

roersnureonsre
speahureosdre
cotiletreetwos
icous
redit
gsats
gulsr
canel
model
rothi
letter
fmsot

EXT

Matters

A Journal of Literature
Theory and Culture

No. 1 [2011]

EDITED BY
DOROTA FILIPCZAK



ŁÓDŹ UNIVERSITY PRESS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dorota Filipczak

ADVISORY BOARD AND ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Pamela Sue Anderson (University of Oxford, GB)

Ira Bhaskar (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India)

Radharani Chakravarty (University of Delhi, India)

Madelaine Hron (Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, Canada)

Jerzy Jarniewicz (University of Łódź, Poland)

Alison Jasper (University of Stirling, GB)

Jan Jędrzejewski (University of Ulster, GB)

Stephen Muecke (University of New South Wales, Australia)

Noel Polk (Mississippi State University, US)

Agnieszka Salska (University of Łódź, Poland)

Aritha van Herk (University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada)

Andrzej Wicher (University of Łódź, Poland)

REVIEWER OF THIS ISSUE

Mirosława Buchholtz, Nicolaus Copernicus University

MANAGING EDITOR

Adam Sumera

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR

Agata Handley

COPY EDITORS

Andrew Tomlinson and Richard Profozich

MLA AND OTHER ADJUSTMENTS

Marta Goszczyńska, Joanna Kazik, Grzegorz Kość (reviews editor)

TECHNICAL EDITOR

Karolina Goławska

COVER DESIGN, LAYOUT AND TYPESETTING

Agnieszka Jarzębowska

PROOFREADING

Tomasz Fisiak

© Copyright by Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2011

ISSN 2083–2931

Contents

Editorial **6**

WOMEN AND AUTHORITY

- Pamela Sue Anderson (University of Oxford)
Michèle Le Doeuff's "Primal Scene":
Prohibition and Confidence in the Education of a Woman **11**
- Dorota Filipczak (University of Łódź)
"Alternative Selves" and Authority in the Fiction of Jane Urquhart **27**
- Agnieszka Łowczanin (University of Łódź)
Who Are You, Mrs Walter Shandy, Aberratio Naturae? **44**
- Alison Jasper (University of Stirling)
Michèle Roberts: Female Genius and
the Theology of an English Novelist **61**
- Joanna Kazik (University of Łódź)
"Of all creatures women be best, / Cuius contrarium verum est":
Gendered Power in Selected Late Medieval and Early Modern Texts **76**
- Marije Altorf (St Mary's University College)
"Initium ut esset, creatus est homo": Iris Murdoch
on Authority and Creativity **92**
- Małgorzata Myk (University of Łódź)
Let Rhoda Speak Again: Identity, Uncertainty,
and Authority in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* **106**

Adam Sumera (University of Łódź) **123**
Woman and Authority in Ian McEwan's "Conversation
with a Cupboard Man" and Its Film Adaptation

Monika Rogalińska (Academy of International Studies) **135**
Inner Strength of Female Characters in *Loitering
with Intent* and *The Public Image* by Muriel Spark

Małgorzata Poks (English Teacher Training College,
Sosnowiec) **145**
The Poet's "Caressive Sight": Denise Levertov's
Transactions with Nature

Katarzyna Poloczek (University of Łódź) **153**
Women's Power To Be Loud: The Authority of the Discourse
and the Authority of the Text in Mary Dorcey's Irish Lesbian
Poetic Manifesto "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear"

Alex Ramon (Kingston University) **170**
Writing About a Woman Writer's Writing: On Gender
Identification(s) and Being a Male Critic of Carol Shields's Work

Tomasz Fisiak (University of Łódź) **183**
Feminist Auto/biography as a Means of Empowering Women:
A Case Study of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Janet Frame's
Faces in the Water

WORD/IMAGE/SOUND

Paul Tiessen (Wilfrid Laurier University) **201**
Memoir and the Re-reading of Fiction: Rudy Wiebe's
of this earth and *Peace Shall Destroy Many*

David Jasper (University of Glasgow) **216**
The Artist and Religion in the Contemporary World

Tomasz Dobrogoszcz (University of Łódź) **228**
The Hidden Gaze of the Other in Michael Haneke's *Hidden*

Joanna Kruczkowska (University of Łódź) **241**
The Use of Ulster Speech by Michael Longley and Tom Paulin

