More precisely, it is the fantasy of parthenogenesis or immaculate conception where the individual can experience desire without symbolic castration. In other words, in fantasizing conceiving immaculately, the individual imagines that s/he bypasses the problem of sexual difference and challenges the compulsion to heterosexuality. Pregnancy fantasies also portray a perfectly symbiotic relationship which, while being of the same body, is nevertheless a twosome that finds its foundations and accomplishment in a sense of kinship (mother *and* child) that ignores the father's involvement. Put differently again, Kristeva's "Madonna model" (cf. Gambaudo, "From Scopophilic Pleasure to the Jouisance of the Madonna") challenges heterosexuality and in the challenge to heterosexuality lies one of the definitions Kristeva gives of woman's homosexuality<sup>2</sup>: the doubling of bodies and the search for female kinship away from castration (*Le Génie Féminin III* 351–52). I do not have the space to unpack the individual's motivation for actually fabricating such fantasies and successfully preserving them in spite of repression. But there are three interesting points I want to highlight: first, once these fantasies are formed, they become a kind of blueprint for particular psychosexual formations, effectively cohabitating with fantasies of an Oedipal nature. So, we now have at least two psychosexual models, one symbolically motivated (Freud with castration) and one semiotically motivated (Kristeva with the Madonna model). Second, these fantasies appear in both men and

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<sup>2</sup> To be accurate, she calls it woman's primary homosexuality, but for simplicity, I am using the expression "woman's homosexuality."

women.<sup>3</sup> I suggested somewhere else the possibility of Madonnic fantasies in men (“From Scopophilic Pleasure to the Jouissance of the Madonna” 18). In one example, Dick Blau’s photographs of his wife (Jane Gallop) and child (Max), Blau ordered the mother and child, then engaged in the ritual intimacy of Max’s bath time, to look at him and he captured on camera the pair’s angry looks directed at the father’s intrusion upon their symbiosis. Blau, we are told, intentionally set up the angry response in *his desire* to chronicle photographically the rejection of castration. Third, although they bypass castration, Madonnic fantasies are intelligible only retroactively, after Oedipal development. Hence, women’s homosexuality is located somewhere between the two ends of a spectrum with at one end “the delightful arena of a neutralized, filtered libido, devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculine sexuality” (Kristeva, *Tales of Love* 80–81) and at the other lesbianism is made intelligible through the prism of phallic desire (for example stone butches, lipstick lesbians or Diesel dykes become the colourful phallogocentric formations of lesbian intelligibility).

Understanding Kristeva’s conceptual apprehension of woman’s homosexuality clearly matters in the context of lesbian studies and lesbian and gay rights. It also matters more widely. Talking about sexuality goes way beyond categorizing sexuality according to preference of sexual partners. Rather, the analysis of the ontological structuring of sexuality has interesting results for a challenge of hegemonic (hetero)sexuality. At the end of the analysis, Kristeva tells us two things: one that she remains on her position (dismissal) regarding the possibility of a socially coherent form of homosexual existence, in the sense she gives homosexuality. Whether hetero- or homosexual, all individuals seek intelligibility via an already established form of sexuality and do so more or less successfully. In this, we can recall Irigaray who says there is only one true form of sex and sexuality and it is phallogocentric. When Kristeva is insisting that the phallus is the referent of any form of sexuality, she is by and large saying the same thing: “To the extent that she has a loving soul, a woman is drawn into the same dialectic involving confrontation with the Phallus. . . . Whatever the organ, confrontation with power remains” (*Tales of Love* 80–81). But Kristeva also tells us that at an aesthetic level much more can and should be done. A reassessment of ontological categories is not just desirable; it is a practice showing one’s sense of good intellectual ethics. Beyond the question of sexuality, Kristeva firmly believes that an aesthetic practice of marginal forms (narratives, paintings, etc., but also their analysis) is key to resisting

<sup>3</sup> Although I have an un-investigated suspicion that their particular formations tend to differ along gender lines (see Gambaudo, “From Scopophilic Pleasure to the Jouissance of the Madonna: The Mother’s Maternal Gaze in Three Photographic Examples”).

their disappearance when hegemony requires their transformation into coherent formations. She has often called the marginal the “feminine,” and beyond their differences, several theories converge to agree with her, whether they call it “feminine,” “queer,” “trans,” or something else:

In the end, recognizing feminine “specificity” and “creativity” associates them with the structures and identities borrowed from paternalistic and monotheistic societies. Because such societies do not recognize feminine specificity, they try to put it aside, subdue it, and make sure no one talks about it. (qtd. in Guberman 106)

What I am trying to say is that Kristeva is suggesting the shortcomings she highlights would be caused by a lack of philosophical reflection on the very meaning of “difference.” While equality and difference feminists achieved much at a political and sociological level, feminist achievement is more mitigated at an aesthetic level. Kristeva appears to place a certain type of intellectual practice, commonly denoted by the terms “French theory” or “continental philosophy,” higher and above other academic disciplines, like politics or sociology. But it would be a mistake to see in this the arrogant exclusion of other intellectual traditions. In fact, she puts forward an interesting dynamic between a feminism that is supposedly verifiable and more exact, and an aesthetic feminism that directly challenges it. Why should we take aesthetic seriously as a tool for subversion? Because Kristeva thinks that in a time of crisis where melancholia permeates the *socius*, aesthetic production is a (if not *the*) chance to rise above crisis and to mobilize imaginative skills precisely because the possibility of aesthetic practice seems foreclosed (Gambaudo, *Kristeva, Psychoanalysis and Culture*; Lechte and Margaroni 3). In the Western world, crisis is partly caused by changes in the limits of authority, partly it is a side effect of the importance we give technology. Let me take each in turn.

As mentioned at the start of this essay, Kristeva has been criticized for seemingly siding with the enemy and encouraging us to protect what she terms “the father” or “the Symbolic.” Against her detractors (I am thinking of Butler’s excellent critique in *Gender Trouble*), Kristeva firmly believes in the value of maintaining a certain form of hegemony in the defence of singular experience. But if the assurance of personal creativity rests on the perpetuation of hegemony, it is not done willy-nilly and Kristeva believes two conditions need to be fulfilled: the maintenance of a fairly solid boundary between permission and interdiction *and* the suppleness of that boundary (Lechte 143–63). The failure to go beyond hegemony and show personal creativity is then a consequence of either too rigid a dominant discourse (for example totalitarianism) or of its instability (for instance corruption),

if not inexistence. So ironically, the suppression of difference, in my earlier example the introduction of “gay marriage,” leads to its assimilation to an existing model but not to the eradication of difference, here homophobia.

Second is the question of technology. Kristeva believes “an excess of technology can kill the imagination” (qtd. in Lechte 152). There is a certain amount of nostalgia in her views, a nostalgia for the good old “pen-to-paper” days when communication was mediated by tangible *matter* like ink or a blank sheet. Kristeva’s gripe with technology also goes beyond this. She describes aspects of technology and the use we make of it that feel uncomfortably Orwellian. For example, the reaching out for ready-made answers (the “just Google it” approach to difficulties from cooking recipes to existential angst) or the use of prefabricated images as models of experience (distressed customers of the Costa Concordia reported that they *knew* what was happening because their experience was reminiscent of scenes seen in the film *Titanic*) suggest that knowledge is not so much mediated by the body from the inside out, but rather generated through our consumption of technology from the outside in. These would be the side effects (or, in the long term, the regulation) of life experiences in a technological environment. Kristeva deplores the impoverishment of the human psyche which, for lack of use, increasingly shows wastage in areas like the capacity to cope with emotions and the aptitude to be creative. The potential to unleash political control or marketing strategies upon needy but docile populations indeed makes for uncomfortable thought.

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## CONCLUSION

There is a difficulty in abiding by a Kristevan ethics because there is ambivalence with regard to what we might ethically object to. On the one hand, she shows quite successfully that certain cultural manifestations hinder political action against the marginalization of difference. A weakening symbolic referent replaced by, for example, a more technological narrative of the human, would be both markers of what is hindered and of what obstructs the path towards change. On the other hand, Kristeva also guards us against the option of authenticating perpetrators and victims of crimes committed in the name of difference. In what appears a circular argument, Kristeva has been one of the early key figures to insist on the importance of understanding how difference (and the marginalization of difference) is manifested and the urgency in unpicking the structures that operate underneath the notion of difference. The authentication of crime would be the domain of the Law, of diversity policies and their application. But these

can only be short to medium term answers to social unrest, with mitigated social efficacy and always in need of reformulation. The latter would be the responsibility of intellectuals and artists. I suggested at the start that Kristeva's discreet form of intellectualism had a crucial role to play in solving social concerns, but this is not entirely accurate. In fact, Kristeva does not envisage a solution and this ambivalence, no doubt, put hopeful critics off. Instead, her vision has political activists and intellectuals engaged in a common venture where each represents one aspect of the same process. If Kristeva's ethics were to be defined, it would be found here, in the fight to maintain dialogue between civic realities and aesthetics, where political action tracks reflection and vice versa.

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## Abjection and Sexually Specific Violence in Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*

# ABSTRACT

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The article applies selected concepts from the writings of Julia Kristeva to the analysis of a novel by Doris Lessing entitled *The Cleft*. Published in 2007, *The Cleft* depicts the origin of sexual difference in the human species. Its emergence is fraught with anxiety and sexually specific violence, and invites comparison with the primal separation from the mother and the emancipation of the subject in process at the cost of relegating the maternal to the abject in the writings of Julia Kristeva. Lessing creates an ahistorical community of females (Clefts) from which the male community (Squirts) eventually evolves. The growing awareness of sexual difference dovetails with the emotional and intellectual development, as the nascent human subject gradually enters linear time viewed from perspective by the narrator of the novel, a Roman senator who hoards ancient manuscripts with the story of Clefts and Squirts. The article juxtaposes the ideas of Lessing and Kristeva, who have both cut themselves off from feminism, and have both been inspired by psychoanalysis. Primarily, Lessing's fictional imaginary can be adequately interpreted in light of Kristeva's concept of abjection as an element that disturbs the system. My interpretation of abjection is indebted to Pamela Sue Anderson's reading of Kristeva, notably her contention that violence as a response to sexual difference lies at the heart of collective identity. Finally, the imaginary used by Lessing and Kristeva is shown to have stemmed from the colonial imaginary like the concepts of Freud and Jung.

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**ABSTRACT**

Doris Lessing has always objected to *The Golden Notebook* being called “the property of the women’s movement” (*The Golden Notebook*, Introduction ix), and has repeatedly repudiated any connection with feminism. Interestingly, the reception of “the Bible of the Women’s Movement” was initially very hostile, as emphasized by Lessing in the second volume of her autobiography (*Walking in the Shade* 338, 342). However, the sudden shift from denigration to ecstasy was too much for the writer: “[a] book that had been planned so coolly was read, I thought, hysterically” (*Walking in the Shade* 342). The last word stresses how much Lessing distances herself from feminism. In this she resembles Julia Kristeva, whose texts are so often analyzed by feminist scholars, and yet her famous *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* states that feminism “is jealous of conserving its power—the last of power-seeking ideologies” (208). While femininity is central to her discourse, “Kristeva has consistently refuted dominating feminist traditions” (Sjoholm 38).

Interestingly, Lessing’s novel *The Cleft* invites many comparisons with the ideas of Julia Kristeva. Inspired by a scientific article stating that women were first to appear on the face of earth, while men came as an “afterthought” (*The Cleft* ix), the writer created a community of “Clefts,” from whom “Squirts” eventually evolved. The two sexes set up separate camps: that of placid, passive and conventional females and that of restless, inventive, risk-taking males. A contribution to essentialist thinking, Lessing’s novel can be read as an illustration of some concepts of Julia Kristeva, primarily the notion of abjection, sexually specific violence, the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic as well as the birth of the subject in process.

Recounted by a Roman senator who collects ancient manuscripts, the story gains an additional framing, as it is commented on by a worldly man who cannot but sympathize with the Squirts and adopt their point of view. The story within a story is another binary arrangement, where the chaotic, rowdy and violent world of Clefts and Squirts is offset by the triumphant Roman civilization, its legions warding off barbarian hordes, its urbane citizens screaming to their hearts’ delight around the arenas where the wild beasts tear human bodies apart. The irony of this juxtaposition is that when the narrator ponders the primitive human community he is now and again confronted with the similarities between the forgotten dawn of humanity and its lustrous sequel. His presence and remarks offer the reader the same perspective, for Lessing’s fantasy about the beginnings of the human kind seems disturbingly close to us, when the first thing we uncover

is her fidelity to stereotypical constructions of femininity and masculinity, entrenched with the advent of psychoanalysis and its inspired followers such as Julia Kristeva.

Embedded in the senator's narrative we find a story of the Clefts, who regularly ascend the rock called the Cleft in order to witness the flow of red petalled flowers along the crevices, which apparently brings on the females' menstrual flow, and makes them ready for conception and parthenogenesis. The first thing that the Clefts are associated with is their gift of creating new life, their perennial maternity, which follows from unthinking obedience to instinct. They are pre-cultural in their motherhood, like Kristeva's construction of the maternal, which relies on the elements connected with nature, and, to follow Judith Butler, it precludes any analysis of cultural variability (103). In Lessing's novel the baby cannot become separate from the mother because there is no "third party" to mediate subject formation (Anderson, "Sacrificed Lives" 213), and save her from the miasmatic, archaic maternal. Motherhood in *The Cleft* implies togetherness and communal being. Younger Clefts do not consider themselves separate individuals. They are all a collective body regularly giving birth to a new generation of passive females.

The Clefts live in the caves which are metaphorically wombs, where their children are kept. As Carl Gustav Jung had it: "The cave is the place of rebirth, that secret cavity in which one is shut up in order to be incubated and renewed" (135). In Lessing's novel rebirth is literal and connected with collective life. Apart from inhabiting the caves the females often reside half in water, half on the land, their seal-like bodies partly submerged in the primeval ocean, the amorphic *mer* and *mère* of Kristevan discourse (Ramsay 52). Lessing's description recycles another Jungian association between water and the unconscious (Sobrinho 227), for the Clefts are caught in the stage where intellectual reflection has not yet arrived. They are still submerged in the amniotic fluid of the earth. Lessing's perspective could be called "naturalistic," a word Judith Butler uses in her analysis of Kristeva's concept of maternity (103). The language of Kristeva and Lessing about the maternal stresses the colonial association in psychoanalysis between a woman and a primitive indigene who is always inferior to a civilized man in her or his animalistic drives. The females in *The Cleft* are the first and hence the more primitive link in evolution that finally gave rise to a race of men. They have only just come out of water, which is their element. They enjoy swimming from infancy, but they find it hard to run or even wander on the land that stretches from the beach into the interior. Lessing does not care much about the scientific support for her fantasy. However, the Clefts have something in common with those kinds of fish that reproduce by parthenogenesis. It is to fish that they are

compared, when the sophisticated male narrator sums up their biological and mental condition:

They did not think to wonder or ask questions. . . . Their minds were not set for questions, even a mild interest. They believed—but it was not a belief they would defend or contest—that a Fish brought them from the Moon. The Moon laid eggs into the sea, it lost a part of itself. . . . When was that? Long, slow, puzzled stares. . . . They lived in eternal present. (31)

The passage invites comparison with Mircea Eliade's concept of "eternal return" applied to the life of indigenous communities caught in cyclical repetition, as opposed to the linear time of rational western men. The Clefts are not aware of time. They seem to have originated from cosmic eggs, which bears affinity to Mediterranean myths, such as the myth of Aphrodite who was born out of foam that contained the sperm of a male god whose testicles had been cut off and dropped into water. In light of biological theories about parthenogenesis or gynogenesis, some fish can reproduce as a result of their coming into contact with the sperm of a different species that the water carries. So the mythical "Fish" from the quotation above can be translated into a phenomenon that is familiar from scientific observations (Kowalska, Rembiszewski, and Rolik 204–05).

A startling moment comes when one of the Clefts gives birth to "a Monster," i.e. a baby with ugly lumps instead of a cleft and a pipe-like organ. "Old Shes" decide to bring the baby to normal condition and cut off the bodily elements whose meaning they do not understand. Recycled here is the Freudian image of a castrating mother, and the scene invites comparison with Kristevan theory of abjection because the baby who is anatomically different "disturbs system" and "order" (4). Violence as a response to sexual difference "lies at the origins of collective identity" (Anderson, "Sacrificed Lives" 217). The peace in the Clefts' community is shaken when more freaks are born. Their genitals are maimed, and they are left on the rock to die. Here a greater fantasy intervenes, for the little boys are carried into the forest by eagles and miraculously fed by a doe, all of this perfectly understandable to the Roman narrator structuring the book with reference to his own myths.

The appearance of little males who are carried out of the Clefts' community even before they are maimed brings about a major change. The turning point is thus summed up by Lessing's Roman senator:

changelessness of an existence like those fish that wash back and forth on the tides, responding to the moon's change. And then the real change, the defining change, the birth of the deformed ones, the Squirts, the

Monsters. The beginning of squirming, emotional discomfort, unrest, discontent: the start of awareness of themselves, their lives. The start only, like an affront the stranded fish must feel at the probing stick. (34)

Lessing reverses the Aristotelian comparison of a woman to a “defective man” (Anderson, *Feminist Philosophy* 7); here the men are seen as defective women. At the same time Lessing plays into the patriarchal imaginary dutifully. It was natural for women to laze around and be carried by the tide before men came along. “The defining change” is the change that the male babies bring about; the Clefts define themselves in opposition to the other, that is “the Monster,” but this mechanism will come back with a vengeance when the Monsters eventually subdue the females and impose abjection on them. Lessing also turns around the traditional interpretations of the Yahwist story of creation. It is not Eve who comes as an “afterthought,” or as derivative material; it is Adam who is born by Eve. In other words, the unnatural birth of the second sex is rectified here. Man comes along as a freak of nature, but also as its bonus paving way for consciousness, linear time and culture.

As the two communities grow side by side, one on the seashore, the other in the forest, the boys' curiosity prompts them to spy on the creatures from the shore. They come upon a solitary Cleft, whose behaviour is unusual because the Clefts are always together. Her lonely ramble along the shore signifies that she has separated herself from the group. The process of her acquiring nascent subjectivity is slow, painful, and eventually lethal. She is chased into the valley by lithe and strong boys, much to her anger and terror. There she comes upon a group of males who immediately register her anatomical difference and, prompted by the behaviour of their “squirts,” they gang-rape her to death, joined by all the other males from the community. The anonymous Cleft may have been a mother of some of the Squirts. Her death comes with the discovery of sexuality, and it is a catalyst of the Squirts' mindless unity in the act of killing. To follow Anderson (“Sacrificial Lives” 219), her maternal body becomes a scapegoat, which is closely connected with sexual difference. The moment she realizes she is other than the Squirts, she is savaged. If Kristeva associates the birth of the nascent subject with violence and tearing away from the mother's body, the scene in Lessing's novel might be a rather sinister illustration of the process. The men realize what they have done, and their abject crime generates both the feeling of shame, which they eventually repress, and the awareness of sexuality. They impose abjection on the raped Cleft, who smells of their excretions, is defiled, dead and removed from their lives not only as a dead body, but also as a sexual body. The forgotten murder is an image of matricide, and of unwitting incest. However, there is

no kinship structure yet, so Oedipus' complex does not apply here. There are no fathers in the group; there are only descendants of the collective maternal that was desecrated. The first physical contact of the Squirts with the body of the (m)other years after birth is lethal violence which repeats what happened to the first male baby.

Flanked by hypersize eagles, their protectors, the Squirts soar high in comparison with the Clefts who lie on the ground or are literally pinned down to it like an errant one who ventured out of her role. The scene invites disturbing associations with Kristevan semiotic mastered by the symbolic that is phallic and violent but also transcendent. In this the rape scene rings with Freudian and Jungian echoes. Men inflict sadistic and fatal sex on a female who is reduced to silence and passivity. This is how they return "home," that is to the body of the mother who in Jungian psychoanalysis represents the home that the man will depart from and return to.

The murder is partly forgotten, and yet it lives on in a story that apparently had its roots in an old man's memories of mass rape. The contacts between the camps are resumed some generations later. Two adventurous girls cross the valley of their own will, and this time the encounter with the males is different. Each of them "plays" with a Squirt, until they satisfy the whole group of men, leave them hungering for more "ease," and come back home irrevocably altered. Interestingly, their sexual initiation through collective sex gives rise to the emergence of their identity. One of the girls declares: "My name is Maire," and the other responds: "My name is Astre" (68). These are the first acts of assuming names among the Clefts; they used to be nameless, and they did not cultivate relations between mother and daughter. Motherhood was a biological act in accordance with Freud's concept of anatomical destiny. The children, passive like all Clefts, grew up left to their own devices and merged into the rest. But now Maire and Astre have separated from the collective maternal on the shore, which is perceived as evil, cruel and animalistic. The girls become thinking subjects, and begin to fight for their autonomy as a result of being exposed to the community of Squirts who had to be torn out of the deadly maternal clutch into freedom and separateness. Interestingly, the girls' identity is born as a result of their contact with the so-called "third party," which lets them detach themselves from what Kristeva calls "the black lava," i.e. the mother.

For a woman the call of the mother is not only a call from beyond time or beyond the socio-political battle . . . this call . . . generates . . . madness. After the superego, the ego founders and sinks. It is a fragile envelope, incapable of staving off the irruption of this conflict, of this love which had bound the little girl to her mother, and which then, like black

lava had lain in wait for her all along the path of her desperate attempts to identify with the symbolic paternal order . . . death quietly moves in. (qtd. in Adams 157)

Maire and Astre refuse to heed the "call from beyond time." They never forget who they have become as a result of their physical contact with the Squirts. Although they have not experienced love from the collective maternal, they are definitely urged to merge back into the shapeless, atemporal womanhood, which they now resist. Maire gives birth to a girl who is restless and different from the previous babies of the Clefts. Both girls return to the male camp where they are greeted, fed and copulated with. The paradigm resembles a Jungian structure, to which Kristeva seems to be indebted. According to Jung's passage about "nothing but daughter," the daughter has to be stolen from the mother (97). This no doubt makes her attempts to identify with the symbolic paternal order less dramatic.

Maire's first partner recognizes the connection between himself and her baby, which is the earliest manifestation of the family life. He takes Maire and the baby to his hut. Interestingly, the Squirts live in the huts of their own making unlike the Clefts who inhabit natural forms of the caves. What distinguishes Squirts from Clefts is that they are inventive even if their huts smell foul. Lessing demurely unfolds the scenario of role division, for the Cleft visitors to the Monsters' camp do not now restrict themselves to collective sex, but they make brooms with which to clean the men's foul abodes. While this is a rather pathetic intervention of a housewife image, it also undermines Lessing's concept of the Clefts' utter lack of inventiveness. Still, as Lessing's view of human evolution would have it, the Clefts serve the purpose connected with the first male construction; they can improve its appearance but not the technical condition. The structure remains the male prerogative, even if it is Maire who teaches the men the complicated language of the Clefts, an inconsistency of Lessing's that feeds into Kristevan imagery. The boys supposedly invent names for utensils, but they talk like children. It is the Clefts who have developed a more mature language, but its character is not really explained. Thus Maire, one of the narrators of a story within a story, is not only a sexual partner for men but also a maternal teacher; they yearn for communication with her, which apparently makes them aware of what they did not realize earlier. The Squirts yearn for the contact with the maternal, since they have only been touched by eagles and doe, but they were not caressed or spoken to in their childhood. Thus Maire becomes a replacement for the Cleft whose first contact with the Squirts was lethal. It was through their violation of her maternal body that the former generations of Squirts cut themselves off from all the gifts, which Maire



offers to the new Squirts through her sexual, reproductive and linguistic powers.

The Old Shes who detect treason and division in their unisex community decide to trap Maire's and Astre's male followers onto the rock called the Cleft. Inside the Cleft there is ossuary connected with former sacrifices that the Clefts used to offer to the power of nature. The rock in the shape of female genitalia exudes poisonous fumes which might intoxicate the boys and make them fall in, if they are enticed on to it. The Old Shes send a group of young inexperienced Clefts to beckon boys to the Cleft, but the plan misfires because Maire, the teacher, manages to attract the boys' attention and save them from the fall into the Cleft. As a result of the ensuing conflict, its instigator, that is, the Old She, is killed by the males, which works as a narrative repetition of the gang rape on the anonymous Cleft generations earlier. The female is hit with a stone and her head is cleft. The intended cruelty of the Old She mirrors the literal cruelty of her predecessors who maimed and killed little boys by violently inflicting a cleft on them in an act of castration. The fall of the boys into the Cleft was supposed to have been an act of collective castration for the boys lost in the stony and poisonous vulva of the rock, a visual equivalent of Jungian devouring mother. But the boys regain control; the anarchic, seditious semiotic is overpowered, and gradually the Clefts lose not only their cruel instincts but also their complicated speech and independence.

The old Cleft, just like the first victim of gang rape, becomes a repudiated and abject body. This time she is not destroyed by means of sexually specific violence but as a potential head of a vengeful team, an incident mimicking sexual violence nonetheless. The Old She, like Kristevan black lava, did not allow the young Clefts to escape her influence. With the huge rock as her natural ally, she put up resistance against the inventive but careless Squirts, adept at building shelters, hunting and wielding weapons. In Lessing's war of the sexes female dissenters have to ally themselves with Squirts, offer them sexual "ease," children and regular sweeps of a broom in their dirty abodes. In return, they will emancipate themselves from the mother who has shown cruelty and tendency to dominate and enslave her daughters.

The Cleft that gives the title to the book is a very powerful symbol of female abjection. Filled with the poisonous odours, it is the site of death with dead bodies piled up and decomposing to finally ossify into the depth of the vulva-shaped pit. At the same time the Cleft is the primal landscape offsetting the female maturing towards maternity. Visited regularly by the red flurry of petals of endemic flowers, it is a symbol of menstruating, and hence potentially life-giving body. The Cleft, solid as it is, becomes the site of fluidity connected with the sacred rite of collective menstruation



and the unclean process of decomposition of the bodies in the pit. Hence the Cleft loses its well defined edge; it dissolves the boundary between the solid and the fluid; it metamorphoses into the abject, to finally become one with the Old She who arrived to witness the spectacle of the boys' annihilation in the pit of death. The blood shed from her cleft head is another marker of abjection in the course of the story. The rock loses its sacred dimension connected with female fertility, while the Clefts lose the power to give birth by parthenogenesis. The death of the Old She who belonged to the parthenogenetic camp puts an end to the female control over fertility. The Clefts are now offered the sexual use of squirts, and the better offspring, but their fertility is now at the mercy of men. In generations to come men become even more restless and look for new places by themselves, leaving women with the sense of outrage and question: "who is going to fill our wombs?" (190).

The narrative framed by the commentary of the Roman narrator eventually takes us to the stage when Clefts and Squirts form one community, but there is continual conflict between the sexes. The female side is led by Maronna, whose priorities are connected with biological survival and stability. Her antagonist, Horsa, disdains these values opting for adventure, exploration and search for better places to live in. Maronna and Horsa are often shown in verbal clashes, but it is Horsa who makes decisions for the whole of male camp, and these decisions affect the female camp. Again Lessing recycles a familiar Jungian association between the woman and home, for indoor and outdoor activities are projected on women and men respectively. Lessing, like Jung, Freud and Kristeva, is ahistorical and unlocated in her portrayal of the binary world of sexes. Or else, her male narrator makes it obvious that the hegemony of men in the Mediterranean world originates from their seizure of power over women in the past. The debt to the mother is obliterated in his culture. Men owed their survival to the assistance of animals. The story of eagles looking after the Squirts sounds very convincing to the citizen associated with Rome, whose foundation legend speaks of the male twins suckled by a she-wolf. The denial of maternity puzzles the reader of manuscripts:

The women standing here beside Maronna, were all mothers, and every male there had been dandled, fussed over, fed, cleaned, slapped, kissed, taught by a female . . . and this is such a heavy and persuasive history that I am amazed we don't remember it more often. (190)

Superimposed on the more ancient manuscripts are remarks of the man who stressed how Romans measured and controlled everything, and how they had brought their women under submission, even if goddesses were

still celebrated in the Empire. The female potential is freely dissipated by Horsa and his followers as they march on in anticipation of new discoveries, get their female companions pregnant and stop caring about their condition, neglecting the hazards to the lives of small boys who joined their team out of rebellion against the women. Thus the story from the beginnings of the narrative about Clefts and Squirts is repeated. The Clefts need togetherness and companionship but the boys will emancipate themselves from the mothers' embrace and will join the male ranks even if there are perils to overcome. A special initiation ritual into adulthood is invented and duly practised by the boys. The challenge is to ascend the rock called Cleft and endure the experience of being exposed to its fumes. This apparently signifies the change of status. Any boy who has endured this rite of passage has also mastered the toxic maternal in a sublimated repetition of the test that the Old She unwittingly exposed the Squirts to before she was killed. Separation from the maternal, denial of maternal qualities and abhorrence of the maternal body produces even greater rift between the sexes:

The girls who had lost their infants became listless, and wept or lay about, their arms over their faces, silent, suffering . . . and milk dropped from their breasts. Oh, horrible, unseemly, and the boys showed their dislike, and yet these were girls who had shared their adventures and were comrades, like the boys—but then they spoiled everything by getting pregnant and then all the rest of the unpleasant sights and sounds. As for the little boys, they were revolted. (205)

The women are already removed out of sight when they stop being "comrades," and show their reproductive potential. Their bodies are subject to change, which upsets the perspective of males whose bodies do not undergo similar changes. Women are relegated to the realm of the abject, their breasts secreting milk. In response, they turn to melancholia, which is the only manifestation of their displeasure with male insistence on their being and behaving like the males. Even if Horsa returns from his expedition crippled, and faces Maronna's anger about the loss of many children by his team on its way to success, still the story repeats itself in the history of the narrator who mourns the loss of his two youthful sons in the legions. He tries to atone for this by begetting two other children whom he looks after during the absence of his new and faithless wife. What his wife shares with the Clefts is that her act of giving birth is purely biological; there is no emotional connection between her and the children now taken over by a caring father, a representative of the law and symbolic order whose role is after all to help the children sever the ties with the maternal: "The greater the capitulation to the female, the greater there will be the recoil" (258) are the final words on the history of Maronna and Horsa.

Essentialist constructions of femininity and masculinity are petrified in the narrative of Maronna and Horsa, where men build rafts in order to cross the sea, while women look after the children. Horsa's first marine structures are unsuccessful, but he keeps on trying and dreaming. Huts on the land will eventually be replaced by constructions that navigate towards progress and prosperity of the Roman Empire and its narrator. To quote a sentence from a Peirce scholar (Blasco José Sobrinho): "rationalism of world mastery' could only have emerged within a culture—Hellenic-to-Western European—that repeatedly found itself grappling with problems of navigation" (227). Lessing's primitive females lose their innate ability to swim and move around in the waters better than on the land. Her more advanced males acquire the ability to "master" water due to navigation. The nascent subject moves on from Kristevan chora shared by the maternal and its descendants towards the triumphant Symbolic.

As an afterthought at the end of the novel comes a passage about the eruption of Vesuvius, compared to the explosion of the Cleft, which erases the last trace of matrifocal community. The immolation of the Cleft is total, even if it does not harm the people in its vicinity, unlike Vesuvius. The imaginary connected with the archaic maternal will never be recovered. The narrator states that it is impossible to identify its location. Only the story remains, or the myth. The fetish of female genealogy turns to dust, while Lessing's message remains correct and demure, punctuated by the perspective of the male narrator who offers the right framing for the narrative of the maternal semiotic brought under the control of the paternal symbolic, both being as unlocated as Lessing's binary world. While Kristeva's theory loses sight of cultural variability or ethnic difference, it still echoes the sweeping generalizations of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis which apply their instruments to the study of anarchic depths of human mind the way the colonial empires in their day applied themselves to the study of "primitive" people. Lessing's Roman narrator is a very good mediator of the colonial perspective. He imagines the archaic community in the way that suggests indigenes. The narrator is a very convincing spokesman for Doris Lessing herself, raised as she was in the peripheries of the British Empire, and influenced by entrenched colonial attitudes, which she later rejected. The binary world from *The Cleft*, whether primitive or civilized, testifies to insurmountable difference between the sexes, a construction familiar from psychoanalysis, which Julia Kristeva also dutifully followed despite her rejections of essentialist stereotyping and her pleas for singularity.

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## Taking Sides on *Severed Heads*: Kristeva at the Louvre

# ABSTRACT

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The theorist and philosopher Julia Kristeva is invited to curate an exhibition at the Louvre in Paris as part of a series—*Parti Pris (Taking Sides)*—and to turn this into a book, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. The organiser, Régis Michel, wants something partisan, that will challenge people to think, and Kristeva delivers in response a collection of severed heads neatly summarising her critique of the whole of western culture! Three figures dominate, providing a key to making sense of the exhibition: Freud, Bataille, and the maternal body. Using these figures, familiar from across the breadth of her work over the last half a century, she produces a witty analysis of western culture’s persistent privileging of disembodied masculine rationality; the head, ironically phallic, ironically and yet necessarily severed; the maternal body continually arousing a “jubilant anxiety” (Kristeva, *Severed Head* 34), expressed through violence. Points of critique are raised in relation to Kristeva’s normative tendencies—could we not tell a different story about women, for example? The cultural context of the exhibition is also addressed: who are the intended viewers/readers and whose interests are being served here? Ultimately, however, this is a celebration of Kristeva’s tribute to psychic survivors.

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**ABSTRACT**

During the 1990s, the French writer and art historian Régis Michel organized a series of exhibitions at the Louvre in Paris, called *Parti Pris* (*Taking Sides*), inviting some notable intellectual figures like philosopher Jacques Derrida (1993), filmmaker Peter Greenaway (1994), literary critic Jean Starobinski (1997) and Julia Kristeva (2012), to be guest curators.

In his introduction to Kristeva's short book/exhibition catalogue—published in 2012, nearly twenty years after Derrida's opening contribution to the series—Michel provides us with some insight into his reasons for initiating this project. For example, he clearly wanted them as critical thinkers—cannibalistically from his own perspective!—to critique “[t]he panoptic control of the museum—its voracious appetency for easy ingestion,” and the big spectacular exhibitions favoured by the media that he dismisses as belonging to a world “ruled exclusively by the law of the same” (Michel, in Kristeva, *Severed Head*, xix). He says that, in this way, he wanted to capture the imagination of an educated, museum-going public and to challenge people to think. He wanted to unsettle or upset the “moribund” art historical world that had shown no recent signs of life aside from the “senseless quarrel over contemporary art” (Michel, in Kristeva, *Severed Head*, xx). Beginning his introduction with Horkheimer and Adorno, key architects of modern critical thinking about culture and cultural representations/reproductions, Michel explains that the purpose of the *Parti Pris* project as a whole was to open up in the museum, “at the heart of the institution (which is the heart of the system)—a critical space. A zone of frankness. A place of rupture” (xvii).

At any rate, it looks as if he was happy with Kristeva's partisan choices and their theoretical articulation (Bal 530)—her “ample meditation” (Kristeva, *Severed Head* xxi). He suggests, helpfully, that it lies under the “double aegis” of two writers—Freud and Bataille—whose “frankness” in the sense of challenging the taboos of bourgeois European societies has certainly produced “ruptures” in the past. And of course, he is right that Freud is a hugely important figure in this book, as he has been for Kristeva since at least the 1960s. Freud has provided her over most of her writing career and the whole of her career as psychoanalyst, with a description of powerful human drives that cannot either be comfortably articulated, or “civilized” out of existence; a description of power that does not reveal itself at first glance or touch and is not written in the register of a purely scientific or rational discourse. Obviously, Bataille, as a literary artist of the *avant-garde*, appears here to represent its—for Kristeva, pre-eminent—capacity for facilitating the working out of these otherwise ineffable drives—in terms

of what she calls here, transubstantiations (127). Moreover, Bataille provides her with her title, *The Severed Head*, invoking his short-lived review, *Acéphale* (Headless/No head)<sup>1</sup>— and of course, another object within her exhibition is a drawing of a headless man (Fig. 17) produced by André Masson for the same review. This headless human figure wittily recalls the anti-authoritarian, subversive, revolutionary tendencies of Bataille's circle; its rejection of forms of “headship” from king or divinity to the ideal of the sovereignty of reason. Describing “the subtraction of the man from his head” (128), for example, Bataille has written:

Man escaped his head like a prisoner escapes prison. Beyond himself he found, not God who is the prohibition of crime, but a being who does not know prohibition. Beyond what I am, I encounter a being who makes me laugh because he is headless, who fills me with anguish because he is made up of innocence and crime: he holds an iron weapon in his left hand, flames like a Sacred Heart in his right hand. In a single refinement, he unites Birth and Death. He is not a man. Neither is he a god. He is not me but he is more than me: his belly is the maze in which he loses his way, loses me with him, and in which I find myself again being him, that is to say, a monster. (Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*. 1: 445)

Michel is therefore right to see how important Bataille and Freud are for Kristeva's work. For Kristeva, at a time when significant cultural idealizations like scientism or the theology of the Christian Churches are failing us, it is easy then to see why she values these two writers, for their “superb storytelling” (Kristeva, *Need to Believe* 59), or why they figure so strongly within her own curatorial storytelling, the “capital visions” of her subtitle. In sum, Kristeva's fascination with dissecting the revolutionary momentum that calls all forms of authority into question can be aligned here in this book—or exhibition—with “the sacred slash” (Kristeva, *Severed Head* 87) that delivers us, after the devastating loss of our first blissful absorption in the maternal body. What we are delivered into of course, is the realm of symbol and language—a process in which the figure of the Father plays a pivotal role—that provides, especially in the case of the *avant-garde*, some compensation for this traumatizing loss that she suggests we have to undergo in order to speak and write and, crucially, to thrive. Transferentially, this “sacred slash” can also be aligned with the necessary devastation of failed idealizations that protect young people from all kinds of maladies, or whole societies from final, totalitarian solutions. Once this is understood, it becomes easier to understand the significance—and perhaps too, the wry humour—of a whole exhibition dedicated to severed or toppling heads.

<sup>1</sup> See Kristeva, *The Severed Head* 148, note 11.

But Michel misses a trick in his introduction—and it is curious (or maybe not so curious) that he does so. The book is dedicated to Kristeva’s mother and significantly, Kristeva does not open her exhibition with either Freud or Bataille but with a memory of her. Those who are already familiar with Kristeva’s work know that the role of the maternal body is absolutely crucial to her psychoanalytical and psycholinguistic theory, addressing the obvious shortfall in the work of Freud who privileges the symbolic role of the Father at the expense of the maternal. In this anecdotal reference to her childhood, Kristeva’s mother explains for her daughters the speed and power of the symbolic imagination—the birth of a thought—through a drawing; and, of course, it is the kind of intelligent domestic gesture that quite predictably goes unremarked in a discussion of literary and philosophical ideas such as *Parti Pris*. Coincidentally, the picture she draws shows the head of a snowman toppling off its body—the visual image conveying its melting momentum. And in this way as well, Kristeva hints from the very beginning that Freud and Bataille will be read with a certain inflection; she will return to the maternal body, to its role in bringing about the speaking subject, to the subject’s blissful absorption in the maternal body, and to the vital spaces created by the disruption or the severance of the bond; to this “happy infantile and amorous trauma” (Kristeva, *Need to Believe* vii) for both individuals and cultures. In other words, we will certainly see Freud and the headless body, but we are primed from the very beginning to see more than the divinely patriarchal father or the disembodied rationality of the Christian west. On then to the exhibition: What does she choose?

The chapters of the book detail objects and analyses and follow an approximately naturalistic chronology. Of course, as with everything Kristeva writes, we take as a given that it is addressed as much to the philosophical imagination as to a “head” for unproblematized rationality or scientism. Her choices are informed by the sciences of archaeology and anthropology embedded in the world of the museum, but she does not claim expertise in these areas nor does she scruple on a number of occasions, to move forwards and backwards in time, in order to draw on a critical and literary imagination spanning centuries and even millennia! Pre-*homo sapiens* makes an appropriately early appearance with the worship of skulls, but these ancient bodies appear for a philosophical purpose: to establish Kristeva’s premise that the head is the privileged object in human society. Decapitation of enemies and the dead, cannibalistic rituals involving human brains and other skull manipulations, decoration and post-mortem utilization further inscribe this as a phallic object (13). In Freudian terms—that concern themselves primarily with the male—this worship can be associated with the murder/decapitation of the Father who, according to his



familiar reading, has invoked the fear of castration and impotence in his sons (19) but whose strength and potency, as a result of this murder and cannibalism, is subsequently reabsorbed by them through a totemic ritual. Of course for Kristeva,

... the cannibalistic ritual is as much if not more an appropriation of the mother's power than a devouring of the father tyrant. Cannibalistic and later totemic meals can be interpreted as a conjuration of the original loss of the nurturing body that the subject hallucinates as a head that leaves it. I try to cry out in the face of this loss to name it, to envision it; I also appropriate it, consume it, I do not want to lose it. I rediscover the pleasure of the archaic orality that this breast, this mass, this head provided me. (16)

So it is not entirely surprising to find that the next step/exhibit takes the reader into the world of Greek mythology and to Perseus who kills and decapitates the female Gorgon, Medusa, mother to Pegasus and the giant Chrysaor. Medusa has serpents for hair and even her severed head turns those who look at it to stone. The Freudian theme of castration re-emerges but in characteristically feminine colours; Medusa's curly snakes invoke the fear "that the supposedly castrated engulfing female organ arouses in man" (32). Here the privileged object—the severed head—is a thing of feminine horror and disgust to the male:

... her eye brings misfortune; an evil eye, it kills. Female vulva. Medusa's head is a slimy, swollen, sticky eye, a black hole, its immobile iris surrounded by ragged lips, folds, pubic hair. (29)

She next chooses the sixteenth-century Florentine artist, Benvenuto Cellini's bronze statue of Perseus. In this striking representation, the Greek hero stands in "jubilant anxiety" (34), sword in hand over the body of Medusa, still spurting blood, holding her head aloft whilst gazing down at the severed body at his feet. Cellini has rendered Perseus' action, this slaying of the vulvar monster, as one of triumphant possession and annihilation of the feminine/maternal body—his sword is a continuation of his penis (34). This can also be read as a powerful cultural representation of violence against the feminine and some feminist readers might want to see that kind of framing made even clearer. But rather than attempting to address this issue in contemporary terms, Kristeva moves back at this point to the idea of the feminine privilege of this capital vision. This abject maternal as Gorgonian head or face, she suggests, also, and at the same time, prefigures or points towards a whole aesthetic of incarnation (36) characteristic both of human psychic development and of the overall direction of Christian

culture and theology. Imagining/representing the divine in human form—the Christian doctrine of the incarnation—is a process that mirrors the ecstatic compensatory work of representation (of the mother/maternal face) that only becomes possible at the moment of anguish when that maternal presence—that loving gaze—is severed.