Katarzyna Ojrzyńska (University of Łódź) **254**
One, Mad Hornpipe: Dance as a Tool of Subversion
in Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney*

Joanna Kosmalka (University of Łódź) **270**
Dichotomous Images in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*:
In Pursuit of Objective Balance

REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

Agnieszka Salska (University of Łódź) **281**
Tributes to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz

Richard Profozich (University of Łódź) **286**
New Media Effects on Traditional News Sources:
A Review of the State of American Newspapers

Grzegorz Kość (University of Łódź) **290**
Review of *The Body*, ed. by Ilona Dobosiewicz
and Jacek Gutorow

"*Taste good iny?*": Images of and from Australian
Indigenous Literature **293**
Jared Thomas Speaks with Teresa Podemska-Abt

Engaging the "Forbidden Texts" of Philosophy **312**
Pamela Sue Anderson Talks to Alison Jasper

Contributors **329**

Editorial

Marked with dual identity, the first issue of *TM* seeks to primarily engage in the relationship between women and authority, vested in literary and philosophical texts. The collection brings together the voices of philosophers, theologians, writers and literary scholars. Significantly, it opens with an article by Pamela Sue Anderson, who explores the ways in which texts such as Kant's *The Critique of Pure Reason* "permit or prohibit women to think philosophically." Alert to the insights of Michèle Le Doeuff, Anderson recounts her own development as a philosopher in an interview by Alison Jasper, which is the last text in the issue. The second article in the collection, authored by myself, applies the concepts from Anderson's reading of Kant, notably images of an island of "pure understanding"—and stormy beyond, to the selected novels by a Canadian writer Jane Urquhart. Following this, Agnieszka Łowczanin provides a reading of *Tristram Shandy*, focused on the marginal character of Mrs Shandy. Engaging with the medical ideas about reproduction in the age of Sterne, Łowczanin sees Mrs Shandy as a victim of cultural imaginary. Alison Jasper, a theologian, redefines an androcentric concept of genius. Inspired by Julia Kristeva, she reads Michèle Roberts' *Secret Gospel*, whose protagonist Mary Magdalene claims authority, while finding her sexually different access to Christ's message. The theme of marginalization of women by philosophical, mythological or sacred texts is given a different aspect in an article by Joanna Kazik, who examines the strategies in which medieval and early modern works exclude women from the community by turning them into a laughing stock in seemingly playful jest.

Marije Altorf, another philosopher appearing in this first issue, devotes her article to the tension between authority and creativity in Iris Murdoch's *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, read in the context of Murdoch's philosophy explicated in *The Sovereignty of Good*. Altorf's reading of Murdoch as a philosopher offers a parallel to Anderson's reading of Le Doeuff. Engaging with the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice

Merleau-Ponty, Małgorzata Myk focusses on Rhoda from Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, and sees the character's "uncertainty" as a paradoxical expression of her authority. A different perspective on female authority is adopted by Adam Sumera in the analysis of Ian McEwan's "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" and its film adaptation. At the heart of the analysis is the son emotionally devastated by his toxic mother. Unlike McEwan's character, constricted by the cupboard space, Muriel Spark's heroines, discussed by Monika Rogalińska, struggle out of their conventionalized selves into full personhood.

In the first of two radically different approaches to poetry in this section, Małgorzata Poks dwells on spirituality in the works of American poet, Denise Levertov, whose religious undertones, no matter how muted or transformed, testify to the affirmation of life. In contrast, Katarzyna Poloczek's article on Irish poet, Mary Dorcey, shows how the pronounced manifesto of lesbian desire turns into an indictment of the community, whose repressive standards aim at a violent eradication of difference. The section ends with two men reading women. Alex Ramon scrutinizes the fiction of American-born Carol Shields, who developed as a writer in Canada, and detects in her male characters a potential for disrupting stereotypical constructions of masculinity. Tomasz Fisiak juxtaposes *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath to *Faces in the Water* by Janet Frame so as to read both against Liz Stanley's concept of feminist auto/biography.