There are connections for Kristeva here to Orthodox Christian traditions of icon painting and veneration; specifically she chooses the floating, seemingly decapitated head of the *Holy Face* of Laon and of the legends of St Veronica that tell of how Christ's face is imprinted on her veil when she gives it to him to wipe his face as he carries his cross to Golgotha. These are objects that represent, or re-present—make real again—the divine, drawing the viewer into an encounter—eyes turning inward (37)—with the loving presence of God that compensates for the separation/severance of Christ's earthly crucifixion and bodily death. The icon in this way carries the medusa lineage (56), not as capitulation to the masculine, but in terms of its equivalence to the continual pressure of the feminine *maternal chora*; inchoate yet ever present continually pushing “back further, toward the carnal and passionate antecedents, of femininity and of *kenose*” (56). The iconic head with its Gorgonian heritage, thus becomes part of a whole “economy” determined as much in relation to the feminine as to the masculine.

In the biblical context of the Christian era there are further reminiscences of the masculine privilege of the head as well as of this masculine and feminine economy at work. In the beheadings of Goliath, of Holofernes and of John the Baptist, Kristeva suggests the anguished and the erotic jostle for attention in the work of Solario, Gentileschi and Caravaggio. Caravaggio figures himself as the severed head of Goliath whilst Gentileschi paints herself as Judith beheading the threatening other who wishes to seduce her (89). Freud is once again invoked to note how the doubling of drives that is “the slash of pain” executes and also establishes a defensive position and how it operates “against the fear of losing the mother and the fear of castration (male or female)” (90).

Nonetheless, the divinely masculine privilege of the cutting/severing remains clear in the biblical imaginary for Kristeva: “*the cut* is structural: . . . It was certainly God who, *in the beginning*, did nothing other than separate: *Bereshit*” (89, italics in original). And although she suggests that “imaginary intimacy with death” can also transform melancholy or desire into thought, graphic image and symbol—one means of psychic thriving—this is not to deny that there is actual physical violence in the world, something she is, of course, not keen to seem to promote. Though she was not born in France herself, Kristeva's francophone education makes her in one sense a child of the French revolution and her next object establishes

the clearest difference between the violence of—for example—a biblical image and

... the rational realization of the capital act. Vision and action are polar opposites here, and the revolutionary Terror confronts us with that revolting abjection practiced by humanity under the guides of an egalitarian institution of decapitation. (91)

However, once again Kristeva proposes that the way out of this horror could be to subject it to the minutest scrutiny from the literary and artistic imagination—to continue to observe it, not shrinking from abjection or from the realm of horror and sadomasochism represented in artistic terms from Grunewald to Picasso (103), but “reshap[ing] our vision so that we see it with new eyes” (108). And in this sense Artaud, Picasso, Bacon, Aragon, Flaubert and Fautrier in their fascination with severing heads, invoke for Kristeva the ever-present Medusa legacy (116). And there are women here too:

From Agatha Christie to Patricia Highsmith, or even more crudely with Patricia Cornwell, there are many passionate pilgrims to the high places of carnage who relate with extraordinary sangfroid, adventures of blades severing heads and states of the soul. (118)

Writing out a decapitation—like painting it—thus may be a meditation on depression and therefore a rebirth. So we can understand how the detective novel, like these capital visions, might be an *optimistic genre*. (120)

Appropriately enough the final capital visions are concerned with death masks and veils—though once again, some critical feminist scholars might think that Kristeva’s ambivalent account of the veiled woman under the sign of “the decapitated and immured” (123) subjects—in orientalist mode—the autonomy of the Muslim woman who chooses to veil to the necessarily violent intent of the “other” male.

At the end, Bataille’s *Acéphale* makes its appearance explicitly to support Kristeva’s conclusion that it is not any totemic sacrifice that founds the vitality of our individual—male and female—and political lives. Her coruscating collection of headless bodies, severed, bloody heads and floating faces ends with “the virtuosity, infinite and void, of representation itself” (130). Thus *Acéphale* is not the remnant of any real and bloody execution so much as

... a fertile dead end, whose open wound will never stop being examined by those who like to mediate on the dangers of being alive. ... [b]ecause

the sacred, or the nostalgia for it that remains, turns out to reside not in sacrifice after all, or in some aesthetic or religious tradition, but in that specifically human, unique and bitter experience that is the *capacity for representation*. (130)

180 What then, in conclusion, is the reader/museum attendee to make of this? The point of this partisan performance is obviously—in one way—to illustrate Kristeva's already well established conviction that Freud and the *avant-garde* between them address our complex ecstatic/anguished human condition pretty well, except in so far as they fail to recognize a distinctive psychic economy that is dependent as much on the female/maternal as on the male/paternal. The book and the exhibition—we assume, years after it closed—encapsulate an insight that certainly ought to encourage us to resist the privilege of the phallic object—here, the head as the organ of unproblematized male rationality. The female/maternal is not simply ripped, slashed, crushed beneath masculine feet, but a continual unsettling, even in her Medusan forms an upsetting presence, necessary to the formation of new representations that make our lives as speaking subjects and psychic survivors possible. In other words, Kristeva provides the museum goer with an appropriate theoretical key or “relevant theoretical articulation” (Bal 530). She focuses on the importance of writing, reading, contemplating or otherwise investing in an intense, persistent and unflinching focus on the sacred slash (87)—metonymic reference like the severed head itself to a complex of psycholinguistic processes—as a way of avoiding the “maladies” of our souls to which contemporary life is so particularly prone. These are things we—readers, museum goers, casual, amateur, professional, educated or otherwise—ought to do for our own well-being:

I am afraid of [the sacred slash] or I take pleasure in it, I submit to its terror or I defy it. But if I decide to ignore it, it drops down on me, from within or from without; my organs begin to bleed: I am sick; my acts are put to death; I feel persecuted. (87)

What Kristeva keeps saying to us, in other words, is that we cannot afford not to use our imaginations, we cannot afford not to think, to find words for the desires within ourselves rather than submitting to nameless horrors or passions that find expression not in works of art or culture or words that communicate and ease the suffering, but in incoherence, silence, depression, melancholia at one extreme and violence and cruelty at the other.

Do Kristeva's—and Michel's—efforts succeed or convince? Is this a critical space, a zone of frankness, a place of rupture and is this what we want? Certainly, Kristeva's critique is aimed at our willingness to consume

easily available, ready-made images and reproductions rather than strive to speak or write or otherwise make our own. On the other hand, if frankness is a matter of openness, then the sheer range of reference across western history, literature and culture makes this essay a work for the intellectual, or the philosopher rather than the amateur museum-goer who wants to see something interesting. This is not to suggest that readers or visitors to the Louvre should not make any attempt to keep up, although since Michel expressly objects to “easy ingestion” it would seem, in this respect, Kristeva has come up with the goods! Nevertheless, the assumptions she makes are necessarily exclusive—partisan, biased?—leaving out of the count those who do not operate on the same western terms of reference to history and literature as she does. In the mode of the museum, too, the book does not show how problems associated with its relationship to forms of (gendered, western, colonial) exploitation or to an economy of objects and their “age-value” (Bann 39) are being addressed, if indeed they are. We do not understand this dynamic in the context of the book and even less how it played out the original exhibition on which, we assume (perhaps we should not?) the book has been based. In fact, the original exhibition is scarcely visible. We perhaps want to ask: When was it? How was it? Who funded it? Who came to it? How was it staged and presented? Exactly what was in it? How was it marketed and sold? Who was chosen to review it? These are questions that also ask for frankness and represent a kind of critique. We might say this book is presented as a single, coherent piece that for all that it “takes a side” does not contextualize its own project in socio-material terms, for example, that might have revealed a different set of biases having to do with how Kristeva’s work and her person—her “brand”?—relates to grant funding, publishing rights, and the national, social and gender positioning of particular public intellectuals who invite her to write or curate. Some feminists, for example, will no doubt continue to be suspicious of the way in which she has such access to important public spaces in the western world from Columbia University, New York<sup>2</sup> to Notre Dame de Paris<sup>3</sup> or the University of Oxford,<sup>4</sup> especially when, on one level, we could say she uses them as platforms for telling stories of violence against women (or mothers). Though they are not seemingly *celebrations* of that violence, they still might be said to accord in their fundamental structures, with dominant patterns within the western social

<sup>2</sup> Kristeva is visiting Professor at Columbia University, New York.

<sup>3</sup> Kristeva gives Lenten Lectures in “the fabulous space of Notre Dame de Paris” (Kristeva, *Need to Believe* 77).

<sup>4</sup> Kristeva gives the Zaharoff lectures in Oxford (Kristeva & Clément, *The Feminine and the Sacred* 42).

(heteropatriarchal) imagination which, from at least Aeschylus onwards it is argued against Kristeva, have been founded on the violent sacrifice of the female/maternal<sup>5</sup>; Perseus' execution of Medusa being a case in point. How, they will ask, does this help women seeking to find a different basis on which to imagine a new community or social order and why do the women need to die, over and over again?

Of course, Kristeva is taking sides in this book/exhibition as an analyst as well as a writer or intellectual. She is a therapist working with people who are profoundly distressed, and so neither the pain and horror of the cut (from the bliss of union with the maternal body) nor the healing power delivered through the cutting (into a paternal order of representation and the symbolic, that nevertheless remains troubled and renewed by periodic reconnections with the heterogeneous maternal), can be overestimated. This is the framework within which she continues to write and think, and against this background it makes sense to focus on the mythic, literary, ritual images of violence and death that colour and perhaps even haunt, this world. She argues that these images/representations/capital visions rather than being necessarily pathological—or misogynistic—represent our efforts, individually and culturally, to come to terms with psychic horror and contest the silence of depression and melancholia that creates more pain and leads to mindless/headless violence. This should be an inspiring book because it is imbued with hope for psychic survival and, for this reader at any rate, a certain feminist sensibility. But, in spite of Michel's best hopes, it seems unlikely to challenge the nature of museum or art historical practices very far since it is almost entirely silent about this side of the project. In the long term, its capacity for opening up discussions in terms that challenge our values and envision change might have better success. But in order to do this we perhaps first need to review the ways in which any such discussion might be set up—taking into account not simply the merits of the author and her partisan project, but also the capacities and contexts of potential viewers and readers.

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## Convention, Repetition and Abjection: The Way of the Gothic

# ABSTRACT

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This paper employs Deleuze and Kristeva in an examination of certain Gothic conventions. It argues that repetition of these conventions—which endows Gothicism with formulaic coherence and consistency but might also lead to predictability and stylistic deadlock—is leavened by a novelty that Deleuze would categorize as literary “gift.” This particular kind of “gift” reveals itself in the fiction of successive Gothic writers on the level of plot and is applied to the repetition of the genre’s motifs and conventions. One convention, the supernatural, is affiliated with “the Other” in the early stages of the genre’s development and can often be seen as mapping the same territories as Kristeva’s abject. The lens of Kristeva’s abjection allows us to internalize the Other and thus to reexamine the Gothic self; it also allows us to broaden our understanding of the Gothic as a commentary on the political, the social and the domestic. Two early Gothic texts, Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and Lewis’s *The Monk*, are presented as examples of repetition of the Gothic convention of the abjected supernatural, Walpole’s story revealing horrors of a political nature, Lewis’s reshaping Gothic’s dynamics into a commentary on the social and the domestic.

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**ABSTRACT**



Gothicism has survived in various guises for over three hundred years as a potent cultural form. Throughout this period its authors have managed to find a “scope within a narrow set of conventions narrowly defined” (Kosofsky Sedgwick 11) to retain its formulaic coherence and consistency while extending it beyond literature, thus demonstrating its plasticity and contributing to its generic hybridity. All this means that a reservoir of recognizable and repeatable features which have constituted the nature of Gothicism from its onset in the late eighteenth century is an effective combination holding a powerful aesthetic, emotional and intellectual appeal for its followers and audiences. Such repetition of well-defined and thus predictable elements could have easily turned them into nothing more than “rather hackneyed conventions and then into objects of satire” (Botting 45) and the genre would not continue to thrive if mere repetition governed the distribution of its “narrow set of conventions.”

In the introduction to *Difference and Repetition*, “Repetition and Difference” (1968, English translation 1994), Gilles Deleuze suggests that repetition is “a necessary and justified conduct only in relation to that which cannot be replaced,” because it concerns “non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities” (1). Applying Deleuze’s concepts to the field of literature helps us understand why, while remaining indispensable exponents of this recognizable and sustainable genre, not all manifestations of Gothicism end in pastiche and parody. Deleuze pins down something specific in repetition, namely, the principle of “theft and gift” and the transformation this implies: what is repeated becomes modified, and the repeated incorporates a necessary “gift” of novelty (1). For him,

[d]ifference is included in repetition by way of disguise. . . . This is why the variations . . . must not be understood on the basis of the still negative forms of opposition, reversal or overturning. The variations express, rather, the differential mechanisms which belong to the essence and origin of that which is repeated. (Deleuze 17)

Surveyed chronologically, Gothic fiction can be seen as subscribing to this principle in three different ways. Firstly, it has been applied to the repetition of its motifs. For example, Burkean obscurity is translated and focused into the motif of the veil in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), then repeated by M. G. Lewis, “stolen” and bestowed with new qualities in *The Monk* (1796). Secondly, the principle of “theft and gift” can be seen at work on the level of plot, as is the case in J. S. Le Fanu’s

“Carmilla” (1872), the pivotal assumptions of which are repeated and re-written by Bram Stoker in *Dracula* (1897). Thirdly, the Deleuzian principle operates on the level of what Kosofsky Sedgwick calls characteristic Gothic preoccupations, or conventions (9–10), like the supernatural. This emerges with the tangible Walpolean plumed helmet appearing in broad daylight in the courtyard of Otranto, which, though incomprehensible, is immediately identified by the domestic servants in the narrative, to then evolve into the evanescence of Radcliffe’s blurry shadows, unidentified, unearthly noises and intriguing mysteries, all plausibly explained at the end of her narratives. In successive Gothic fiction it proceeds to epitomize Otherness in the form of Shelley’s patched-up Monster, the product of the superhuman mind and inhuman solitary determination of Victor Frankenstein, to be later embodied in human-turned-subhuman vampires, the bodies of travellers that nocturnally return from the undiscovered country. And with the twentieth century’s new technologies and possibilities for adaptation, the principle of “theft and gift” begins to operate in a much more conspicuous manner as cinema has not only adapted but also spawned strings of responses to the original historical Gothic texts, creating a territory where Gothic motifs repeat, echo and cross-resonate in new and complex ways. It is only repetition thus understood, where “[t]he disguises and the variations, the masks and costumes” become “its integral and constituent parts” (Deleuze 16–17), that can ensure both the survival of the genre and the coherence of its conventions.

One of the signatures of Gothicism and a source of magnetic pleasure for its readers, is the fear it engenders, augmented by an armoury of conventions referred to above. Fear, like no other passion, “robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning” and works towards the experience of terror, “the ruling principle of the sublime” (Burke 34). Though the positioning of the supernatural and consequences of its operation have, together with other staples of the genre, undergone considerable modification, in its early stages it was affiliated with the Other, defined not as an internal force disrupting identity, but externalized as a rupture threatening the safeguards of individual and communal existence. The eighteenth century was an era when, as Kristeva proposes, the Other had not yet collapsed, when “unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law” was still possible, and “Religion, Morality,” though “arbitrary, . . . unfailingly oppressive, . . . laboriously prevailing” (16), were still fiercely adhered to. In many respects Kristeva’s abject maps the historically evolving Gothic territories; the attributes of both are the Other, the ambiguous, the sublime, the transgressive, the terrifying. Looking at Gothic fiction through the lens of abjection allows us, on the one hand, to internalize the Other and thus re-examine the Gothic self, and on the other hand, because “the social

inscription of morality is central to her reading of the abject” (Miles 50), to read the literary Gothic self in a broader context, as a commentary on the political, the social and the domestic.

In the case of the first Gothic story, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which revolves around the theme of usurpation and domestic tyranny, abjection is most immediately associated on the level of plot with Manfred’s criminality and sleaziness. If abjection is “something rejected, from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object,” then, firstly, from the point of view of the reader, the abject translates into Manfred’s inherited transgression of the law, the crime of his forefathers which he did not commit, but must inadvertently adhere to in a premeditated, cunning and hypocritical way, bearing the posture of an “immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady” ruler (Kristeva 4). For Kristeva, “the socialized appearance of the abject” (16) is one that “neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them” (15), and this is the territory allocated for Manfred, a descendant of the rebel. His ancestor, a wilful radical, was the one who denied morality, but he “who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law” (Kristeva 4). Manfred’s crime is inherited, he lives merely to retain what his ancestors had won by turning law aside, misleading and corrupting it. Secondly, however, from the point of view of Manfred, the abject seems to be situated within himself, within his very being, and is connected with the experience of fear that his usurpation will come to an end. To secure his identity, Manfred needs to consolidate a spurious lineage that his ancestors have constructed for him, and in this need he must fearlessly trample on human, social and divine rights. Unless he produces a male heir, his reign will collapse and end up the disjointed, historically fragmented, one-time revolt of an upstart. As a ruler Manfred knows he should be determined and fearless, yet, he dreads to admit to himself that he is not. He realizes, though does not comprehend, his own gradual disintegration, plunges into lapses of indeterminacy, silence and dream-like states, which, like the true abject, simultaneously beseech and pulverize him (Kristeva 5). Manfred’s fear of losing his supreme position in the state can be seen as his personal abject, “the impossible within” (Kristeva 5) that drives him into defiled, “unclean” measures to avert it. Manfred’s desperate actions to retain power, his thwarted attempt to marry his puny son to Isabella and his subsequent frustrated pursuit of her in the subterranean labyrinths in order to produce an heir, are consequences of the compulsion to ward off this abject within, to avoid, in Kristeva’s terms, “a real threat” that materializes and “ends up engulfing” him (4).

His first step to legitimize the urge to father a successor is to get rid of his wife, the barren, climacteric Hippolita. Perhaps to an English reader certain components of this arrangement—royal divorce sought for the sole purpose of securing male succession; Manfred's rejection of a female relative, his words to Matilda: "Begone, I do not want a daughter" (Walpole 23); the sickly disposition of the royal prince—might bear an uncanny parallel with Henry VIII's dismissal and divorce of Catherine of Aragon, his determination to father a son and the eventual feebleness of prince Edward. The profound consequences for the state, for its religion, its people and its alignment with Europe, are an object lesson on the interfolding of the personal and the political. Walpole seems to map the same interfolding through territory in his story. Three spheres are marked out in *Otranto*: the castle, a political and a private space; the monastery, a religious space; and the in-between land of the subterranean that connects the two, where Manfred pursues Isabella. The frustrated monarch's words, "I will use the human means in my power for preserving my race; Isabella shall not escape me" (Walpole 26) suggest that he will not stop short of violent imposition to secure male descendancy. In this story, the underground deceptive labyrinth becomes the land of the abject: Manfred's fear of the doom of his line causes him to become "[t]he traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist," and drives him to perform actions that are "immoral, sinister, scheming and shady" (4)—this is precisely what Kristeva defines as abjection. Manfred's pursuit of Isabella aims away from Otranto, that is, from the centre of power and home, from the throne and the bedroom, towards the church, and this is also Henry VIII's trajectory: from personal and political towards religious consequences. But unlike Henry VIII, Manfred is a figure of ridicule, a roaring but ineffective ruler. He fails to implement his plan, and his last chance to secure a lasting order is lost. The reinstatement of the power of the rightful owner's descendants—which comes to haunt Manfred in the form of a dismembered statue, a truly abject object for him—correlates with the final destruction of his edifice, Otranto, and of his genealogical line. The novel ends with the downfall of the first Gothic rebel and a return of the legitimate, previous order.

If, then, as Miles suggests, "one of the most powerful, and fundamental, determinants of the Gothic [is] the relation between the horrific and nationalism" (47), and if, as Colley proposes, "anti-Catholic animus" and "assertive," "sometimes bigoted Protestantism" (xx, xxi) constituted eighteenth-century British national self-awareness, then perhaps we can read *The Castle of Otranto* as a journey back to the times of Catholic rule and as an enactment of a fantasy where this rule is restored on the level of the political, the national and the private. The novel's ending envisions exactly

the possibility of such erasure of revolt, of return of Catholic legitimacy, here personified in Theodore, the rule descending directly, so to speak, from the loins of one of the church's fathers. From the point of view of eighteenth-century English Protestant supremacy, it is the rule of the abject, "the stuff of sectarian nightmares" (Miles 47), and in this sense the novel's abjection goes beyond the level of plot and dramatizes a possible threat to Protestant confidence in the late eighteenth century. The novel ends with a staple imagistic representation of Catholicism: the appearance of a saint amidst Bernini-like iconography. Alfonso emerges from the ruins of Otranto and, "accompanied by a clap of thunder," he ascends "solemnly towards heaven, where the clouds parting asunder, the form of saint Nicholas was seen; and receiving Alfonso's shade, they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze of glory" (Walpole 113). The Other takes over and enforces the restoration of the ancient regime. Manfred and Hippolita take "on them the habit of religion in the neighbouring convents" (Walpole 115), which is hardly an ending ideologically pleasing to a Protestant eye.

I suggest that Walpole's novel ends with a vision of a state in which, against the grain of eighteenth-century Britain, "severance from the old paradigms" (Miles 54) does not take place. It may look like a cheer for the return of law and order, but when we subvert the traditional reading, the story becomes an enactment of Protestant horror at a near-miss by some Counter-Reformation nightmare that would erase the Glorious Revolution. It was, after all, written at a time when to many Britons "it seemed that the old popish enemy was still at the gates, more threatening than ever before" (Colley 25). It dramatizes the way in which abjection rooted on a fictional personal level resounds with consequences on a national level. In this sense the story partakes in the eighteenth-century emergence of nationalism and its ideologies, and contributes to a process Colley calls "the forging of the British nation" (1), a process endowing Britons with a singular identity to withstand what they saw as the militant Catholicism of Continental Europe (24).

In her exploration of British nationalism, Colley notes that eighteenth-century "Britons reminded themselves of their embattled Protestantism in what often seems a wearily repetitive fashion, precisely because they had good cause to feel uncertain about its security and about their own" (23–24). Gothic fiction at that time seems exactly one of the territories where this repetition of the endorsement of Protestant ideologies and repudiation of Catholic Otherness was enacted. If the Deleuzian principle of "theft and gift" can be seen as operating in the repetition of the genre's paradigms, then the novel which "steals" the national theme and continues to forge Protestant identity through transgressive representations of Continental monastic hypocrisy, through ridicule of the excesses

of Catholic iconographic idolatry is M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*. Written in the decade that rippled in response to the Revolution just across the English Channel, to both its enlightenment and its horrors, the novel plays out what can be read as anti-Catholic national themes but inscribes them with the "gift" of novelty. Lewis subscribes to national discourse initiated, as the whole genre, by Walpole, but treats it as a springboard that allows him to explore the personal and social, rather than political, dimensions. By destabilizing the archetypal representations of female bodies, of femininity, chastity and motherhood in Catholic iconography, by enacting the fiendish consequences of institutional hierarchy and the dictum of obligatory celibacy, Lewis takes the thwarted potential of Walpole's subterranean scenes, which seem bashful in comparison, into a full realization of their bodily capacity.

Imagistically, where Walpole's novel ends, Lewis's starts. After "a clap of thunder" shakes the castle of Otranto to its foundations, the earth rocks, the walls fall with "a mighty force," Alfonso appears "dilated to an immense magnitude" in the centre of the ruins (Walpole 112). In *The Monk's* first chapter Lorenzo has a dream in which "a loud burst of thunder" causes the church to crumble, and the gigantic form of an "Unknown" snatches Antonia, his wife-to-be. She escapes, minus her robe. Among harmonious voices, and a "wing of brilliant splendour" which "spread itself from either of Antonia's arms," she is received into the glory, "composed of rays of dazzling brightness" (Lewis 28). This moment strikes one as another almost surreal pastiche of Baroque popish imagery, yet here Antonia's nudity plays out an ambivalence in the religious representation and meaning of the body. On the one hand, we have ridicule of Catholic extravagance; on the other hand, something else, a hint at the political force that had just implemented its eradication across the Channel, a proper de-Christianization that we can infer from the allusion to the tripartite motto of the Revolution. When the Monster appears before the altar, he bears an inscription on his forehead "Pride! Lust! Inhumanity!" (Lewis 28) which clearly apes the atheistic strain of "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*."

As has been said, the Deleuzian "gift" element in the treatment of the abject can be seen in the way it enriches a Walpolean personal-cum-politicized agenda with the spheres of the unspoken and the hidden, whereas the horrors of the abject are expressed in *The Monk's* preoccupation with the female body. The novel starts with an exposure of the ambivalence inscribed in the treatment of the body in Christianity, here expressed as a political comment on quintessential Catholic otherness: celibacy and imagistic idolatry. The image of the Madonna inspires in the monk Ambrosio indefinable sensations that confuse religious adoration with sexual arousal. When his sexual appetite is satisfied by contact with the Madonna-like

Matilda—herself a hybrid, a woman who disguises herself as a man, who has posed for the portrait of the Madonna, and who in the end laughs in the face of a Christian deity and succumbs to the Devil’s will—Ambrosio does not hesitate to commune with everything abjection stands for. He slides into incoherence and away from his monastic vows, and once he explores satisfactorily the territory of defilement, transgression and hypocrisy, the realm of the abject, there is no stopping him. To satisfy his desire for his sister Antonia, he kills his own mother and signs a pact with the Devil.

However, the truly abject territory in this novel, the space of rape, filth and birth, cadavers, rot and blood, is enacted when Lewis returns to the spatial schemata set out by Walpole, that is, to the dungeons. A Walpolean labyrinth of procreant pursuit transforms here into a tomb, a land of murder, incest and travesty of parturition. In Lewis’s visually rich, elaborately choreographed novel, where especially female bodies subscribe to culturally endorsed sartorial expectations and formulas, this underground territory, invisible to the world, cancels society’s expectations of obligatory feminine beauty. When the pregnant Agnes wakes up in impenetrable darkness on a bier in a vault, her only contact with reality is through touch and smell. The suffocating aroma drives her towards the door, but her hand rests on something soft, which, to her disgust and consternation, in spite “of its putridity, and the worms which preyed upon it” (Lewis 403), is recognizable as the rotting head of one of the nuns who had died some months before. When her eyes grow accustomed to the sepulchral darkness, she sees that her body is covered with a linen cloth, strewn with faded flowers: she has been entombed, together with her enwombed baby. Lewis makes Agnes experience the fakery of her own death, puts her “at the border of [her] condition as a living being.” Alive, she is made to enact being her own “corpse, the most sickening of wastes” (Kristeva 4).

Amid the stench of corpses, Agnes gives birth, but fails to sustain her child and it soon, too, becomes a mass of putridity, a loathsome and disgusting object with whom she refuses to part, an instance of “death infecting life” (Kristeva 4): “[o]ften have I at waking found my fingers ringed with the long worms, which bred in the corrupted flesh of my infant” (Lewis 413). Holding on to the remains of her child, Agnes communes with the abject, but in doing so she holds on to the only identity that is left for her in the self-annulling territory of the vaults, that of a mother and a lover, both roles now gone. According to Kristeva, “[i]t is . . . not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (4). Agnes’s identity and individuality are shaken to their foundations; as a social being she is wiped out, and when she realizes this plunge from social summits to non-existence, she doubts the reality of her situation:



That the Duke de Medina's Niece, that the destined Bride of the Marquis de las Cisternas, One bred up in affluence, related to the noblest families in Spain, . . . that She should in one moment become a Captive . . . reduced to support life with the coarsest aliments, appeared a change so sudden and incredible, that I believed myself the sport of some frightful vision. (Lewis 411)

And yet Agnes, not Antonia, depicted as the symmetrical model of classical beauty, is the one who survives. Agnes walks out of her own tomb, wretched, pale, half-naked, a miserable object in tattered rags with the rotting remains of her child clasped in her convulsed and shivering arms. In the end it is she who marries her paramour; Antonia's fate is to be brutally raped by her own brother—thus does *The Monk* trouble and invert certain traditional models of femininity. “Femaleness and fallenness,” as Gilbert and Gubar would have it, may be “essentially synonymous” (234) in Lewis's text, but they are not synonymous with inadequacy and weakness.

Both *Otranto* and *The Monk* deal with lawlessness and usurpation of power; both use the territory of the abject to play out transgression, to enhance the borderline between the morally accepted and the illegitimate. But whereas *Otranto* centres around political power, *The Monk* moves towards the exploration of power afforded by privilege and blind religious reverence. Both novels use female bodies to communicate their messages, and in both of them, because of their often flamboyant tone and narratorial detachment, these messages can be surprising, and seldom self-evident. Walpole presents the threat of Catholicism victorious. His Manfred turns out to be as weak as his puny son when he yields, his identity crushed by the power of legitimacy. His fear of failure and loss, which materializes itself in the enactment of the prophecy, destroys him and nothing remains but to depart the political arena, enfeebled and defeated. Ambrosio does even worse. Tortured physically, he is swallowed by death and eternal damnation. Only Agnes and Matilda leave behind the territory of the abject, to emerge triumphant. The grit in their femininity, by which they survive, is the “gift” of the new Gothic dynamics that later works will repeat and enrich.

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**CONTINUITIES:  
EROTICISM AND ITS  
DISCONTENTS**

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## A Cypriot Story about Love and Hatred

# ABSTRACT

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The Middle Ages have their great love stories. We owe one of them to Peter I Lusignan, King of Cyprus. Married to Eleanor of Aragon, who bore him a son and a successor, he had a mistress pregnant with his child. The queen decided to eliminate this rival by inducing a premature delivery. The incident was recorded by Leontios Makhairas, a Cypriot chronicler, who described the cruelty of Eleanor and mourned the fate of the baby. But it is not his account which keeps this tragedy alive in Cyprus even today. There is a folk song about beautiful Arodaphnousa, who suffered because of the bad queen. The song is deprived of historical context, but it is a historical source nevertheless. Its remote counterpart is the Catalan story of Eleanor, who was expelled from Cyprus and lived in Aragon for a long time. This story creates an image of a benign, calm lady who was venerated after death by her subjects. The clash between these images makes one think about the black and white PR created in every epoch. But this is not the point of this story. The point is the fate of an innocent child, both the flower and the victim of love. This is a rare motif in medieval literature; children are seldom present on the pages of its manuscripts. The emotion connected with this story deserves the reader's attention.

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**ABSTRACT**

**P**eter I Lusignan (1358–1369) was the most popular king of Cyprus during the period of Frankish<sup>1</sup> rule on the island. His travels to the West, his Egyptian crusade and his assassination are well known to historians. We learn most of this from Leontios Makhairas, a Cypriot Greek who lived at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Nicolaou-Konnari 66–67). The chronicler provides the reader with many vivid details about the political and military activities of the ruler. Peter's private life was no less colourful than his public life. He was married to Eleanor from the royal House of Aragon and was devoted to her. But he also had mistresses, and one of them was pregnant with his child. The tragic story of this baby shook the inhabitants of the island, and was preserved through the centuries in folk songs. The editors of the French translation of the Makhairas chronicle at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century added two poignant stories as appendices to their publication. The texts are anonymous, their versions differ a little, but the main plot is the same. There is a beautiful royal mistress, Arodaphnousa, a cruel Queen, and a King—the avenger. Without knowing the historical context, one can say that it is only a fairy tale.

Once upon a time, three sisters, Krystallo, Helena and Arodaphnousa, lived in the vicinity of the royal palace. The last was the most beautiful and the king was passionately in love with her. When his queen learnt about this secret liaison, she grew angry and asked her servants to bring the young woman to the court. Anxious, Arodaphnousa tried to postpone her arrival, but finally, elegantly robed, as befitted a woman of her status, she appeared in the palace. She paid sophisticated regards to the queen and was invited to the table where delicate dishes were served. Arodaphnousa was flattered by this reception, but at the same time she found it suspect and insisted she be told the real reason for her summons. The queen answered that she wanted to dine with her and then walk in the garden. In this way they passed the whole day, and at sunset Arodaphnousa expressed gratitude for her reception, but her hostess turned a deaf ear and did not reply. The young beauty left, but she commented on the queen's manners unkindly. This the queen did not hear, but the servants did, and so the comment reached her.

The next day she sent an envoy to bring Arodaphnousa back. The young lady said good-bye to her bedroom, to another room in which she

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<sup>1</sup> This expression concerns the Westerners settled in the East in the Middle Ages. Their great appearance is connected with the time of crusades when they established the Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099–1292) and three other Latin states.

used to drink coffee, and last to her sleeping child. The Queen was waiting. She grabbed Arodaphnousa by her hair, saying that she would kill her as the king's mistress. In terror, the victim cried out so that her lover would hear. Though far away, he caught the cry. The king covered a thousand and a half miles on horseback and soon appeared in the castle. In the meantime the queen locked her chamber, and, holding Arodaphnousa's hair, cut off her head. The king forced the door open and, seeing so much blood, lost consciousness. When he recovered, he ordered that his consort be put into the stable as an animal and despaired over his mistress's body. He wept because he had loved her so much for eight years, and blamed himself for her innocent death. Then he proceeded to arrange a royal funeral for the lady of his heart. "May all those, who will read the song, be happy, and those who are married—resign of their love!" the anonymous author says ("Chanson sur Arodaphnousa" 400–05).

Another version of the song is slightly different. The queen questioned her servants about the identity of her husband's mistress. In reply they told her about three sisters: Rose, Anthousa, and, the most beautiful, Arodaphnousa. The first sister liked the king, the second offered him kisses, but it was the third who shared his bed. The queen demanded that the lady in question should be brought to the court. Arodaphnousa was surprised, but she put on a dress with golden and crystal ornaments, a robe embroidered with pearls, and she left for the palace. With a golden apple in her hand, moving in a coquettish way, she entered the chamber where the queen waited with excellent dishes. Seeing this, Arodaphnousa said that she did not come to eat, and asked why she had been invited. In reply, the queen asked who was her husband's mistress; Arodaphnousa feigned ignorance. Then she left, and, on the stairs out, she commented on the queen's appearance in an arrogant way. The reaction could be foreseen. The king's wife asked the servants to bring her visitor back. Arodaphnousa appeared dressed in black with a black apple in her hand. Swaying in a coquettish way, she asked why she had been summoned. The queen showed her a burning furnace. Arodaphnousa started to cry so that the king could hear. He did, even though he was listening to music at the time. Having covered a distance of two thousand miles, he appeared in the palace and found the door closed. He said that the Turks were following him and asked the Queen to open the door. His wife answered that there was a pregnant woman inside and she was assisting with the birth. The king forced the door open and saw Arodaphnousa in the oven. He caught his wife and cast her into the fire too. In this version we are not encouraged to love or to give up our sentiments ("Chanson de la Reine" 405–08).

Thus, this tragic story is a recollection of historical events which happened in Cyprus in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. From its beginnings the island was

connected with the Greeks, who shaped its history and culture. It passed through the Hellenic and Roman times, and it became an early centre of Christianity through the influence of Saint Paul and the Cypriot apostle Saint Barnabas. The island played a pivotal role in a confrontation between Arabs and Byzantium in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. In these insecure times of Muslim invasion, the Cypriot Church became not only a religious but also a political authority. Byzantium regained its sway in 963–64, and the island enjoyed a rich cultural development. In 1191 it was conquered by Richard the Lionheart, who then sold Cyprus to the Knights Templar, who after a short time sold it to Guy de Lusignan, the ruler of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. In 1192 Lusignan established the Kingdom of Cyprus and his family reigned there till 1489. Latin was to be an official language, but it was soon replaced by French, while Greek became its second language. With the fall of Acre in 1292 the Kingdom of Jerusalem ceased to exist but the rulers of Cyprus kept their claims and the title. The coronation of the kings of Cyprus was held in Nicosia and that of the titular king of Jerusalem in Famagusta. Many Frankish refugees from the lost territories settled on the island, which became an important trade centre in the Levant, attracting the attention of Genoa and Venice. The Lusignans introduced the Latin Church, which was a challenge to the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. This cohabitation was not easy for the Greeks (Balard 102–03; Jacoby 68–71; Luke 340–42; Kyrris 18–19).

It is time to discuss the main characters of the song about Arodaphnousa. The jealous queen was Eleanor of Aragon-Gandia, the wife of Peter I Lusignan. His mistress Joanna l'Aleman, of Frankish origin, is presented in the song as Arodaphnousa. Peter I was born in 1328. He was crowned as King of Cyprus and as a Titular King of Jerusalem in 1358. He ruled till 1369. Eleanor was his second wife, five years younger than he. She was a sister of Alfonso, Duke of Gandia (in Valencia), close to the royal family of Aragon. Their only male heir was Peter II, born a year before the coronation of his father. Peter I of Lusignan entered history as a romantic warrior propagating the idea of the crusade against the Muslims. Cyprus faced a permanent danger from the Turks and the Mamluk Egypt. Lusignan began his reign by bringing the important Turkish city Adalia (Antalya) in the southern Asia Minor under his rule. Then he began to promulgate the idea of a crusade against the Mamluks. In 1362–65, with the support of Pope Urban V, he paid visits to many European rulers, hoping to win them over to his purpose. His French genealogical ties and the attractiveness of Cyprus as a trade centre were important assets. But neither John II nor his successor Charles V of France or Edward III of England were interested in this idea, as they were waging war against each other. Peter did not give up, and he turned to Charles of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia and Louis



d'Anjou of Hungary, whom he met in Cracow in 1364, during the rally organized by Casimir the Great, King of Poland. Neither of them accepted the invitation to the crusade. The extravagant Cypriot dreamer remained in history as the participant in a feast hosted by Wierzynek for eminent figures of Central Europe (Hill 324–29; Iorga 196–97; Dąbrowska, “Peter of Cyprus” 265–67). His only support came from the Venetians who knew how they might thereby profit. The great fleet met at the isle of Rhodes in October 1365 and went on to attack Alexandria. The soldiers had no mercy towards the inhabitants, and there was no limit to their greed. The sack of the city did not change the political situation in the East, but it strengthened Peter's ambitions (Atiya 15–18; Luke 355–58). On the strength of this victory, he turned to the Mamluk possessions in Syria and then renewed his raids against the Muslims. Devoted to his *idée fixe*, Peter Lusignan once again set off to Europe in 1367, this time looking for assistance in Italy, but he returned the following year empty-handed (Atiya 3–26; Housley 193–95; Luke 357–58). These ups and downs of his politics changed his personality; mood swings now constantly dogged him. He became unpleasant and cruel to his courtiers. The pretexts of the animosities were as banal as a conflict about greyhounds that the king wanted to get from his vassal, or a quarrel with a steward about the lack of oil for asparagus during the meal. Both men in these disputes were imprisoned (Makhairas 244). The atmosphere at the court grew tenser, the ruler even less predictable. It seemed that Peter was tempting fate. In January 1369, he was killed in his bedroom, decapitated and castrated for good measure (Makhairas 266). Along with the knights, his brothers, John and James, were involved in the plot (Edbury 220–22; Richard 108–23).

Peter was an attractive man, and his wife was supposedly jealous of him. To prove his affection for the queen, he would travel with her shifts and sleep with her underwear. This apparently intimate sign of marital fidelity did not mean that he went without affairs at court. In fact he had two other ladies of his heart: Eschiva de Scandelion and Joanna l'Aleman. The first was married, the second a young widow. Queen Eleanor tolerated this, but her Catalan temper boiled over when she heard that the second lady was pregnant. When the king set off to Europe in 1367, Joanna was in the eighth month of her pregnancy. The queen demanded that she come to the court, because she wanted to get rid of Joanna's baby. The young woman was tortured. Maidservants prostrated her on the floor, and, stretching her body, put a great marble mortar on Joanna's abdomen. The Queen hoped, in vain, that this would induce a premature childbirth. The next day another kitchen utensil was used; the maidens put a hand-mill on Joanna's womb yet the rough movements of the handle again failed as an attempt at abortion. Then they forced her to sniff drugs, noisome herbs, nettle

among them (Makhairas 214). The child remained in Joanna's womb, so the queen sent her back home, where she gave birth to the baby. Eleanor told her to bring the child to the court immediately. The child's fate is not known. The unhappy mother, still bleeding, was imprisoned and treated in a terrible way (Makhairas 216). When the king learnt about this he wrote a letter to his spouse threatening her and demanding that she release Joanna. The mistress left the citadel but was sent to a nunnery, St Claire's, where she stayed for a whole year, without losing her beauty (Makhairas 218). Eleanor was hardly innocent herself. During the king's absence she had a lover, John of Morphou, Count of Edessa, and this liaison lasted for some time. When they learnt about Peter's return, Morphou made the two ladies swear not to say a word about the romance (Makhairas 226).

It is difficult to say whether Eleanor pushed others to kill her husband; however, it is probable that his end suited her. After the king's death she became a regent on behalf of their son, who was crowned Peter II two years later, in 1371. The rival maritime republics, closely connected with the Cypriot trade, sought the young king's favour. During the coronation in Famagusta, Venetians and the Genoese provoked riots in the city (Balard 87–90). The latter strengthened their position on the island, and Eleanor profited by it. She was unhappy that her young son allowed his uncles, John and James, to participate in the rule. She intrigued against her brothers-in-law and gained Genoa as a supporter in this conflict. This only provoked more hostilities between the Cypriots and the Genoese, who behaved like tyrants and mistreated the queen and her son. But this did not put an end to her machinations. In 1374, James, her brother-in-law, was taken to Genoa as a hostage. John kept his distance. But then he received an invitation to the queen in Nicosia. He was warned not to go but went nevertheless. When they sat at the table in the company of the young king, Eleanor made a sign to bring the shirt in which her husband was murdered. She asked whether John recognized it and, without waiting for an answer, her followers slit the guest's throat (Makhairas 451). Under the pretext of avenging her consort, Eleanor managed to eliminate from the court the potential rivals of her young son. A forty-year-old lady was now mistress of the situation, but not for long. In 1377 Peter II married Valentine Visconti of Milan, who was not accepted by Eleanor. Facing the choice between a wife and a mother, Peter II sent the second one to her homeland. In 1382 Eleanor reached the Catalan coast and began another chapter of her long life (Luke 366–67).