Opening the section Word/Image/Sound, Paul Tiessen analyzes the first novel by Rudy Wiebe, a Canadian writer of Mennonite origin, in light of his memoir *of this earth*. The article stresses the relationship between language, soundscape of childhood, memory and identity. David Jasper remains within his interdisciplinary interest in literature and theology, discussing the artist as a mediator of religious experience. His article connects light in the paintings of Joseph Mallord William Turner and Vincent van Gogh with religious illuminations. Disturbing the contemplative tone of the first two articles in this section, Tomasz Dobrogoszcz analyzes Michael Haneke's film *Caché* in light of postcolonial criticism, emphasizing the polarity between descendants of the colonized Algerians and their former masters, now unsettled by the intrusion of surveillance camera in their apparently safe home. The focus of Joanna Kruczkowska's article is Northern Irish vernacular used in the poetry of Tom Paulin and Michael Longley. In each case the soundscape reflects an engagement with history and politics. The article by Katarzyna Ojrzyńska is devoted to Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney*, whose dance, explored in the context of Irish dance, takes her out of her ordinary self repressed by patriarchal convention. While Ojrzyńska's article connects with the first section through the character of Molly, an article by Joanna Kosmalska returns to the output of McEwan,

whose short story is analyzed in the first section by Sumera. Devoted to dichotomous images in McEwan's *Saturday*, Kosmalska's text explores paradoxical characters and their paradoxical world.

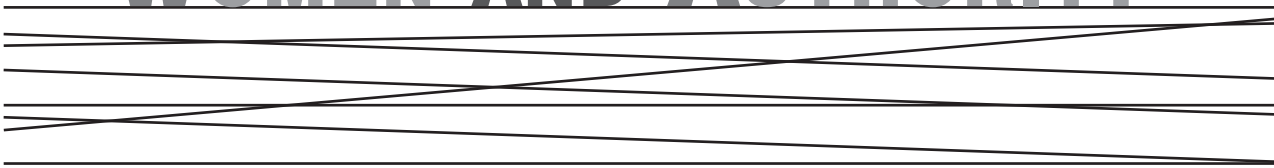
In harmony with Word/Image/Sound Teresa Podemska-Abt elicits comments on Indigenous Australian literature from writer Jared Thomas, whose remarks on language, tradition and identity provide the second section of *TM* with further depth and excentric perspective that already anticipates the second issue, notably *Marginalia/Marginality*. The two interviews in the first issue have been grouped in a separate part, with Agnieszka Salska's and Grzegorz Kość's comprehensive reviews of selected scholarly books in Poland. Fusing the convention of an article and review is a text by Richard Profozich on the contemporary situation of American newspapers.

8

While harmonizing with respective sections, all the texts in this volume can be subdivided into philosophy and theology, British and American literary studies, Irish studies, Canadian studies, Aboriginal studies, film studies and gender studies.

Dorota Filipczak

WOMEN AND AUTHORITY



Pamela Sue Anderson

University of Oxford

**Michèle Le Doeuff's "Primal Scene":
Prohibition and Confidence
in the Education of a Woman**

ABSTRACT

My essay begins with Michèle Le Doeuff's singular account of the "primal scene" in her own education as a woman, illustrating a universally significant point about the way(s) in which education can differ for men and women: gender difference both shapes and is shaped by the imaginary of a culture as manifest in how texts matter for Le Doeuff. Her primal scene is the first moment she remembers when, while aspiring to think for herself, a prohibition is placed in her reading of literature. Her philosophy teacher—at a boys' school—told the young Michèle that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* was "too difficult" for her to read. In recalling this scene, the older (and wiser) Michèle—now, a woman philosopher—directs her readers to this text by Kant, in order to demonstrate how knowledge has been constrained by the narrative and imagery in the text of a philosopher; similarly, in the texts of others. She finds the central imagery of Kant's text for setting the limits to human knowledge in his account of "the island of understanding," or "land of truth," surrounded by "a stormy sea" of uncertainty; the latter image also retains a seductive appeal, threatening to destroy the confidence of any knower who ventures out beyond the well-marked out island. Moreover, women have (too) often been associated with the dangers at sea beyond the safety of the island, where falsehood and worse reign. I propose that "text matters" here not only for gender issues, but for the postcolonial theory which Le Doeuff's reading of island imagery enhances in western literature and culture. The suggestion is that women in the history of ideas have been more susceptible than men to prohibitions (to reading texts): women's negative education is against going beyond certain boundaries which have been fixed by a generally colonialist culture on the grounds of gender-hierarchies. I stress the significance of confidence in the production of knowledge. A lack or an inhibition of confidence in one's own ability to think critically risks the damaging exclusions of, for example, colonialism

and sexism. My aim is to unearth the political biases evident in textual imagery, while also pointing to new epistemic locations, with island-and-sea imagery that transgresses patriarchal prohibition, liberating subjects for confident reading and writing of texts today.