Historians dealing with Cypriot history do not pay much attention to her later vicissitudes. From the Lusignan point of view, she is not interesting either. But Eleanor spent another 35 years in Aragon, which meant more time than in Cyprus! She was a lady of strong character,

which she quickly showed. Supported with a good pension, she settled in the city of Valls, in the residence of archbishop of Tarragona, as his co-ruler. A group of Cypriot courtiers accompanied her. Eleanor's milieu quickly started a conflict with the local population as the queen refused to pay taxes connected with the import of wine. Her residence was invaded and her butler murdered. She left the city in 1394 for Barcelona, where she settled for the rest of her life. She died there and was buried in the habit of the Third Order of St Francis, though with regal dignity, in the church of Saint Francis in 1417 (Ayensa, "El recuerdo" 368–69). This could have been the end of her adventurous story but the next centuries wrote a sequel to it. In 1692 her tomb was opened and the queen's body appeared untouched by decay, intact and flexible. Pilgrimages were made to this place; miracles ensued (Ayensa, "Entre cel" 93–96). The queen's vicissitudes were commemorated in popular literature. One touching poem from the beginning of the 20th century evokes the murder of King Peter, the queen's despair and her return to Aragon to live in Valls (Ayensa, "El recuerdo" 377).<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to observe how this gentle image of a good queen Eleanor is opposed to her commemoration in Cypriot folklore. It is like a distorting mirror. In the east of the Mediterranean nobody was interested in her Catalan life. She was remembered as a cruel queen, a symbol of jealousy and revenge, a villain in contrast to her husband's delicate and subtle mistress, treated so terribly in the eighth month of her pregnancy. Joanna l'Aleman's story appeared on the Web, and the song on Arodaphnousa is to be found there. The motif of oven is the same, and so is that of the king's grief. Joanna is buried by the monks, and the queen is thrown to the hounds.<sup>3</sup> The reader of this story does not pay attention to the arrogant behaviour of the young woman, proud of her beauty and royal affection. The song focuses on her martyrdom. The image of her annihilation endures in memory. The most moving is the story of the baby. In one quoted version Arodaphnousa is saying good-bye to her child, in another the queen is acting as a midwife intending to kill the child. But it was Makhairas, a professional chronicler, who noted the cruel circumstances of Joanna's tortures with mortar and pestle and hand-mill on her abdomen to provoke preterm delivery. What could have happened? Placental abruption, labour

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<sup>2</sup> I am very grateful to the historian of Cyprus, Dr. Łukasz Burkiewicz from Jagellonian University in Kraków, who supplied me with copies of the Eusebi Ayensa articles.

<sup>3</sup> I am also grateful to Mr Marcin Cyrulski, a Ph.D. student in Classics at the University of Łódź, who examined for me the Web version of the Song of Arodaphnousa ("Arodaphnousa—medieval song from Cyprus" on the NOCTOC blog in Greek).

induction, premature rupture of the membranes.<sup>4</sup> But the child was born—despite the determination of the queen. Therefore she decided to deprive the young woman of the baby, a crime unforgivable in any culture.

In this story of negative emotions and violence one cannot miss an important historical detail, namely, that all this happened in the family of Lusignan, a foreign dynasty to the Cypriot Greeks. Also, Joanna l'Alema belonged to a Frankish world, and her name suggests German roots. But this is not the point. The child was killed and the inhabitants of Cyprus were shocked by the murder. Whether the specified kitchen utensils were used is beside the point. From the late Middle Ages, on through the centuries, Cypriot Greeks sang this tragic story. The Catholic context disappeared. The innocent child remains in collective memory, but not everywhere. The selectivity is characteristic. In Catalan literature there is no question of the queen-murderess, not only in connection with the death of the king's natural child but also in relation to the death of the king himself. Eleanor is not remembered as the ruler of a kingdom inhabited mainly by Orthodox subjects. She is just a queen of Cyprus, and this is her unique distinction. By way of digression, let me say that the religious identity of the island is the most important factor. The contemporary vicissitudes of its cultural monuments are a case in point (Dąbrowska, "Byzantine Frescoes" 30–31).

As a Byzantinist dealing with late medieval history I would like to add that Peter I and Eleanor's son was the object of matrimonial interest at the imperial court in Constantinople. In 1372 John V Palaiologos wanted to marry one of his daughters to the future Peter II. The offer was rejected in Nicosia, but there was no religious obstacle. From 1369, the Byzantine Emperor was Catholic as he wanted to gain the support of European rulers against the Ottoman Turks threatening Byzantium (Dąbrowska, *Łacinniczki* 37; Luttrell 103). Cyprus seemed a reliable ally, especially with its romantic tradition of struggle against the Muslims. But the Constantinopolitan mission failed and the young Palaiologina did not become Eleanor's daughter-in-law. Maybe, in contrast to Valentina Visconti, their relations would have been proper, and Eleanor would not have left Cyprus for Aragon. Whatever the alternative history could have been, the most important detail still stands: Peter I Lusignan's pregnant mistress and the tragic fate of their child mourned by Cypriot Greeks.

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<sup>4</sup> I am much indebted to Professor Andrzej Bieńkiewicz from the Medical University of Łódź for his professional consultation.

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# IRISH THEMES

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## Anthologizing Sir Samuel Ferguson: Literature, History, Politics

# ABSTRACT

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Although Sir Samuel Ferguson is generally recognized as one of the key figures of mid-nineteenth-century Irish literature, there has been no major edition of his poems since 1916, as a result of which his work tends to be known to the general reader through selections published in anthologies. The essay analyzes the selections of Ferguson's work in anthologies of Irish literature published between 1895 and 2010 in an attempt to assess the impact of the cultural dynamics of twentieth-century Ireland on the interpretation of Ferguson's achievement as a poet. The evidence collected demonstrates that the image of Ferguson perpetuated by most twentieth-century anthologists, most of them Hibernocentric in approach, was that of a respectable if rather old-fashioned Romantic nationalist antiquarian, whose work focused primarily on familiarizing the Victorian reader with the ancient myths and traditions of Ireland. This interpretation of Ferguson's achievement, motivated, it is argued, by the predominantly nationalist agenda of modern Ireland's cultural establishment, has largely marginalized the other side of Ferguson—a political thinker committed to the unionist cause and vehemently opposed to the violence perpetrated by the emergent Irish republican movement and culminating in the Phoenix Park murders of 1882, which formed the subject of two of Ferguson's most powerful late poems, "At the Polo-Ground" and "In Carey's Footsteps."

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**ABSTRACT**

It is one of the most bizarre paradoxes of Irish literary history that Sir Samuel Ferguson, famously hailed by W. B. Yeats as “the greatest poet Ireland has produced” (qtd. in Frayne 103), remains to this day a somewhat elusive figure, perhaps more so than any of the other major Irish writers of the nineteenth century. While his work has over the years attracted a considerable degree of academic research, as is demonstrated, in particular, by the monographs produced by Malcolm Brown (1973), Robert O’Driscoll (1976), Peter Denman (1990), and Eve Patten (2004), it is rather surprising that there is to date no major critical biography, and indeed no modern critical edition of his works: it is now nearly a hundred years since the publication of Alfred Perceval Graves’s edition of the poems (1916), and since then the only other collection has been a tiny volume published in 1963 by Padraic Colum. In recent years, Ferguson’s *œuvre* has become more easily available through reprints of nineteenth-century originals and, even more significantly, through the increasing availability of electronic resources; this, however, does not change the fact that for several decades now the majority of readers, academic and non-academic alike, have familiarized themselves with Ferguson’s poetry, in the first instance, through reading selections of his work included in anthologies. It can therefore be argued that the perception, among non-specialist readers in particular, of Ferguson’s art and of his place in Irish literary culture is likely to have been influenced, more so than would have been the case with some of his contemporaries, by the choices made by anthology editors; as a result, the Ferguson known to most late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers is not so much the “real” Ferguson as a cultural construct, a product of the process of selection and exclusion that lies at the heart of any attempt to establish a canon, to define a tradition, or even to select a list of personal favourites. It is the purpose of the present essay to try to investigate how this constructed identity of Sir Samuel Ferguson has developed over the last hundred years or so, and to assess its impact on the popular perception of his contribution to nineteenth-century Irish literary culture and cultural politics.

Nineteenth-century Irish writing, and particularly poetry, has over the years been served by anthologists remarkably well: nearly every decade, since the late nineteenth century, has produced a significant new anthology, some of them one-volume selections bringing together works produced during a particular period, written in a particular genre, or exploring a particular theme, and others multi-volume projects designed to offer a comprehensive survey of writing representative of the Irish literary

culture as it developed over the centuries. The present study focuses on sixteen collections, ranging from W. B. Yeats's 1895 *Book of Irish Verse* to the 2010 *Penguin Book of Irish Poetry*, edited by Patrick Crotty. The focus of all of the anthologies is specifically Irish: the works of Sir Samuel Ferguson tend not to be included in general anthologies of Anglophone literature (there is, for example, no mention of him in Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom's Victorian volume of *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature* [1973], or in Christopher Ricks's *New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* [1987], or indeed in Valentine Cunningham's Blackwell anthology *The Victorians* [2000])—which is, in itself, a significant indication of the fact that his work does not achieve the same kind of recognition in the broader pan-British context of Victorian literary culture as it does in its specifically Irish context. Most of the anthologies researched for the purposes of this study offer some form of general introduction, clarifying the approach adopted by the editor(s) in the process of compiling the volume, and sometimes offering brief critical comments on the work of authors included in (and sometimes excluded from) the selection.

Thus, for example, W. B. Yeats notes, in his preface to *A Book of Irish Verse* (1895; revised 1900), that his aim is “to separate what has literary value from what has only a patriotic and political value, no matter how sacred it has become to us” (xv). His introductory essay on “Modern Irish Poetry” sets Ferguson, alongside William Allingham and Aubrey de Vere, all of them “working apart from politics” (xxiii), in contrast to the politically-minded poets associated with the Young Ireland movement, particularly Thomas Davis and James Clarence Mangan. Yeats stresses Ferguson's indebtedness to the traditions of Ireland's bardic culture, and in the broader sense to the tradition of the Homeric epic:

He had not the subtlety of feeling, the variety of cadence of a great lyric poet, but he has touched, here and there, an epic vastness and naïveté, as in description in *Congal* of the mire-stiffened mantle of the giant spectre Mananan macLir, striking against his calves with as loud a noise as the mainsail of a ship makes, “when with the coil of all its ropes it beats the sounding mast.” He is frequently dull, for he often lacked the “minutely appropriate words” necessary to embody those fine changes of feeling which enthrall the attention; but his sense of weight and size, of action and tumult, has set him apart and solitary, an epic figure in a lyric age. (xxiv–xxv)

Yeats's selection of Ferguson's poems does not, however, quite reflect this judgment: he does not include in his anthology any excerpts from *Congal*, and the closest he comes to including a narrative poem is in his choice of the ballad-like “The Vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.” Otherwise,

Yeats's selection brings together poems based on Irish myths ("Aideen's Grave," "Deirdre's Lament for the Sons of Usnach"), Irish folklore ("The Fairy Well of Lagnanay"), popular Irish songs ("The Fair Hills of Ireland"), and the traditional motif of the loss of ancient Irish culture ("Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey of Timoleague"); the only poem carrying a modern, contemporaneous relevance is "Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis."

Yeats's anthology established a pattern followed by many of his successors, with the editors stressing that the approach they adopted was in some way objective, whether on the grounds of aesthetic judgment or the representativeness of the selection, and their choice of Ferguson's poems focusing clearly on works of broadly antiquarian character. Thus, for example, John Cooke, in *The Dublin Book of Irish Verse, 1728–1909* (1909)—"a fully representative volume of Anglo-Irish Verse" (v)—and Alfred Perceval Graves in *The Book of Irish Poetry* (1914)—"a selection of Irish Poetry, old and new, old and modern Gaelic poems in English verse translation and Anglo-Irish poetry of the last two centuries which have most appealed to me as illustrating the leading features of Gaelic, Hiberno-English and Anglo-Irish verse" (xvi)—both select for their volumes a number of poems, the great majority of them from *Lays of the Western Gael* (though Graves includes also two excerpts from *Congal*) and nearly all of them deriving, in one way or another, from Irish mythology, tradition and folklore; the only exception is again "Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis," included in Graves's volume.

A rather different approach is taken by Padraic Colum in his 1922 *Anthology of Irish Verse*. Published in New York at the time when Ireland was emerging as a newly independent nation, the volume seeks to convey, through its selection of poems, what it describes, in words which sound rather unfortunate to the modern ear, as the "racial distinctiveness" (4) of Irish poetry, absent, in the editor's view, from early Anglo-Irish writing, and only infused into poetry written in English through the impact, direct or indirect, of the tradition of writing in Gaelic. This interpretation inevitably puts Ferguson very much in the centre of the development of the tradition of Irish writing in English:

He took the trouble to learn Gaelic, and when he translated the words of Irish folk-songs to the music that they were sung to, he created, in half a dozen instances, poems that have a racial distinctiveness. Ferguson had what Moore had not—the ability to convey the Gaelic spirit. (8)

Colum praises "Dear Dark Head," "one of the most beautiful of Irish love songs[,] . . . a poem that carries into English the Gaelic music and

the Gaelic feeling” (8); he is more critical of Ferguson’s re-telling of the ancient sagas (“he made them conform a good deal to Victorian rectitudes” [8–9]), though he still recognizes that the poet “blazed a trail in the trackless region of Celtic romance” (9) with his use of stirring imagery and “a sense of vast and mysterious action” (9). The actual selection of Ferguson’s poems for the anthology is predictable: five pieces based on antiquarian material and “Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis.”

A rather similar focus on the centrality of Gaelic heritage to the tradition of Irish poetry characterizes another US-published anthology, Kathleen Hoagland’s *1000 Years of Irish Poetry* (1947). In her view, “of the poets in the field of translation Samuel Ferguson in his conception comes nearest to the heroic in the poetry of the Celt—the poetry found in the earliest epics—and nobody has rendered more exquisitely the love songs” (xxviii). Discussing his work in the context of the tradition of the Young Irelanders, she goes on to comment:

Ferguson, endowed with a mighty imagination and poetic narrative power, nourished his talent on the simplicity of Homer. He forged strong, crude poetry to present the persons and events of Ireland’s ancient literary past in epic manner. The finest example of this is *Congal*. . . . In that tour-de-force his talent for achieving architectural structure in narrative poetry appears at his best.

The first work of Ferguson incorporating ancient myth and saga was *The Tain Quest*, a long and plodding poem having within it magnificent passages. . . . Concerning Ferguson’s ballads, Swinburne said of the “Welshmen of Tirawley” that it was one of the greatest ballads of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a contrast to this poet’s sweeping style, his “Fairy Thorn,” and his many Irish-Gaelic translations, show a magical lyric quality that is not suspected by those who know only his more difficult work. (xlviii)

Hoagland’s extensive selection—seventeen poems, the second highest number in the anthologies investigated during the research on this paper—follows the established pattern, with the bulk of the material consisting of a broad range of myth-based and folklore-based poems and songs; as has by then become something of a pattern, “Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis” provides the only example of Ferguson’s engagement with the contemporaneous world.

Geoffrey Taylor’s introductory note on Ferguson in his 1951 collection of *Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century* opens with the rather refreshing statement that “of all poets, except perhaps Browning, Samuel Ferguson was the most inconspicuously normal” (109). The editor’s scepticism about the value of his poetic *œuvre* as a whole (“his poems . . . have never been collected—nor . . . is there the smallest reason why they should be”

[110]) is juxtaposed with a clear articulation of the way in which Ferguson's poetry occupies a middle ground between the more explicitly Celtic-influenced work of poets like Mangan, and the more conventional English-style poetry of writers such as Allingham:

He almost always chose Irish themes and he was a successful translator from the Irish; but even most of his translations, apart from occasional Gaelic refrains, could take a place in any English anthology without calling attention to themselves. (110)

Among Ferguson's longer poems, Taylor praises "The Welshmen of Tirawley" and suggests that *Congal* is not particularly readable; on the other hand, he expresses his appreciation of the shorter poems, as "they have always an honesty and frequently a felicity which will commend them in any Victorian revival" (111). All in all, his extensive selection (eighteen items, including both complete poems and excerpts from longer works), is—not surprisingly, perhaps, given the way he distances himself from the hitherto prevalent Hibernocentric discourse of his predecessors—distinctively more varied in tone: while it is still dominated by some of Ferguson's best-known antiquarian pieces, it also includes a small number of poems unrelated to Irish themes (such as three sonnets inspired by the paintings of Paolo Veronese), as well as, very importantly, the hitherto neglected by anthologists—though frequently reprinted in the early years of Ferguson's career—"The Forging of the Anchor."

Taylor's mixed feelings about the quality of Ferguson's poetry are reflected by some of the other anthologists of the post-war period. Lennox Robinson states quite openly, in his Preface to *The Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1958), that if poets such as Ferguson are underrepresented in his anthology (the selection includes four antiquarian poems and the Davis "Lament"), "it is to make room for the others, the ones who died only yesterday or the ones whose best work lies in the future" (v). Donagh MacDonagh's introduction to the volume notes Ferguson only very briefly, and then exclusively in the context of the work of his more colourful predecessors; comparing him with Mangan, MacDonagh says:

Samuel Ferguson, his antithesis, translated felicitously and melliflously, though with less respect for the original metre and rhythms. At his best he broke free from the vapid verse-forms of his day and reconstructed, as did Callanan and O'Curry, the country speech of the Irish poet. (xv)

John Montague's *Faber Book of Irish Verse* (1974) reduces the amount of space devoted to Ferguson even further; two of his translations are hidden

(without reference to his authorship of them on the contents page) in a section on “A Wandering Voice: Songs from the Irish,” while the main body of the anthology offers, under Ferguson’s name, only the ubiquitous “Lament.” Montague’s critical comments on Ferguson are rather eccentric and sometimes self-contradictory: having described his adaptations of the Irish sagas as “dated and literary” (32), and having criticized the conventionality of some of his rhymes, he nonetheless goes on to talk about his “solid craftsmanship” (33), and he clearly cannot quite separate Ferguson’s personal life from the role he played on Ireland’s literary and cultural scene when he says that “Ferguson was full of the contradictions of his period: an Ulster Unionist who married a Guinness heiress and was made a knight, he invented the Celtic Twilight” (32). Thomas Kinsella’s introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986) mentions Ferguson only in the context of his review of James Hardiman’s *Irish Minstrelsy*, adding that he “himself produced many versions and verse re-tellings from the Irish during a long and respectable career” (xxvii). The Ferguson selection in Kinsella’s anthology is again quite narrow (five poems), though it is notable for the inclusion of the hitherto unanthologized “At the Polo-Ground.”

Among the anthologies produced over the last forty years, and still widely available to contemporary readers, by far the most generous account of the significance of Ferguson’s contribution to Irish poetry, and the most extensive sample of his poems, can be found in Brendan Kennelly’s *Penguin Book of Irish Verse* (1970). While granting that Ferguson is less inspired and less passionate than Mangan, Kennelly states:

The importance of Ferguson’s contribution to Irish poetry cannot be over-emphasized. It was Ferguson, more than any other single poet, who proved that old mythology was an almost infinite source of inspiration. . . . [His] translations, mainly love poems, show Ferguson’s technical competence and variety, his liking for vigorous rhythms, and his ability to capture the essence of the original. . . . [His] passion [for all things Gaelic and Irish] was the driving-force behind Ferguson’s life as a poet and it made him place all his faith in the mythology of his own land. The bulk of his poetry is heroic, though he also produced some fine lyrics. (35)

Kennelly then goes on to discuss *Congal* and “Conary,” praising the latter for “the restraint with which Ferguson evokes a terrifying supernatural world, in the frightening light of which a great man’s destiny is spun to its tragic end” (36), and describing the poem as “the work of a rich, disciplined imagination” (36). Not surprisingly, the selection of poems in Kennelly’s anthology is relatively extensive, with eleven poems, mostly of



antiquarian character, but including also “The Forging of the Anchor” and “Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis.”

The more recent anthologies tend to treat Ferguson with what could best be described as respectful indifference. Seamus Deane, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991), reprints a rather conventional selection of eight poems, and his introductory essay on “Poetry and Song, 1800–1890” notes the historical significance of Ferguson’s central idea—“his pursuit of a cultural renovation that would link together Catholic and Protestant in a single, shared identity” (7); although dismissing Ferguson’s achievement as a poet, Deane grudgingly recognizes the logic, intellectual cohesion, and cultural impact of his grand project:

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Nevertheless, he did have an audience and he did have a background out of which he could appeal to that audience. As a result, his work does not suffer from the occasionalism of many others. It is governed by a purpose and, in remarkable fashion, manages to achieve it. For him, translation was not an action that generated crisis in his writing. It liberated him as a poet and helped him to attain his best effects. . . . Ferguson’s theory of cultural politics was predicated on the notion that union between the Irish and English civilizations was possible and desirable. . . . He seeks union between two languages and two cultures; his translations are his proof that the search is justified. (7)

In twenty-first century anthologies—W. J. McCormack’s *Ferocious Humanism* (2000), Stephen Regan’s *Irish Writing* (2004), Peter van de Kamp and A. Norman Jeffares’s *Irish Literature: The Nineteenth Century* (2007), and Patrick Crotty’s *Penguin Book of Irish Poetry* (2010)—Ferguson’s presence is even less prominent: though mentioned in passing in the introductory essays, and awarded enough space for a few poems well familiar to readers of earlier anthologies, he is included and acknowledged but certainly not focused on—an ossified presence from a bygone age, deserving of a token gesture of respect but clearly unlikely to generate any form of genuine enthusiasm or excitement.

Is this vision of Ferguson entirely fair though? If we undertake a simple statistical analysis of the representation of his work in the sixteen anthologies researched for the purposes of this essay, we shall get the impression that in some ways it probably is: the overwhelming majority of Ferguson’s poems made available to readers in anthologies published over the last 115 years are his translations from the Irish and his renderings of tales from Irish mythology: the list of favourites includes “Dear Dark Head” (anthologized 12 times), “Cashel of Munster,” “Deirdre’s Lament for the Sons of Usnach” (9), “The Burial of King Cormac” (8), “The Coolun,” “The Fair Hills of Ireland” (7), “The Fairy Thorn” (6), and “Pastheen Finn” (5).



From the literary-critical point of view, it is difficult not to find this list disappointing: the fact that the most prominent place among Ferguson's antiquarian poems is occupied by the saccharine and self-indulgent "Dear Dark Head," while the dynamic and muscular story of "The Welshmen of Tirawley" does not make it to the top eight, cannot be explained away by suggesting that "Dear Dark Head" is shorter and therefore easier to include in a one-volume collection. The anthologists clearly choose to present to their readers an image of Ferguson as a polite sentimental author of conventional love poems and elegiac celebrations of the lost Gaelic past, a dutiful if rather unimaginative collector of minor curiosities of Ireland's literary heritage, and an heir to the tradition of the drawing-room art of Thomas Moore—with his typically Victorian scholarly earnestness replacing Moore's easy-going charm and musicality.