ABSTRACT

12

The most precious thing, in my eyes, is that a philosophical text produces in the minds of its readers, in each one, female and male, experiences or creative shocks that the author (or whoever) could not predict, and that take on at once cognitive and therefore political value. A value variable to infinity, since it is the meeting of an individual and a body of work. (Le Doeuff, “Engaging with Simone de Beauvoir” 16–17)

INTRODUCTION

Michèle Le Doeuff describes the “creative shock” produced by a philosophical text in “the minds of its readers,” showing how this shock takes on cognitive and political value. In this essay, I would like to demonstrate how Le Doeuff’s own text, *Hipparchia’s Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc.*, produces such an effect in her readers. My claim is that “the meeting of an individual and a body of work” can happen in the reading of Le Doeuff’s “primal scene” in philosophy (Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia’s Choice* 142–47). As will be made clear, this scene conveys something novel that places Le Doeuff’s appropriation of island imagery into the history of “the philosophical imaginary” (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 8–20 and “Le sexe de la philosophie” 454–73).

We will discover that Le Doeuff’s primal scene in Quimper, Brittany, portrays the moment of a prohibition against her sex which is ironically also a sort of permission to transgress the limits of knowledge which had been set for and by western philosophers at least since the eighteenth century. These potentially imperialist and, as Le Doeuff shows, sexist limits of philosophy are variously represented by an island, notably by the “northern isle” (*The Philosophical Imaginary* 17), which Kant carefully charts in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (257–58).

More generally, ironical island imagery appears in Le Doeuff’s earliest readings of western literature and philosophy. This means not only the im-

agery of secure knowledge and the illusion of that "security" in Kant, but also the tales of islands and storms at sea in Shakespeare's *Tempest*; of philosophical freedom and political tyranny in Rousseau; of colonial and anti-colonial tensions in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Le Doeuff's own irony equally speaks critically of both Shakespeare's fools and Bacon's island-utopia, of both Rousseau's moral education on a south sea island and Kant's northern island as the "land of truth." Ultimately, Le Doeuff appropriates reason's inevitable refusal to remain content within any limits fixed by the privileged male philosopher: she refuses to exclude women and other non-privileged readers from reason's "new beginning" in self-preservation (cf. Blumenberg 75).

Despite what philosophers have written about its non-philosophical nature, imagery remains central to Le Doeuff's philosophical reading of texts, but also, according to her, to the history of western philosophy. Island imagery goes back at least to Plato's tale of the lost island of Atlantis in the *Timaeus* and is recalled in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*. It can also be traced to a darker reading of human empires and political lives on and off islands. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is recommended by Rousseau, in *Émile*, as the first book on moral education to be read by a growing boy; and yet there is ambivalence in its significance as an apologia for, or an ironic critique of, economic individualism, of imperialism and capitalism; as a study in alienation or a spiritual autobiography (Birch 851). The impact of Defoe's novel has been enormous. But then, as will be seen in this essay, Le Doeuff exposes how Kant brings both the islands of Bacon and of Defoe into a juxtaposition of philosophical and literary texts, of North and South Seas islands, in his own great project, in order to both limit knowledge and expose the inevitability of reason's transgression of its own limits. Despite, or perhaps because of, her interest in imagery, the real political heart of Le Doeuff's project is the education of women in philosophy and, more generally, in the reading and writing of texts. For Le Doeuff, texts matter! Texts both prohibit and permit women to think philosophically. If taking up her project, it remains our task to work out how one achieves confidence for women in philosophy.

LE DOEUFF ON HER OWN PRIMAL SCENE

Let us turn to Le Doeuff's "Each to Her Own Primal Scene" (*Hipparchia's Choice* 142–49):

Mine took place far from the Luxembourg Gardens [and the Medici Fountain],¹ in Quimper on the south coast of Brittany. As the philoso-

¹ Here Le Doeuff assumes a contrast between her own primal scene in Brittany and what she famously describes as Simone de Beauvoir's primal scene in Paris. Following Le Doeuff, other feminists (most notably: *Moi* 37–45), refer to this scene as a formative

phy classes at the girls' school were full, I [was] sent to the classes at the boys' school. This was my first experience of being "the only woman," hence a singular person in a masculine world . . . The teacher was an elderly man who took the content of his classes chiefly from wide circulation magazines on science (for the "philosophy of knowledge") or sport (for the "philosophy of human sciences"). . . .