But there is more to the image of Ferguson emerging from this discussion than that rather bland portrait. Although Ferguson's antiquarian poems constitute over 80 per cent of all the anthology entries analyzed here, the single most frequently anthologized of his poems is in fact his "Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis," included in fourteen of the sixteen collections researched. The prominence given to this poem in the anthologies, all of them dedicated specifically to Irish writing and therefore espousing, to a greater or lesser extent, some form of a Hibernocentric approach to literary and cultural history, seems to indicate that the "Lament" is meant to be read not only in private terms, as an expression of Ferguson's personal homage to Davis, but also in a broader public, and indeed political context: surrounded as it tends to be in most of the anthologies by poems testifying to Ferguson's commitment to the Romantic idea of cultural nationalism, "Lament for the Death of Thomas Davis" begins to sound almost like a declaration of allegiance, linking Ferguson to the ideological, cultural, and indeed political tradition leading from Davis and Mangan to the early Yeats. In a paradoxical reversal of what critics like David Lloyd and Terry Eagleton have described as Ferguson's participation in the process of the appropriation of the ancient Gaelic civilization of Ireland by the colonizing forces of Anglophone Protestant imperialism, the anthologies present the work of Ferguson primarily in the context of Irish nationalist discourse. This approach may not be entirely unjustified perhaps given Ferguson's own complex ideological position in the ambivalent and highly nuanced world of mid- and late-nineteenth-century Irish cultural politics, but it is nonetheless easily misinterpreted in the context of the rather more dichotomous ideological and political discourse of twentieth-, and indeed twenty-first-century Ireland. A modern reader discovering Ferguson through anthologies, and unaware of his background, heritage, and public career, could easily be forgiven for adopting a view of his poetry that, considered in the broader

context of his work, could well be seen as unbalanced and biased, a product of a subtle form of cultural manipulation and indeed appropriation.

The nature of this manipulation becomes clear when we consider the works of Ferguson which are excluded from the anthologies, or which are included in them only occasionally. It is of course important to accept that anthology selections cannot always be fully representative, and have to take into consideration the aesthetic qualities of the works selected as much as their historical, political, or cultural significance—in the context of Ferguson, it would be difficult to blame anthology editors for rejecting the ideologically significant but artistically questionable poems from “An Irish Garland,” or indeed the rather old-fashioned and overly topical “Dublin.” It is much more surprising, however, to realize that only four of the anthologies, none of them, interestingly, published before 1950, reprint “The Forging of the Anchor”—not only one of the most popular of Ferguson’s early poems during his lifetime, but indeed the most direct expression, in his poetry, of the dynamism and energy of the 1830s, its enthusiastic celebration of modernity and progress standing in dramatic contrast to the much more restrained tone of his later writings. It is difficult to resist the impression that the sheer intensity of the poem, with the industrial setting of what can be assumed to be modern Belfast standing in dramatic contrast with the near-timelessness of the world of Gaelic Ireland evoked in his later antiquarian writings, does not fit in with the essentially traditionalist image of Ferguson evoked elsewhere in the anthologies.

It is, however, in relation to another poem, or rather pair of poems, that the bias of nearly all modern anthologists of Irish poetry becomes self-evident. Only two of the sixteen anthologies researched for the purposes of this study (and, significantly, both of them published only over the last twenty-five years) reprint one of the last, and yet one of the most powerful, of Ferguson’s poems, “At the Polo-Ground,” and none of them finds room for its companion piece, “In Carey’s Footsteps.” Rather more ambitious on the formal level than most of Ferguson’s works, in adapting the Browningsesque model of the dramatic monologue for the purposes of topical commentary on the Phoenix Park murders of 1882, the two poems offer a powerful analysis of the complex ideological, social, moral, and psychological aspects of the phenomenon of political terrorism, as significant for late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers as they were in the late-nineteenth century, in the British Isles as much as in Continental Europe and beyond. To the contemporary reader, the two poems are perhaps among the most interesting, and indeed the most disturbing, of Ferguson’s works—and yet it is, it seems, this very modern tone of the poems, their explicit engagement with the complex socio-political reality of modern Ireland, and their unambiguous adoption of a particular political

standpoint, that must have proved uncomfortable to the pre-1980s anthology editors, as they fundamentally undermine the received popular perception of Ferguson as a conventional late-Romantic nationalist antiquarian, uncontroversial and respectable but at the same time rather insipid and increasingly outdated, and likely to be of interest to academic critics rather than to the general reader. Ferguson's interpretation of the Phoenix Park conspiracy (and by extension, of the more radical forms of Irish nationalism) as motivated by a combination of greed, envy and moral cowardice, stands in direct contrast to the idealized vision of the Irish revolutionary tradition which shaped much of the Irish cultural and political discourse from the late nineteenth century until relatively recent times; as a result, "At the Polo-Ground" and "In Carey's Footsteps" show the poet to be a far more complex, far more interesting and indeed far more controversial thinker than he is generally credited to be, but also as one who seems to no longer fit into the conventional grand narrative of nineteenth-century Irish nationalism which remains one of the defining myths of modern Irish identity—or rather, as one who would no longer fit into that narrative if the two poems were more easily available, and in consequence more widely known, than on the evidence of the material discussed in this paper they appear to have been. In consequence, then, it is difficult to resist the impression that the near-universal eradication of the Phoenix Park poems from the world of popular imagination that has resulted from the consistent exclusion of them from the great majority of modern anthologies of Irish poetry is in fact a form of ideologically motivated manipulation of the image of Sir Samuel Ferguson, aimed at maintaining a particular image of his contribution to modern Irish culture, an image that is incomplete and consequently unbalanced. If this is indeed the case, then there is perhaps all the more reason for trying to retrieve his work from the relative obscurity into which much of it has now settled; it is, perhaps, time to ensure that the full range of his *œuvre*, in all its diversity and complexity, becomes easily available not only to the academic audience, but also to the general reader.

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Recalling All the Olympians:  
W. B. Yeats's "Beautiful Lofty Things,"  
*On the Boiler* and the Agenda of  
National Rebirth<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

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While it has been omitted by numerous critics in their otherwise comprehensive readings of Yeats's *oeuvre*, "Beautiful Lofty Things" has been placed among the mythical poems, partly in accordance with Yeats's own intention; in a letter to his wife, he suggested that "Lapis Lazuli, the poem called 'To D. W. 'Beautiful Lofty Things,' 'Imitated from the Japanese' & 'Gyres' . . . would go well together in a bunch." The poem has been inscribed in the Yeats canon as registering a series of fleeting epiphanies of the mythical in the mundane. However, "Beautiful Lofty Things," evocative of a characteristically Yeatsian employment of myth though it certainly is, seems at the same time to fuse Yeats's quite earthly preoccupations. It is here argued that the poem is organized around a tightly woven matrix of figures that comprise Yeats's idea of the Irish nation as a "poetical culture." Thus the position of the lyric in the poet's *oeuvre* deserves to be shifted from periphery towards an inner part of his cultural and political ideas of the time. Indeed, the poem can be viewed as one of Yeats's central late comments on the state of the nation and, significantly, one in which he is able to proffer a humanist strategy for developing a culturally modern state rather than miring his argument in occasionally over-reckless display of abhorrence of modernity.

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## ABSTRACT

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Published in the 1938 edition of *New Poems*, “Beautiful Lofty Things” has never been awarded a place among W. B. Yeats’s prime achievements. The poem is often only briefly mentioned as a supporting piece to the better-known elegy “The Municipal Gallery Revisited” that comes as the penultimate poem in the volume and has compelled more critical attention. While it has been omitted by numerous critics in their otherwise comprehensive readings of Yeats’s *oeuvre* (it is not mentioned in Ellmann, Brown or Foster), “Beautiful Lofty Things” has been placed among the mythical poems, partly in accordance with Yeats’s own intention; in a letter to his wife, he suggested that “Lapis Lazuli, the poem called ‘To D. W.’ ‘Beautiful Lofty Things,’ ‘Imitated from the Japanese’ & ‘Gyres’ . . . would go well together in a bunch” (Yeats and George Yeats 479). The poem has indeed been inscribed in the Yeats canon as registering a series of fleeting epiphanies of the mythical in the mundane (Vendler 354). However, “Beautiful Lofty Things,” evocative of a characteristically Yeatsian employment of myth though it certainly is, seems at the same time to fuse Yeats’s quite earthly preoccupations. It is here argued that the poem is organized around a tightly woven matrix of figures that comprise Yeats’s idea of the Irish nation as possessed of “poetical culture,” an ability to understand and follow the subtle beauty of language (*Autobiographies* 118). Thus the position of the lyric in the poet’s *oeuvre* deserves to be shifted from periphery towards an inner part of his cultural and political ideas of the time. Indeed, the poem can be viewed as one of Yeats’s central late comments on the state of the nation and, significantly, one in which he is able to proffer a humanist strategy for developing a culturally modern state rather than miring his argument in occasionally over-reckless display of abhorrence of modernity.

“Beautiful Lofty Things” has been shown to have been contemporary with the writing of “General Introduction for my Work” that Yeats worked on since spring 1937 for the projected “Edition Deluxe” of his collected works (Jeffares 460). Having finished his intensive revisions of the Introduction by mid October 1937 (Yeats, *Later Essays* 484), Yeats had recalled many of his earliest memories; in the Introduction he briefly discusses the influence of O’Leary, “His long imprisonment, his longer banishment, his magnificent head, his scholarship, his pride, his integrity” (*Later Essays* 205), O’Grady and his “extravagance” (*Later Essays* 206) and Lady Gregory’s “heroic legends” (*Later Essays* 207) on his own poetry and on the shaping of Irish culture in general. The laudatory phrasing of his descriptions in the Introduction evokes the tonal quality of “Beautiful Lofty

Things.” In view of that similarity the poem’s composition date could be set on the period following the thematically related “The Municipal Gallery Revisited” that was finished by September 1937 (Yeats, *Letters* 897; Foster, *Arch-Poet* 596; Jeffares 482) and the final corrections of the Introduction. The process of writing the poem therefore coincides with Yeats’s renewed concentration on the social and political state of Ireland and the Western world in general. It was between December 1937 and late January 1938 that Yeats devoted himself to writing down his long-pondered appraisal of the young Republic, which resulted in the infamous *On the Boiler* that was published posthumously in autumn 1939 by The Cuala Press together with several poems and the play *Purgatory*.

In the pamphlet, which he planned as the first in a series to be modelled on John Ruskin’s *Fors Clavigera*, Yeats wanted to “curse my enemies and bless my friends. My enemies will hit back, and that will give me the joy of answering them” (*Letters* 900). The pamphlet proved of immediate importance to Yeats, who read and discussed it with unflagging zeal. At one time, as John Kelly reports, having finished reading from it to Lady Elizabeth Pelham and her sister, he “remains talking for five-and-a-half hours” (308). Despite such enthusiasm, he knew full well that should he “lay aside the pleasant paths I have built up for years and seek the brutality, the ill breeding, the barbarism of truth,” he would estrange many a friend, as he confessed in a letter to Ethel Mannin, “Half my friends may never speak to me when it comes out” (*Letters* 903, 914). There is universal agreement among critics as to two things concerning *On the Boiler*. Firstly, its harangues against masses and support of eugenics reached an unparalleled pitch among the poet’s writings, although the tone may have been so barbaric not only due to Yeats’s violent opposition to modernity but also to his desire to boost sales in order to help the always nearly insolvent Cuala (Foster, *Arch-Poet* 612). Secondly, when read in a broader context of Yeats’s output, the ideas of *On the Boiler* seem less shocking than the violent language in which they are set down; moreover, in no way does the pamphlet express any approval of either Fascists or, for that matter, Communists, both of whom are inveighed against as much as the democratic politician, for, as Yeats mockingly put it, “any hale man can dig or march” (*Later Essays* 230; see also Cullingford 117).

For Yeats, the principal problem of modern Ireland is the proliferation of the unskilled and “unintelligent classes” (*Later Essays* 232). Therefore according to the poet, the fact that everybody is allowed to marry whom-ever they desire has resulted in the general debilitation of the race,

For now by our too much facility in this kind, in giving way for all to marry that will, too much liberty and indulgence in tolerating all sorts,



there is a vast confusion of hereditary diseases, no family secure, no man almost free from some grievous infirmity or other. (*Later Essays* 228)

Because of the laxity in marriage law, and especially in permitting the Ascendancy to intermarry with peasants, “it comes to pass that our generation is corrupt, we have many weak persons, both in body and in mind” (*Later Essays* 228). In order to tackle the insidious degeneration Yeats urges his particular version of eugenic family planning. He believes that only in such a way can the crisis be prevented and a new civilization may come, literally treading on the bones of the present one. His condemnation of the contemporary Irish as bodily and intellectually feeble takes its most radical form when, led by his abhorrence of the “docile masses,” he asserts that “[t]he danger is that there will be no war, that the skilled will attempt nothing, that the European civilisation, like those older civilisations that saw the triumph of their gangrel stocks, will accept decay” (*Later Essays* 213). It may be observed, after Donald Torchiana who tries to alleviate the horrific implications that the pamphlet must stir in the reader, that Yeats’s trenchant criticism of the contemporary society, especially in Ireland, derives from his long-held belief in “[a]ble men, a unified Ireland, a country based on the soil, the intellectual and literary contributions of famous men” (Torchiana 343). It may thus be argued that the poet radicalizes his anticipation of the collapse of civilization that he brilliantly evoked in “The Second Coming” and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.” As a result, in the context of his other writings, Yeats’s stance, though incredibly anti-humanist at times, appears significantly less shocking.

However, in *On the Boiler*, Yeats seeks not only to give vent to his fury at what he deems to be the deterioration of modern society but also proposes an agenda of changes to remedy the situation. Apart from the compulsory acceptance of eugenics, Yeats focuses on education. What may be surprising is that he no longer recommends that the entire nation be taught, like he did for many years. Now it is only the select few that must be schooled to be prepared for taking over the country’s leadership. Yeats advises that “nothing but Greek, Gaelic, mathematics, and perhaps one modern language” (*Later Essays* 239) should be taught at schools, while “those pleasant easy things” like English, history, and geography “should be taught by father and mother” (*Later Essays* 241). This is a marked change in Yeats’s conception of nationalism, for he no longer believes that even reading and writing ought to be generally learnt as forcing them “on those who wanted neither was a worst part of the violence which for two centuries has been creating that hell wherein we suffer” (*Later Essays* 223). Whereas in the past he used to insist time and time again that the path to an independent Ireland lay in the revival of the myths and legends of the

heroic period among the people that could offer them a model to follow, in the late 1930s

Yeats seems resigned to the loss of peasant culture, and his program for education is a way to regain the benefits that he saw derived from a close connection with the earth. Education then can partner with eugenics to represent the balance in a new form of cultural nationalism. (McKenna 86)

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It is the new breed of “men of action” that are to espouse the rebirth of civilization, “not from a void, but out of our rich experience” (*Later Essays* 238). The richness of experience is a running theme throughout Yeats’s writings on nationalism and culture. For him, such wealth can be won from literature, which in the future is bound to become the unifying centre of the nation and, like the Abbey Theatre has already done in some measure, will take “the place of political speakers . . . in holding together the twenty scattered millions conscious of their Irish blood” (*Later Essays* 225). Similarly to the early essay “Symbolism of Poetry,” where Yeats suggested that the nation’s culture is created and held together by art (*Early Essays* 116), in *On the Boiler* it is literature, particularly poetry and drama wrought to the utmost limits of “tragic ecstasy” (*Later Essays* 226), that is to help the Irish civilization of able few “retain unity of being, mother-wit expressed in its perfection” (*Later Essays* 234). The delineation of the idea of unity of being, which appears by name only once in *On the Boiler* but which underlies the entire argument of the pamphlet, goes back to its first appearance in print at the end of “If I were Four-and-Twenty,”<sup>2</sup> where Yeats also promotes eugenic ideas, stating at the end that, “I would begin another epoch by recommending to the Nation a new doctrine, that of unity of being” (*Later Essays* 46).

The doctrine of unity of being returns several times in Yeats’s writings but perhaps most tellingly in *Autobiographies* where he reminisces that “I thought that in man and race alike there is something called ‘Unity of Being,’ using the term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the *Convito* to a perfectly proportioned human body” (164). In his occult treatise *A Vision* unity of being becomes one of ruling concepts. Yeats explains that “He who attains Unity of Being is some man, who, while struggling with his fate and his destiny until every energy of his being has been roused, is content that he should so struggle with no final conquest” (*Vision* 28); it is the realization that man’s struggle with fate is doomed to

<sup>2</sup> With a hindsight it turns out that the term first appeared in the automatic script that Yeats and his wife George worked on ever since the beginning of their marriage. The entry that mentions it is for 13 September 1918 (see also Mills Harper 302).

failure that creates the necessary conditions for the attainment of the highest passionate ideal and so “the greatest beauty of literary style becomes possible” (*Vision* 61). Such a passionate ideal that represents a momentary apprehension of unity of being may be traced in lots of Yeats’s poems from “An Irish Airman Foresees his Death,” both Byzantium poems and “Among School Children” to “The Statues.” It is in the last one, written just a few months after *On the Boiler*, that the “formless spawning fury” (Yeats, *Variorum* 611) may be taken to represent fall from unity of being that Ireland has suffered along with the whole world. The image of degradation, evoked in *On the Boiler* (*Later Essays* 249), is deeply rooted in Yeats’s poetry, relating primarily to “That insolent fiend Robert Artison” from “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” who “lurches past, his great eyes without thought” (*Variorum* 433). In the poem, according to Michael Wood’s thorough reading, Yeats “tells two stories, the first about loss, the second about the folly of our believing we ever had what he think we have lost” (Wood 36); it is the latter that seems more troubling, for in it Yeats laments the entire Western world, himself included, “a now-defunct club to which anyone who was wrong about the world can claim to have belonged” (Wood 43). In this light, a reference to “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” serves to further emphasize the fact that the poet of “The Statues” counts himself complicit in the crime of submitting to the “formless spawning fury.” Yet, he also asserts at the end that “We Irish . . . // Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace / The lineaments of a plummet-measured face” (*Variorum* 611). The reclamation of the ideal passionate state is only possible in art, particularly poetry, as Yeats explains in section V of “Under Ben Bulben,” the most famous of poems directly referable to *On the Boiler*:

Irish poets, learn your trade,  
Sing whatever is well made,  
Scorn the sort now growing up  
All out of shape from toe to top,  
Their unremembering hearts and heads  
Base-born products of base beds. (*Variorum* 639)

Only provided Irish poets manage to revive the ancient passionate and tragic art, can unity of being be regained. In the same section of “Under Ben Bulben,” more directly didactic, for all its sheer abomination of the contemporary world, than “The Statues,” the poet underlines the key features of the now-tarnished ideal, demanding that the lyricists to come:

Sing the peasantry, and then  
Hard-riding country gentlemen,

The holiness of monks, and after  
 Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;  
 Sing the lords and ladies gay  
 That were beaten into the clay  
 Through seven heroic centuries. (*Variorum* 639–40)

The motifs enumerated in “Under Ben Bulben” have obviously been employed throughout Yeats’s work, from the earliest lyrics of *Crossways* all the way to “Cuchulain Comforted” that he revised literally on his deathbed. It is especially the peasantry, “Hard-riding country gentlemen” and “the lords and ladies gay” that constitute for Yeats the perfect embodiments of unity of being due to their ability to fuse all the yearnings and ambitions into a single tragic and passionate expression.

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Throughout his *oeuvre*, Yeats focused on several figures from among his immediate friends and associates to fashion them into figures of unity of being. The best-known examples are “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory,” “Easter 1916,” in spite of its somewhat problematic nature due to the poet’s ambiguity of the presentation of the rebels that Maud Gonne called neither “sincere enough” nor “worthy of the subject” (Gonne and Yeats 384), and “The Municipal Gallery Revisited.” Each of these lyrics evokes a certain aspect of unity of being that is identified in the person conjured up. Thus Robert Gregory, depicted as a larger than life character with a propensity for recklessness, displays an aristocratic audacity and defiance of danger that make the speaker wonder “What made us dream that he would comb grey hair?” (*Variorum* 327); while in “The Municipal Gallery Revisited” the focus of stanza VI is directed onto the nobleman, the peasant and, obliquely, the artist, here represented by a composite-figure of “John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory.” Yeats stresses that all that an artist does “Must come from contact with the soil, from that / Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong” (*Variorum* 603). Therefore what these poems have in common is their insistence that there were among Irishmen and women of the time people who embodied some aspects of unity of being and it is they who should have been popularly accepted as central figures in a nationwide cultural revolution. According to Yeats, the eventual failure to mould the cultural life of Ireland in accordance with the standards set up by passionate ideals such as Lady Gregory, her son (despite the fact that he was incorporated into the clique of passionate men only after his death; when alive, Robert Gregory would occasionally take issue with Yeats over his proprietorial approach to Coole Park) or John Synge resulted in the deterioration of the nation that he exposes and rages against in *On the Boiler*.

Composed when Yeats was at his most truculent and bellicose, “Beautiful Lofty Things” might have been an attempt to recall the past when the

glorious rebirth of the nation was still feasible; or to escape the rancour that the poet was unleashing in himself towards the end of 1937, which would not be an unheard-of example of vacillation between love and hate on his part. Similarly, the poem's mood and tone alter radically from line to line, ostensibly in response to the variety of characters that the compact lyric tries to put forth. No other lyric in the entire Yeats *oeuvre* is so packed with names of people who played an outstanding role in shaping his cultural ideals. It is by the very choice of the five characters whose images comprise the poem that Yeats puts his idea of a passionate society at the forefront.