To compensate for his classes, I read everything I could lay my hands on, understanding what I could, gleaning little bits whose meaning I could grasp . . . skipping the rest, which was beyond me, then going back to it, reckoning that my faculty of comprehension would have opened up a little in the meantime as a result of other things I had read (142–43).

At the back of the classroom there was a huge cupboard: the library. Once a week we were allowed to borrow books if we asked the teacher. I therefore asked for the *Critique of Pure Reason* and my esteemed future colleague refused to give it to me:

"That is *much too hard for you*. Kant . . . Kant . . . you know . . . Kant is very difficult . . ." (143–44; emphasis added).

I have never read the *Critique of Pure Reason*. . . . I have never been able to, except by cheating: reading the end first, and then what came just before the end, a little of the beginning, a passage from the middle . . . [about islands . . .] that is not what reading is, particularly for a book like that. I have to admit that my teacher's assessment of it as "too hard for you" has had an effect, and that is very strange. For years before, when the school library refused to let me have Shakespeare (regarded as dangerous for a little girl's morality), I went immediately to the town library, where the librarian always gave me anything I wanted, even precious first editions which were not to be taken out on loan. Why did I not immediately do the same with Kant? . . . [later] I should, simply out of a sense of duty to my work, have devoted two months of my time to reading the *Critique* from cover to cover . . . So . . . that prohibition was paradoxically effective here: a few, totally unjustified words uttered by someone I did not respect still prove insurmountable years afterwards, even when they are counter-balanced by duty. (144)

The above excerpts offer us Le Doeuff's retrospective account of a decisive, creative and cultural shock to her as a young woman who is intent upon thinking for herself, especially in what she reads. But ironically, instead of producing a decisive obstacle to her engagement with literary and philosophical texts, her school teacher's ban ultimately did the opposite. The philosophical "damage" may at first glance seem extreme,

conversation between Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre at the Medici Fountain in the Luxembourg Gardens, Paris, in 1929. For more on Beauvoir's primal struggle with her male contemporary in philosophy, the young Sartre, see Anderson 163–80.

especially when the young Michèle immediately breaks the ban on reading Shakespeare, while still not being able to read Kant "cover to cover;" the latter inability is portrayed as the direct result of her teacher's claim that Kant is "much too hard for you." Yet at a closer look, this is ironic.

As I will show, Le Doeuff in fact reads Kant but does so through the lens of the philosophical imaginary. To anticipate my further discussion of this, I offer two salient quotations. First, her comments on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* which she wrote well before writing about her primal scene in *Hipparchia's Choice*:

. . . [an] ancient happiness is no longer thinkable in the eighteenth century, as Kant does not fail to acknowledge, closing the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, with some thoughts on nature as cruel stepmother, and on the veneration we owe the creator "as much for what he has refused us as for what he has given us in recompense" [Kant, *Critique* 257]. The castrating dimension of the passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason* points in this direction, but at the same time its metaphor annuls this and organizes a seduction into renunciation by depicting an island already discovered. . . . A restoration of paradise on earth, through the work and progress of the . . . sciences, is declared possible and even already begun, despite and notwithstanding everything—even if the system cannot find this hope on reason. But without this hope, can there be a *Critique of Pure Reason*? (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 15–16)

In other words, the shock in Le Doeuff's primal scene must have unwittingly worked for the good, insofar as it opens up the possibility for her to read any and every text with a critical eye for what has been thought to be non-philosophical.

Second, prior to writing her primal scene, Le Doeuff discovers a dialectical relation between image and concept in Kant's first *Critique*:

The image of the northern isle is thus indeed a precondition of the Kantian theory: in one way it works towards the coherence of the system—we meet in it the major theses of the theory, even down to some of its details. But, in a contradictory sense, it reinstates everything which the work of critique tends to empty or to disavow, it cancels the renunciations demanded by the theory. Decoding it, and reintroducing into the discourse its latent meaning, makes apparent the troubles of the system.

The island of the Analytic compensates for the recognition of the vanity of regrets of South Seas islands. (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 17)

It is crucial to bear in mind that one of the subtexts to her primal scene is the tale of *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe is the male character who

returns to a very different primal scene to Kant's "northern isle," or to Le Doeuff's classroom: Crusoe is forced back to nature on a desert island in the south sea. And yet, Le Doeuff will use this difference to her own ends. A man is shipwrecked on an island where his ingenuity and labour are necessary in isolation but also in relation to a primal, or "mother," nature. Le Doeuff exploits the fact that this highly gendered tale has been the subtext of many different philosophical and literary texts concerning the politics of empire, variously appropriated for colonial and postcolonial thinking, for individual and communal life. In this context, Le Doeuff's use of primal scenes is highly suggestive and subversive: her description of one's "primal" setting certainly has Rousseau in mind (cf. Nye 92–98). Yet Le Doeuff manages a subtle subversion of Rousseau and his use of Defoe's tale; this is achieved with her feminist appropriation of Kant's imagery of islands at sea. She critically reflects upon the damage done to young girls by prohibitions against both south sea pleasures and thinking which would take them away from island-nature to the stormy seas:

. . . it is possible that girls and women have a powerful sensitivity to prohibition—a sensitivity which nothing affects—because their education is more closely watched and entirely centred on negativity.

. . . our intentions were implicitly on trial at all times, as though we were little things to be feared, which had to be stopped from doing damage: preventive precautions were thus the primary concern of educative procedure.

This attitude of prohibition had two features: the first was that it was presented to us in a purely negative form . . . We were not charged with fulfilling a hope, dream or ambition).

When I read Rousseau, I again find the pure interdict which characterized our education . . . "Girls must be restricted early." (*Émile*; qtd. in *Hipparchia's Choice* 145)

In *Émile: or, On Education* Rousseau restricts a girl's education but gives to his ideal male pupil, Émile, Defoe's fictional tale of the slave trader Robinson Crusoe, as "the man" who is shipwrecked on a desert island and forced to become like "a native," or natural man, and as a consequence, sees Europe differently (cf. Conrad, *Island* 44, 91–97). Although Rousseau's use of travel tales is based upon theory and not his own actual travels, arguably he came closer (to Kant and contemporary postcolonialism) than many other philosophers in suggesting that whether imaginative or real a comparison between the "native" disorder and "civilized" order does not always end up favouring the latter. In other words, Rousseau's view of the state of nature is more optimistic than some of his

contemporaries like Hobbes or Locke, while his view of Europe is arguably less so than theirs.

Unearthing these subtexts and their imagery, these stories with their pictures of nature, of women and men, helps Le Doeuff to convey the reality of flesh and blood even in western philosophy. In the hands of Le Doeuff, the philosophical imaginary comes to include the excluded matter. Although thought to be extraneous to philosophical argumentation, the imaginary becomes central to Le Doeuff's feminist method for what it can reveal about the unavoidable significance of the so-called non-philosophical in philosophical texts; that is, the stories or tales of real life struggles and injustice.

In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, it has become increasingly clear that Le Doeuff's influence on the women's movement is to require both a sense of solidarity and a shared sense of history between women with very different material, social, racial and cultural background. This would have to include understanding how philosophy has assumed, rationalized, and at times encouraged racial and cultural inequalities. In other words, a critical concern for ethnicity, for colonial and postcolonial thinking, in the reading and locating of the asides and imagery in philosophical texts is not just of political significance, it generates a deeper understanding of texts, especially when interpreted from non-privileged positions. But it is not enough to make this a theoretical enterprise—or, even a practice of textual interpretation—which maps the vulnerability of women and so-called natives. Theory and the interpretation of texts alone can leave people to suffer.

The role which Le Doeuff gives to imagery in philosophical texts is not trivial. According to her, at the very least, "imagery is inseparable from . . . the sensitive points of an intellectual venture" (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 3). At the most, imagery "occupies the place of theory's impossible" (5). This latter would sustain what the "system cannot itself justify, but which is nevertheless needed for its proper working" (3). Again, in her words, "the imaginary which is present in theoretical texts stands in a relation of solidarity with the theoretical enterprise itself (and with its troubles)" (6). Le Doeuff's position is in sharp contrast with philosophers going back to Plato who have insisted upon the non-philosophical nature of images and metaphorical language. For this reason, the present essay is seeking to persuade readers to notice the great significance of the philosophical imaginary to learning and to philosophy as a vibrant discipline. Le Doeuff both insists and demonstrates that images in philosophical texts are more than pedagogical aids; they are not merely "a stock of cultural forms" either. Instead we need images to cope with life, to think and to encourage the growth of knowledge, freedom and justice.