The opening line introduces the figure of John O'Leary, the Fenian leader who was Yeats's mentor ever since their meeting in 1885. In the poem, it is only "O'Leary's noble head" (*Variorum* 577, l. 1) that is conjured up. This homage-toned invocation may be due to the fact that Yeats associated him with exquisite beauty (*Autobiographies* 100) and "Roman virtue" (*Autobiographies* 177; *Memoirs* 42), as Ross has suggested (53). However, the statuesque image of O'Leary may also derive from an attempt to fashion him as an exemplary figure that represented the perfect political leader, "courteous and noble in demeanour" (Brown 29) and a gifted scholar who "had great numbers of books, especially of Irish history and literature" (Yeats, *Autobiographies* 177). Moreover, the sculpture-like image transports O'Leary from the earthly plane in which he failed to assert his ideals, in the words of "September 1913": "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone, / It's with O'Leary in the grave" (*Variorum* 289), to the level of perfected image like the "plummet-measured face" of "The Statues." Thus O'Leary is shown as an embodiment of unity of being that can inspire the whole nation to labour to achieve similar nobility. Furthermore, O'Leary's bust summons the hopes of the unity of culture that the country could attain "if [it] had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism, a European pose" (Yeats, *Autobiographies* 105). By the 1930s Yeats had long realized that the notion would never come true and, as has been argued above, it was in *On the Boiler* that he trumpeted his disillusionment with that early ideal. Still, in "Beautiful Lofty Things" the image of O'Leary helps the poet revive those long-gone thoughts of a national unity of being to be achieved via a unity of culture.

The poet leaves this brief evocation of O'Leary to go on to a memory of his father, John Butler Yeats, and, indirectly, of J. M. Synge. The scene that Yeats calls to mind in the best imagist fashion, no prolixity admitted, is the speech his father delivered in defence of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* when "no man in all literary Dublin dared show his face" (Yeats, *Autobiographies* 356). The play opened on 26 January 1907 and immediately

incited riots and protests among people on the grounds of immorality and indecent portrayal of Irish women (Foster, *Apprentice Mage* 360–61).

My father upon the Abbey stage, before him a raging crowd:  
 “This Land of Saints,” and then as the applause died out,  
 “Of plaster Saints”; his beautiful mischievous head thrown back. (ll. 2–4)

In the poem, the transition from the late 1880s to 1907 is instantaneous but in life the twenty-odd years marked a change in Yeats’s attitude and demeanour, as Ellmann puts it, “he became a terrible man in combat” (179) and he fought for Synge unwaveringly. In his speech during the meeting of 4 February, the same in which his father spoke the line repeated in “Beautiful Lofty Things,” Yeats maintained that the generation of artists that Synge and himself represented “wish again for individual sincerity, the eternal quest of truth” (qtd. in Foster, *Apprentice Mage* 365). His determination to assert that Synge’s *Playboy* was a masterpiece was partly motivated by the idea that true critical literature should expose the provincialism of Irish mentality, thereby bringing the country closer to Europe. It is this point that the image of J. B. Yeats in the poem seems also to evoke. Yet the poet is careful to capture not only the mischief that his father displayed but also the impassioned intensity, what J. B. Yeats in a letter to his son once called “distinction and rarity of feeling” (1). In *Autobiographies*, Yeats recalls that “at breakfast [his father] read passages from the poets, and always from the play or poem at its most passionate moment” (80). It is in such a passionate moment that J. B. Yeats is captured in the poem. By perfectly calculating the highest point of mischievous intensity Yeats creates another image of passionate unity of being that is fleetingly achieved by his father. The “raging crowd” is deprived of any clearly negative qualification, unlike in many of his other writings of the time. Rather than through an acrimonious attack, in the poem the people’s provincialism and lack of education are exposed by being set against a skilfully arranged image of artistic sovereignty and superiority.

In this way, the passage plays a subtle variation on the much earlier “On those that Hated ‘The Playboy of the Western World,’ 1907,” where the speaker says, “Eunuch ran through Hell and met / On every crowded street to stare / Upon great Juan riding by” (*Variorum* 294). In a letter to Lady Gregory, Yeats mentioned that “I wrote a note a couple of days ago in which I compared [Arthur] Griffith and his like to the Eunuchs in [Charles] Rickett’s picture watching Don Juan riding through Hell” (*Letters* 525). Back in 1909, that mockery of the founder of the *United Irishman* and its later successor *Sinn Fein* and the future president of the Republic of Ireland was an extension of a long dispute that Yeats engaged

in with Griffith. Writing to Lady Gregory of his literary ideals several years before the *Playboy* riots, Yeats observed that Griffith and himself supported divergent policies: “[Griffith’s] that literature should be subordinate to nationalism, and mine that it must have its own ideal” (*Letters* 422). This context shows that the evocation of J. B. Yeats defending Synge’s play in “Beautiful Lofty Things” seeks to restate that aesthetic position. The embodiment of an artist at his most intense (see J. B. Yeats 4) re-asserts the absolute primacy of art in the formation of an unbiased society.

In the poem, J. B. Yeats’s passionate challenge to the intellectually-calcified Irish crowd evokes by analogy Standish O’Grady’s speech at the end of a dinner organized by the *Daily Express* (Foster, *Apprentice Mage* 211–12). A famous historian of ancient Ireland and author of the influential histories of the Irish heroic period, O’Grady comes as an embodiment of a scholar whose knowledge opens new fields of inspiration before the creative artist. It was O’Grady’s *History of Ireland*, along with selections from the poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson and James Clarence Mangan, that Yeats intended as the vital books to be re-published so as to further the process of cultural unification of the country that the poet took on himself in the early 1890s (*Autobiographies* 296). However, the invocation of O’Grady’s “high nonsensical words” (l. 6) in “Beautiful Lofty Things” indicates a marked change in both the attitude and tone of the poem. So far rather deferential to the figures of passion and authority from the past, the speaker’s voice now registers bitterness and an admission of incipient failure of what, in reference to O’Grady’s retelling of the Cuchulain cycle of legends, Yeats called the “heroic ideal” (*Wheels and Butterflies* 70). This transition from political nobility and artistic mischief to scholarly disenchantment informs the development of the poem as much as the last thirty years of the poet’s life, at least as he saw it in late 1937. The initial hopes that he would manage to create a unified culture gathered about “A little lyric [that] evokes an emotion . . . and melts into their being in the making of some great epic” (*Early Essays* 116) slowly faded, as the elites capable of composing such “little lyrics” eventually passed away. What Yeats was left with was his “philosophical mind” (*Later Essays* 233) that increasingly often saw reeling shadows of “indignant desert birds” (*Variorum* 402).

O’Grady’s bitterness at the failure of the heroic ideal and indignation at the erosion of landlords’ importance (see Yeats, *Autobiographies* 314–15) leads the poet’s thoughts to Augusta Gregory. This is another attempt at pitching an ideal figure against what he would scathingly call “this filthy modern tide” in “The Statues.” Lady Gregory’s importance to Yeats cannot be overstated, as he confessed in his *Memoirs*, “She has been to me mother, friend, sister and brother” (*Memoirs* 160–61), adding in the later *Autobiographies* that when she showed him her translations of the



Cuchulain stories in 1901 “all in a moment, as it seemed, she became the founder of modern Irish dialect literature” (*Autobiographies* 335). A devoted helper and an artistic partner, she was a living embodiment of Yeats’s hopes harboured all the way until *On the Boiler* of what the new, restocked ascendancy should become in the future. The poem evokes a dispute that she engaged in with one of her tenants:

Augusta Gregory seated at her great ormolu table,  
Her eightieth winter approaching: “Yesterday he threatened my life.  
I told him that nightly from six to seven I sat at this table,  
The blinds drawn up” . . . (ll. 7–10)

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Lady Gregory described the episode in her journal, “When one of my tenants threatened me with violence, I showed him how easy it would be to shoot me through the unshuttered window of this room. I told him that nightly from six to seven I sat at this table” (Gregory 337). She dates that event on 10 April 1922, which would suggest that Yeats was imprecise, putting her age at eighty in the poem, while she was in fact seventy. Yet, it may not have been so much an example of blatantly fallible memory of a man who at his most vengeful professed that “Now . . . I live in the past” (*Later Essays* 233), as his deliberate wish to emphasize the fact that Gregory managed to retain her equipoise even in the throes of breast cancer and only days before her death. It is probable that Yeats would have used a different moment from Gregory’s extraordinary life had she decided to send him a note she jotted down in February 1931 when she thought her end was close:

I don’t feel very well this morning, rather faint once or twice—It may be that the time has come for me to slip away—& that may be as well—for my strength has been ebbing of late—& I don’t want to become a burden or give trouble. (qtd. in Foster, *Arch-Poet* 437)

Nine days after her death, writing to another of his life-long friends Olivia Shakespear, Yeats confided, “She was her indomitable self to the last but of that I will not write, or not now” (*Letters* 795). Indeed, in the weeks following Gregory’s demise he found himself unprecedentedly “barren; I had nothing in my head. . . . Perhaps Coole Park . . . when it was shut, shut me out from my theme; or did the subconscious drama that was my imaginative life end with its owner?” (*Variorum* 855). With a figure of such prominence in his life there could have been no simple error in dating.

Whether or not Yeats chose to make Lady Gregory older in the episode that he focuses on in “Beautiful Lofty Things,” the image of the senile



woman, remaining “her indomitable self to the last,” speaks powerfully in the poem. After the bitterness, it seems, dignity returns. However, it is dignity on the verge of disappearance. The conflation of Gregory’s final days with the danger-defying pride that she displayed on various occasions prior to her illness brings Yeats to his erstwhile muse, the last figure to be named a beautiful lofty thing:<sup>3</sup> “Maud Gonne at Howth station waiting a train, / Pallas Athene in that straight back and arrogant head” (ll. 10–11). Maud Gonne’s record in the poem harks back to her walk with the poet at Howth where, most likely on 4 August 1891 (Kelly 22), he first proposed to her and was rejected (Jeffares 462; see also Brown 51). It is the only time in Yeats’s *oeuvre* that he conjures up Gonne by name, rather than referring to her through the mythical figure of Helen of Troy or the poet’s nameless beloved. There is also a vital change in his attitude to her. No longer besotted as in the days of the proposal alluded to in the poem, Yeats depicts Gonne with unmistakable appreciation, verging on extolment, but also at a distance, solitary and remote “waiting a train.” This is the poet who has already exorcized Gonne’s demonic haunting, which seems to be an underlying motif in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, and can appraise her almost dispassionately. There is still the old fury lying dormant inside the statuesque figure but now Gonne seems tamer and more reasonable, Pallas Athene having replaced the symbolic Helen of “A Prayer for My Daughter” who has eaten “A crazy salad with [her] meat / Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone” (*Variorum* 404).

Significantly enough, Gonne is stripped of all her fanaticism, “one-ideal’ness” as she herself called it in her autobiography (124), and unaccompanied by those for whom she exerted herself so tirelessly and without complaint, “Yet never have I, now nor any time, / Complained of the people” (*Variorum* 352). Yeats attempts to freeze Gonne in a mythical moment before her nearly divine beauty has been squandered in futile political struggles. Beautiful and mysterious like Helen of “No Second Troy” (Hassett 68), it is the perfect muse who stands at Howth station both on 4 August 1891 remembered by the aged man and in the timeless moment of the poem, one thinks of an inflection to the famous “now and in time to be.” Gonne is therefore inscribed in the mythical plane of poetry, she is “set upon the golden bough” or like the Chinamen, staring “On all the tragic scene” (*Variorum* 567), who are gay “not just because they are ancient and up high . . . but also because they are in art—literally—rather

<sup>3</sup> In “A Crazy Girl,” which in *New Poems* directly followed “Beautiful Lofty Things,” Margot Ruddock, whom the poem celebrates (Hassett 178–79), is also declared “A beautiful lofty thing” (*Variorum* 578) but in this case the effect bears none of the emotional and intellectual complex of the earlier lyric.

than in life” (Bell 108). In this way, Yeats turns her into an image of inspiration and, at the same time, a finished symbol of poetic achievement; she is recorded in a moment of unity of being and herself becomes a symbolic representation of the “little lyric” that could gather the people and lead them to form “some great epic.” In the poem, Yeats tries to rework the past, making Gonne become the unifying aristocratic figure in line with the frenetic appreciation he wrote in a letter to her when he learnt that she was to marry John MacBride, “You possess your influence in Ireland very largely because you come to the people from above. You represent a superior class, a class whose people are more independent, have a more beautiful life, a more refined life” (Gonne and Yeats 165). Despite the fact she declined his proposal in 1891 and on several other occasions, for “there were reasons—she would never marry” (Yeats, *Memoirs* 46), Yeats sees in that potent moment from the past a germ of possibility that was eventually lost but for a while seemed like a chance for all his youthful dreams to come true.

A noble politician, two fearless, mischievous artists, an enraged and bitter scholar, a dignified landlady and a perfect beauty—this is the matrix of survival that Yeats proffers against the debilitation of the best stocks not only of Irishmen and women but also of the whole Europe. The eugenic programme that he so vehemently promoted in *On the Boiler* but considered deeply throughout his writing life (Childs 170), when it is seen against the context of “Beautiful Lofty Things,” seems to respond to the celebratory and simultaneously disappointed last line of the poem: “All the Olympians; a thing never known again” (l. 12). The ending of the poem emphasizes Ireland’s unprecedented fortune of having had such outstanding figures work for it all at the same time. Read in the light of *On the Boiler*, the poem voices a coherent agenda for both preserving what is best in the Irish nation and developing it into a powerful unified country in the future. The five figures, as embodiments of unity of being in their most intense moments that are recorded in the poem, focus on what ideals ought to be promoted. This positive message of “Beautiful Lofty Things” stands at odds with the dissatisfied “wild old wicked man” of the pamphlet and its companion piece *Purgatory*; instead of the unfortunate inroads into eugenics that by the late 1930s was in decline, evocative as it was of “new Nazi-inspired images of racial tyranny” (Soloway 72), in the poem Yeats focuses on what he knows to have been the ideals that at one time promised freedom and prosperity but can now be recalled like the gods and fighting men that once proved so important to a budding lyricist.

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# **REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS**

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A Review of Christina M.  
Gschwandtner's *Postmodern  
Apologetics? Arguments for God in  
Contemporary Philosophy*  
(New York: Fordham UP, 2013)

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Gschwandtner begins by warning that the two “loaded” terms found in the title (*postmodernism* and *apologetics*) are, for many, incompatible. If *apologetics* is, as she contends, a “militant defense” of Christian beliefs (or at least of the existence of a monotheistic God), and *postmodernism* a “militant rejection” of any such worldview, how then can the two be reconciled? What’s more, of the twelve twentieth-century philosophers covered in the book’s thirteen chapters, how many could rightly be characterized as either postmodernists or apologists, let alone both?

These are the questions that Gschwandtner opens with. If the reader maintains a second-century view of apologetics and a 1960s view of postmodernism, these questions will remain unanswered. If, however, we stretch our understanding of apologetics to the exploration and justification of faith within contemporary thought, and limit our understanding of postmodernism to skepticism towards metanarratives (and of objective, distanced truth claims), we see how the two may relate. And, on these terms, they do.

*Postmodern Apologetics?* is a compelling study of how twentieth-century philosophy stemming from the phenomenological tradition has impacted on, and enabled, contemporary trends within philosophy of religion. The book is in three parts: “Preparations,” “Expositions” and “Appropriations.” Part 1 (“Preparations”) outlines the foundational contributions of three major thinkers: Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida. While often characterized by their ambivalence towards theological questions and concerns within their *oeuvres*, these three philosophers are seen by Gschwandtner to have set the groundwork for contemporary debates on both religious experience and religious language. Part 2 (“Expositions”) considers how

the phenomenological ideals identified in Part 1 were expounded upon by a variety of contemporary French thinkers, ranging from the late Paul Ricoeur to Emmanuel Falque. Part 3 (“Appropriations”) tracks how key aspects of twentieth-century continental philosophy have recently been appropriated by three philosophers in the United States for the purpose of formulating a modern Christian *apologia*.

## PART 1: “PREPARATIONS”

The focal point of Part 1 is the commentary of Heidegger in the first chapter. Gschwandtner maintains that various aspects of Heidegger’s ontology set the phenomenological context in which all subsequent thinkers operated, “even when aspects of his thought were challenged” (38).

Gschwandtner begins by offering a précis of what she terms Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion. Her emphasis is placed on two fundamental concepts which would be seen to impact on the French and American based philosophers discussed in later chapters. The first of these is Heidegger’s understanding of *onto-theo-logy* as derived from his “deconstruction of the metaphysical tradition.” Here, Heidegger contends that ontology and theology had been problematically conflated from the very origins of metaphysics. By proposing a conceptual distancing of the two modes of thought, Heidegger is seen by Gschwandtner to have “opened a different way to speak about the divine” (30). This, in turn, has enabled much of the thinking of Marion and a host of other, more “religiously motivated,” theorists.

The second crucial concept, stemming from Heidegger’s hermeneutical writings, is his understanding of truth as *aletheia* (or “un-concealment”). Truth, in this respect, is seen as distinct from the objective, verifiable truth sought by the natural sciences. Though an often-neglected feature of Heidegger’s work, Gschwandtner correctly observes that his “existential” understanding of truth (and the concept of *meditative thinking* which follows from it) offers a basis for twentieth-century hermeneutical philosophy. This chapter discusses neither the romantic hermeneutical origins of this line of enquiry, nor how it was later developed by H. Gadamer. It does however convincingly argue that this is perhaps Heidegger’s greatest contribution to critical theory, underpinning the critiques of art laid out by Marion and Chrétien (33), and heavily informing Ricoeur’s conceptual distinction between “verification” and “manifestation” (34).

The remaining two chapters in this section outline the philosophies of Levinas and Derrida, and their contribution to religious thought. Due to the early emphasis placed on the legacy of Husserlian phenomenology,



the reader senses that these two theorists do not offer the same foundational contribution that Heidegger was seen to have. Indeed, as with the discussions in Part 2, much of the analysis of Levinas (and to a lesser extent Derrida) centers on the expansion and/or rejection of Heidegger's groundwork. Of particular interest in Chapter 2, however, is Gschwandtner's expansive commentary on Levinas's "critique of phenomenology," and how it engendered a new and lasting understanding of *alterity* (42-45).

## PART 2: "EXPOSITIONS"

Part 2 is comprised of seven chapters and examines the thought of six twentieth-century French philosophers: Ricoeur, Marion, Henry, Chrétien, Lacoste and Falque. Chapters 4 to 9 are each dedicated to a separate theorist, and follow a similar schema. Each chapter offers a short review of the philosopher's more religiously centered publications. Following this, Gschwandtner provides an in-depth analysis of how their work built upon the theoretical concepts from Part 1 in order to explore the nature and "viability" of religious experience (and its articulation within text, art and contemporary culture).

In line with the focus of this edition of *Text Matters*, let us consider in some detail Gschwandtner's chapter on Paul Ricoeur, entitled "A God of Poetry and Superabundance."

Chapter 4 begins with a general overview of Ricoeur's encounters with religious (or, rather, biblical) texts and criticism. While the chapter touches briefly on his publications from the 1960s on primary symbols (86-88), as well as his work on poetic discourse from the 1970s (88-90), the focus is placed squarely on Ricoeur's late autobiographical reflections from the 1990s, and particularly his analysis of the relationship between philosophy and religion (as presented in *Oneself as Another*, *Critique and Conviction* and *Living up to Death*).

This chapter proposes that Ricoeur's two main contributions to twentieth- and twenty-first-century Christian philosophy were his exploration of biblical discourse and his analysis of the division between *critique* and *conviction*. From his early corpus, Gschwandtner highlights Ricoeur's assertion that biblical language utilizes polyphonic and hyperbolic rhetoric in order to engender a new, revelatory, understanding of the text, God and the world: "Ricoeur calls it 'biblical polyphony' and insists that the multiple voices heard are important and should be homogenized into a single univocal voice. God is named in many ways and this naming is therefore complex and multi-faceted" (90-91).

From his later work, Gschwandtner reflects on Ricoeur's conceptual division between philosophy and theology. In the sub-section "A Controlled Schizophrenia" she examines the reasons why throughout his career Ricoeur maintained a "water-tight division" between his philosophical body of work and his biblical hermeneutics (96). Drawing upon his late autobiographical publications, Gschwandtner argues that Ricoeur came to recognize the stark "and in many ways false" opposition between philosophical analysis and theological reflection. This chapter concludes that Ricoeur was ultimately unable to "resolve the dichotomy" (101) between these two modes of thought. She however proposes that, through his exploration of the relationship between philosophical *critique* and religious *conviction*, Ricoeur provides a platform for contemporary theorists to better understand the nature of biblical discourse (as well as a non-positivist understanding of religious *Truth* which it elicits).

This chapter pursues two, perhaps incompatible, objectives. On the one hand, Gschwandtner seeks to offer an introduction to Ricoeur's weighty contributions to biblical theology. On the other, she is intent on breaking new ground, and exploring how his later publications may be used to augment his earlier understanding of truth as "manifestation."

As regards her first aim, Gschwandtner focuses on several particular facets of Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics, in lieu of offering a more superficial overview. As a result, she concentrates on his understanding of textual polyphony and "limit expressions." While her commentary on Ricoeur can be lauded for its clarity and concision, it fails to consider how Ricoeur's conceptual understanding of *biblical polyphony* and *parabolic limit expressions* derived from (and is wholly reliant upon) his non-religious/linguistic understanding of metaphor and metaphoric predication. This seems a notable omission, not least as the remainder of the chapter would presume a rigid conceptual separation between Ricoeur's religious and non-religious theories.

The second half of the chapter looks at the relevance of Ricoeur's autobiographical reflections and interviews (particularly those found in *Critique and Conviction*), which have garnered significant attention in recent years. Though the subjects of religious experience and religious truth were rarely the primary focus of Ricoeur's work, Gschwandtner ably demonstrates how Ricoeur's later publications can be used to expand the relevance of his earlier work in this direction.

### PART 3: "APPROPRIATIONS"

The third and final part of *Postmodern Apologetics?* focuses on three notable American Christian philosophers (Merold Westphal, J. D. Caputo

and Richard Kearney) who have, in recent years, adopted and popularized elements of the phenomenological tradition. Gschwandtner contends that, as the three are writing to a somewhat skeptical American readership, they are similarly driven to demonstrate the potential value of twentieth-century French philosophy to contemporary American Christian studies. These three chapters open by considering the centrality of Heideggerian ontology and Derridean deconstruction theory within the respective philosophies of Westphal, Caputo and Kearney. Gschwandtner goes on to establish that Westphal and Caputo, in particular, appropriate concepts prevalent within French thought in order to explore the problems of faith in a postmodern world.

This section ends by considering the deeply hermeneutical nature of contemporary continental philosophy of religion, as well as the “similarities and parallels” between the various projects presented in the book’s three parts. Notably, Gschwandtner maintains that, from Levinas to Caputo, there is a shared interest in the use of excessive or hyperbolic language as a means of articulating religious *Truth*:

The one thing almost all of these ways of speaking about the divine and religious experience have in common is that such experience is always depicted in superlative forms. It seems that a defense of faith or even a mere use of religious imagery automatically pushes language to the very limits. (287)

*Postmodern Apologetics?* succeeds as a general introduction to a number of the main theorists who have instigated, or informed, a wide range of debates within twentieth-century philosophy of religion. Questions remain as to whether the French and American philosophers selected share a coherent (or even connected) *apologetic* initiative. Nonetheless, Gschwandtner successfully demonstrates the legacy of the phenomenological tradition within their works, and how they relate to one another. Her argument that these philosophies share an underlying interest in the boundaries (and superlative expression) of religious experience is also a provocative one, and has important implications for contemporary hermeneutical scholarship.

# The Privilege to Write What You Want

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## Roddy Doyle Talks to Joanna Kosmalska<sup>1</sup>

(University of Łódź)

**JOANNA KOSMALSKA:** In some of your recent works you tackle the issues of migration. Tell me, have you ever lived outside Ireland?

**RODDY DOYLE:** Yes, I have. I spent five months in West Germany. I lived in London for several periods, which, added together, amounted to about a year. Later I went to New York for six months. When I was a student, I worked in Germany and London. The summers were very long. I would leave the day after the exams finished and I would come back, not on the day when college started, but on the day when you'd be struck off the register if you didn't turn up. Once, I left in early May and I came back in November.

**JK:** How about New York?

**RD:** In New York I was teaching in a college in Manhattan for a semester. I loved the city and I wouldn't mind spending more time there. We

stayed in the States right through the winter. It was spectacular. Although we did not get any hurricane, we experienced the snowfall, which we have had a bit now in Ireland for the last few years, but at that point me and my children would have never seen snow and that was a daily occurrence in New York in the wintertime. As for the teaching side of it, I had been a teacher for fourteen years, I had enjoyed it but I wouldn't like to be teaching all the time. Even though it was college teaching, so it was quite different, I don't think it would be a good move for me to go back into teaching. Just as a variety now and then. Besides, it gave me the excuse to live in New York, which was wonderful.

**JK:** Have you had a chance to visit Poland?

**RD:** I was in Poland in 1977. It was a long time ago. I was a geography student in UCD back then and it

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<sup>1</sup> This interview is a part of a literature project DEC-2011/01/B/HS2/05120 financed by the National Science Centre.

was a part of our programme. I travelled with a group of people on the bus. We went through West and East Germany into Poland, first across the country into Warsaw and then south to Wadowice, where the pope was born. It was a beautiful city.

**JK:** What were your first impressions?

**RD:** You have to bear in mind that I was visiting a Communist country or what was an attempt at a Communist country. I'd just come through Germany, and I'd been to East and West Berlin, so the differences were very stark. Really stark. One of the things that struck me immediately while driving through East Germany was how flat it all was, and how few divisions of land there were. Just vast areas, like one huge field. It may have made economic sense but it was all dreary to look at. It was so boring. Then we went to Poland and it also seemed flat, quite in contrast with my own country. No sea I could see anyway. Warsaw struck me at the time as a place that had been built in a hurry, which was true. The reconstruction works were going on at the time, but it was still a very new project. That was interesting itself. The Palace of Culture was like something taken out from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In fact, it may well have been. The couple of department stores that I went into were almost empty. Empty of variety. People queuing up outside

the shops. A lot of queues. A lot of vodka. People were friendly.

**JK:** Any second thoughts on the visit?

**RD:** My politics has always been to the left. What the visit had done when I came home and it all began to sink in was shape my beliefs. I was 18 when I went to Poland. By the time I turned 19 my political views were more precise and I wouldn't have considered myself a Communist. I didn't like what I saw after the Berlin Wall. I took a very keen interest in the Solidarity movement in the late 1980s. I kept myself up to date and when any books were appearing, I bought them immediately. I read virtually everything I could lay my hands on, especially a lot of Timothy Garton Ash. He had a great familiarity with Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. As I started to write around that time, I realized what a privilege it was to write exactly what you want. People can react with it and say it is rubbish. But there is no one to say you can't write that whereas that was the case with the intellectuals in, what was then called, Eastern Europe. It was a fascinating visit. But it was almost like visiting history. Time travel. I haven't gone back yet, which is strange in a way.

**JK:** Ireland, in turn, took a leap forward. What would you say has been the most significant change in Ireland since the 1990s?

**RD:** I would say it is reflective in the census, in the proportion of people who weren't born in Ireland but are living their lives here. Effectively they are citizens, even though legally they are not. It is a huge proportion of population and it's a much more complicated picture than it used to be the case. That is for me the most important change.

**JK:** How did Irish people cope with this massive wave of immigrants?

**RD:** One thing that reassures me that we didn't cope too badly with it is the fact that immigration has never been a political electoral issue. Nobody has ever jumped up and claimed that there was an excessive amount of immigrants. Nobody has said there was a high number of unemployed people and if we got rid of the immigrants, we would have a lower unemployment rate. That has been a simple, stupid mathematics often in the UK and their far-right parties that have seats in councils and seats in Europe, not in the House of Parliament. I wouldn't call it racist as such, but that extreme negative point hasn't been made out loud in Ireland because nobody wants to hear it. If any politician or people who aspire to political ambition felt that it would grant them extra support, they would start shouting. And I haven't heard it. That is a good thing.

On the other hand, the fact that I've never seen a black Garda is worry-

ing. By now we should hear Garda speaking accents other than rural Ireland. We should be seeing Garda that either haven't been born in Ireland or whose parents haven't been born here. We haven't seen that in the public sector yet. I think that integration is needed. Efforts have to be made to bring immigrants into the institutions of the state to reflect the facts that have been revealed in the census.

**JK:** There are a lot of Polish people among the immigrants. How do the Irish perceive Poles?<sup>1</sup>

**RD:** As far as I can make out, I've never heard about any hostility towards the Polish people. In fact, the attitude of the Irish is quite warm. They feel certain affinity. Even people like myself, who have no religion, but they were brought up Catholic. They understand it. If I am walking on a promenade outside on a Sunday, I can often tell who the Polish people are because they are dressed in their Sunday clothes. That used to happen here in the 60s and 70s when I was a kid. The Irish people don't do that anymore. But the knowledge of it is still bubbling away inside them. The Polish people are here to remind us what we used to be like. There is also a certain rhythm to the Polish life that is probably very similar to the

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Central Statistics Office, the estimated number of Polish immigrants in Ireland amounts to about 123,000.

rhythm of the Irish life. The Poles are also similar in that they land in a new place and organize themselves into communities straightaway. The Irish do exactly the same when they go abroad.

**JK:** Is there a stereotype of a Pole in Ireland?

**RD:** All I ever hear is that the standard of work by Polish men is brilliant. And they clean up after work, unlike Irish guys. They turn up on time. You don't smell a drink. I've never heard anybody say "Bloody Poles" and I don't think there has been any change of the attitude despite the crisis.

**JK:** Some of your recent works depict Polish characters. One of them is "The Bandstand." How did it come about?

**RD:** I approached the editors of *Metro Éireann*, Chinedu Onyejeme and Abel Ugba, and asked them if I could contribute to the multicultural magazine they were going ahead with. I started to write short stories for them, which were published in instalments. For the first time I had to work close to the deadlines, under more pressure than I'd been used to.

**JK:** Have you tried to mirror the way Polish people speak?

**RD:** I've noticed that most Eastern Europeans have really good English. They are very articulate and fluent. But their language is often unnaturally formal, as if taken from a course book. You can tell there's something not quite right. So I underdo the characters' English to mark that it is not their mother tongue. I put a little crack in the sentences now and then. It doesn't hinder the understanding but signals that it's their second language.

**JK:** Are your characters based on real people?

**RD:** No, they aren't. I know some African people but not many Polish. "The Bandstand" came out of an article I saw in *The Irish Times*. It was a story of a Polish guy who came here with a university degree but no English. He couldn't find a job and ended up homeless but was too proud to go home. That was a starting point. Then I did some observing in pubs and streets. It got my imagination going.

**JK:** Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today.

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## Goodbye Polsko, Hello Anglio

### Joanna Czechowska Speaks with Joanna Kosmalska<sup>1</sup>

(University of Łódź)

**JOANNA KOSMALSKA:** You're a British writer but you have Polish roots. What is your connection to Poland?

**JOANNA CZECHOWSKA:** My father was Polish. He came to the UK during the war in 1942. He fled Poland when the Germans invaded and almost literally walked across Europe. He headed west through Germany, then France, and eventually arrived in England. Here he joined the air force and became a paratrooper and a pilot. He was stationed in Newark, Nottinghamshire. Near the end of the war he met my mother at a dance for service men. They married in 1948 and settled down in Derby. Then my father arranged for his mother to come over from Warsaw and live with us. She was a widow, had no other children and was living in very sad circumstances.

My grandmother had been living with us when I was born. She looked after me. She couldn't speak English, so she spoke Polish to me, and it became my first language. I don't remember her dying but everyone tells me I was extremely upset and full of grief. Reportedly,

I refused to speak Polish until I see her again. My father decided to take me and my family over to Poland to see if it would comfort me. This was the first time he had been back since 1939. Up to 1965 he would have been in danger if he'd entered the country. I think he was a bit nervous about going back. He was very anti-communist, and he disapproved of the direction the country had been heading towards.

**JK:** What were your first impressions of Poland?

**JC:** We stayed with my great uncle in Warsaw. Poland in those days was very different to how it is now. Everyone had a very difficult life. My childhood memory of the country is that of queuing for food and a tiny flat we stayed in. The old building had bullet marks from the war on the outside. Inside, there was just one room, a kitchen and a bathroom. The beds hung down from the walls. In daytime they would go up and would be put down at night-time. The family had no television, no car. But they owned

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<sup>1</sup> This interview is a part of a literature project DEC-2011/01/B/HS2/05120 financed by the National Science Centre.



a little garden, which was a separate allotment. You had to walk to it. There was a little summer house, where you could sit in and read. It smelled of fruit and vegetables that they grew. Different countries have different smells. The smell that reminds me of Poland is dill, which is not that popular in Britain, although amazingly where we are, Dulwich means “a field of dill” in Old English. We went back one more time before my father died in the summer of 1970. I remember somebody telling me that the best view of Warsaw is from the top of the Palace of Culture because from there you can’t see the building itself. But obviously the country has changed so much since then.

**JK:** Have you visited Poland since your childhood?

**JC:** I’ve been there a few times. I have a cousin in Gdańsk, and I stay with her every time I visit. She’s also a novelist, Anna Kanthak. Her penname is Hanna Cygler. Poland of 1965 was very different to the country I saw when I went in 2000 or 2004. My cousin and her husband have built this beautiful, open-planned, very Scandinavian-looking house to their own design. There is a supermarket nearby that has got something like 74 check-outs. I’ve never seen anything like that in this country. There are beautiful beaches with nice restaurants serving lovely food. Gdańsk is a really lovely city.

**JK:** Do you have any Polish friends living in England?

**JC:** I know people like me, second generation Poles, whose parents came to England during the war. A lot of my school friends had at least one parent that was Polish. My father and his colleagues started a Polish Club in Derby that was called Dom Polski. Similar clubs sprang up all around the country. They were founded by Poles who came here during the war. As they couldn’t go home, they established what to them would be like a little home from home, a little Poland where they lived. The club offered a variety of weekend activities: Polish classes for children, girl guides, boy scouts, a Polish mass on Sundays, dances in the evening, a restaurant and a bar. My father was actively involved in that.

**JK:** Can you see any differences between the immigration waves of Poles in the UK?<sup>1</sup>

**JC:** Yes, we tend to call them “old Poles” and “new Poles.” The old ones were refugees really. It was a forced immigration in a lot of

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<sup>1</sup> The estimated number of Polish immigrants in Britain runs to over 532,000, and Polish is currently the second most popular language used for communication in the British Isles. The Polish diaspora is much larger if we account for two previous emigration waves, the former in the aftermath of World War II and the latter in the 1980s.

ways. They escaped the brutality and stayed here because they couldn't go home, often even for a visit. They hadn't expected to come and they had to make the best of it. They worked hard, put down roots, set up their communities and tried to live a life. It all happened against their will. I don't know much about those who emigrated in the 1980s. I know only one person who came in 1982. But those who have come recently did it voluntarily. It's their choice and they can go back whenever they want. It is a different situation.

I've heard there is some hostility between the old Poles and the new. There might be some jealousy behind it. The old Poles feel that they had no choice but to work hard to establish a community and try to fit in. The young ones don't experience any suffering and are free to do whatever they want. When I was interviewed on the Polish radio, we talked about the Polish clubs in London. The interviewer said that they seemed so old-fashioned with the crowned Polish eagle, like a time capsule, something from centuries ago. They represent a Poland that does not exist anymore, a fossil. It is like an isolated group that is no longer connected to the mainstream culture. As to what the young immigrants think of the old ones, I do not know. With new immigrants it's hard to fit them into any of the social groups in the British class system. They might be cleaning here but they would have

a degree in physics from the Kraków University. They are doing low-paid jobs but that is not really what they should be doing. Most British people would be aware of that and admire their bravery to come here.

**JK:** How do the British perceive Polish people?

**JC:** A popular idea is that Polish people are very hardworking and trustworthy. I remember a comedy sketch on television. The setting is a house. A woman comes in and starts talking to two workmen about putting in a shower. She seems happy with their arrangements. The two men speak with a very strong accent. Then she goes out and they start talking to each other normal English. It turns out they only pretend to be Polish to get the job.

Since 2004, Poles are everywhere, even in small towns. This is a completely new thing, almost revolutionary. As a result, now we are much more familiar with Polish culture. There are Polish shops "Delicatessy" everywhere and we learnt more about their food and drinks. A lot of people really like the Żubrówka Vodka. They know about Polish cakes and lunch meat. Kraków has become a popular holiday destination. This old, beautiful city is often compared to Prague. During their trip to Kraków, British tourists sometimes visit Auschwitz. My father's first wife was a messenger in the resistance. She was caught

and sent to the camp. When I mention it to people, they assume she was Jewish, which she wasn't. They are not aware of many Polish Catholics who died in the concentration camp.

**JK:** What was an inspiration for your novels *The Black Madonna of Derby* and *Sweetest Enemy*?

**JC:** There is a quite established culture of novels about immigrant groups in the UK. There is a novel *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* that came out just before mine. The author of the book, Marina Lewycka, wrote to me a couple of times and said she really enjoyed my book, which was flattering. There is also a novel called *Small Island* about black newcomers from the 1950s and *Brick Lane* about Indian immigrants. There are things that link those novels because every human being that comes from one country to another feels lost and isolated. It's similar for all immigrant communities. But I didn't know about any book that was written about the group of immigrants that my father belonged to. The story hasn't been told and I thought it was worth telling.

**JK:** The publication of your first novel coincided with the new wave of Polish immigrants. Was it planned?

**JC:** No, I didn't plan it. I had this idea a long time ago, when I was in

my twenties. I wrote two chapters and a synopsis, then I forgot about it for years. When I found it again, I read it through and thought this could be a good story. I went ahead and wrote my first novel. People say it's quite complex with a lot of twists and turns but it all makes sense in the end. I tried to find a British publisher but had no success. I sent a copy to my cousin in Gdańsk. She contacted me saying she liked the book and was going to translate it and find a Polish publisher. It was published under the title *Goodbye Polsko* and I did a few promotional talks around Gdynia and Gdańsk in 2006. We ended up in Warsaw where we had a reception at the British Embassy. The English version came out in 2008.

**JK:** What is the story behind the books' titles?

**JC:** I was originally going to call the first novel just *The Black Madonna*. There is a copy of the icon in St. Mary's Church in Derby, which is one of the first Catholic churches built in England after the Reformation. The icon was a gift to the people of Britain as thanks for giving Polish communities a safe haven. I remember seeing it as a child. We did go to Poland one time to see the real painting. Then I decided to combine Polish and British aspects of the book in the title and call it *The Black Madonna of Derby*.

The first book begins in 1964 and ends in 1978, the year the Polish

pope was elected. The sequel, *Sweetest Enemy*, is set in the 1980s and 1990s and describes the Solidarity era in Poland and the years of Margaret Thatcher in the UK. I thought it would be interesting to bring the two countries and the two ideas together with the background of this Polish family, called Baran, who were still living in Derby. We were so used to this idea of a divided Europe, we never thought that would finish. The Soviet Union turned out to be more of a house of cards than we realized. The title *Sweetest Enemy* hints at key antagonisms illuminated in the novel. One of them is a painful relationship between the two main characters, Zosia and Wanda. They are sisters who have very different points of view on life. Because of it, they are enemies but they love each other, too. They are the sweetest enemy to each other. There is also a father and his son, who are opposed to each other. On the one hand, they have a loving relationship, on the other an antagonistic one. Finally, you could broaden it to the connection of the Baran family with the two countries. They have a strong link with Poland but their life is in England. The parting with the country is a sweet sorrow. “Love” and “hate” like “sweet” and “sorrow” don’t really go together. There is a conflict in terms.

**JK:** What part does language play in the books? Have you tried to mirror the way Polish people speak?

**JC:** Language plays a great part in the books. It is a feature that distinguishes immigrants. You wouldn’t necessarily know that they are different if it wasn’t for their language and their names. I wondered for a long time how to indicate in the book that somebody is speaking another language. At first, I thought about changing the typeface to make it seem different. But it didn’t look right. In the end I’ve just used about four Polish words, which, of course, no English person would understand but if I kept using them in context, the readers would work out their meaning. I would just put these four words in to indicate that the character is now speaking a different language.

There is a significant scene in the book where language becomes a weapon. Two sisters meet in a restaurant. They are opposed because one celebrates her Polish heritage while the other denies it. They haven’t seen each other for a while but when they meet the elder sister would just speak English while the younger one will only speak Polish. I remember a lot of children of my generation who would start to reject their culture. Parents would speak to them Polish and they would answer English. The mother wouldn’t give in on speaking Polish, and the child wouldn’t give in on speaking English. I’ve taken that scene and made it a part of the conflict. And there is the youngest child in the family, the boy, who forgets Polish altogether.

**JK:** What sources did you depend on while writing your novels?

**JC:** I had to research historical events to make them accurate. I didn't do a huge amount of research because it was not meant to be a textbook, but fiction and entertainment. The hardest challenge was to fit in the fictional figures with the true historical events. For example, the book starts in 1964. This is the year when the first film of the Beatles, *A Hard Day's Night*, was released. The eldest granddaughter, Wanda, is 14 so she is the right age to be interested in

the band. It was quite complicated to make everyone the right age for the events. You have got a fixed truth, fixed historical events in the background, and you have to get it right. Historical facts should be as accurate as possible to make people believe in the story. I had a lot of reviews saying that I captured the 1960s London very well and accurately. I was a small child living in Derby, so I don't remember it. But it's nice that people believe it.

**JK:** Thank you for taking your time to talk to me.

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# Contributors

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**Mieke Bal**, a cultural theorist and critic, is based at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), University of Amsterdam. Her areas of interest range from biblical and classical antiquity to 17<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary art and modern literature, feminism and migratory culture. Her many books include *A Mieke Bal Reader* (2006), *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002) and *Narratology* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2009). She is also a video artist, her internationally exhibited documentaries on migration include *Separations*, *State of Suspension*, *Becoming Vera* and the installation *Nothing is Missing*. With Michelle Williams Gamaker she made the feature film *A Long History of Madness*, a theoretical fiction about madness, and related exhibitions (2012). Her current project *Madame B: Explorations in Emotional Capitalism*, also with Michelle, is exhibited worldwide. Occasionally she acts as an independent curator. Her co-curated exhibition *2MOVE* has travelled to four countries.

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**Joanna Czechowska** is a British journalist and writer. Her novel *The Black Madonna of Derby* was first published in Poland under the title *Goodbye Polsko* in 2006, and then two years later in Great Britain. The lively response from readers encouraged Joanna Czechowska to write the sequel, *Sweetest Enemy*, which came out in 2012. She lives and works in Derby.

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