TO PROTECT “A LITTLE GIRL’S MORALITY,”
NEITHER SHAKESPEARE² NOR KANT

18

Le Doeuff takes up the imagery of a man stranded on an island, mapping its terrain and learning to survive, as a point of departure for a very different tale of a woman learning to survive, stranded on an island which has already been mapped out for her. But this woman becomes a philosopher by moving off the security of Kant’s land of truth. Crucial to the interpretation of this scene of patriarchal bliss is Le Doeuff’s subtle and poetic challenge to significant spatial imagery concerning an island. In particular, the northern “island of understanding” which has been carefully “charted,” as distinct from the uncharted and uncharitable seas, by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* constitutes—for Le Doeuff—a form of prohibition, ensuring that “confidence” on matters of knowledge is “sexed,” since only possible within certain limits and from certain epistemic locations; that is, those of men. Le Doeuff forces us to ask whether women in the history of philosophy have been more sensitive than men to prohibitions, and so their confidence in the production of knowledge has been seriously inhibited or blocked. Too often women have been associated with the dangers at sea and of disorder beyond the safety of the so-called “secure” island where falsehood and worse reign. This essay suggests the possibility of new epistemic locations by finding space for transgression within the shared imaginary of Bacon, Kant and Le Doeuff. Provocative readings of island-and-sea imagery help us to discover new ways (for women and others) to read both non-traditional and traditional literature in the context of wider political and cultural debates.

As we read Le Doeuff’s texts, we also learn about the exclusionary strategies of reading, the cognitive blocks, as well as sexist bans to the reading of certain texts. In Le Doeuff’s primal scene, a young woman is discouraged from reading Shakespeare because of his “tales of morality,” while this woman has been even more strictly banned from her reading of Kant by sexist claims such as: his texts would be “much too hard” and “very difficult” for a (young) woman (*Hipparchia’s Choice* 144). With Le Doeuff, we are forced to recognize the significance of gender in the reception and dissemination of texts: it goes back to our earliest or most primal encounters with sexist and/or moral development. Although the more general purpose of *Hipparchia’s Choice* is to explore the method, nature and content of philosophy, again and again Le Doeuff illustrates how

² Michèle Le Doeuff not only read and loved Shakespeare at school (despite any bans on his “morality” for young girls), but she translated Shakespeare’s poem, “Venus and Adonis,” into French by reading it aloud in order to render it into a form which can be performed; see Le Doeuff, *Vénus et Adonis* 71–107.

philosophers in the history of western philosophy have restricted those who can create philosophy with prohibitions which, as we have read, can and should be transgressed. Le Doeuff continues to expose and transgress sexist prohibitions in her later writings. On this, Meryl Altman's review of the 2003 English translation of Le Doeuff's third book, *The Sex of Knowing*, is revealing:

Some feminist scholars take the view that one or another Great Philosopher can provide useful conceptual tools for feminists, provided we overlook what he actually said about women. This is not Le Doeuff's approach. To smile demurely in the face of insults ignores the real pain and waste involved as talented young women decide serious intellectual work and professional achievement are either beyond them or not worth the effort. Le Doeuff compares such "cognitive blockage" to the difficulty a woman involved with a violent man may have in admitting that the danger she most fears already occurred. (14–15)

Also, according to Altman, Le Doeuff echoes the "Lady Reason," from the fifteenth-century text by Christine de Pisan, when she reminds each woman

. . . to trust her own intelligence and judge theories about women by her own experience and observations. Every woman must defend herself against slander, not with tears, piety, or emotional appeals to women's "different nature" but with rational argument, principled debate, and historical and practical example. (14)

Le Doeuff seeks to create the mental space which is necessary for the right sort of confidence of each and every woman: confidence that derives from a woman having looked an intellectual prohibition (often on what are described as "moral" grounds) in the face and so undermined its hold on her subjectivity. In brief, Le Doeuff's approach to philosophy seeks to give confidence in order to increase knowledge and (political) freedom.

Ironically, Le Doeuff seems to have, if not a Kantian then, an Enlightenment motivation: to give women autonomy, treating them as ends-in-themselves; and so, to think for themselves in reading and writing. Yet she is also rightly critical of Kant. To confront the Enlightenment sexism of "the Great Philosophers," Le Doeuff draws on another concept from the history of philosophy: "an interior freedom" which she finds in the writings of the seventeenth-century feminist philosopher, Gabrielle Suchon, who predates Kant but is either informed by, or perhaps even, informs, some of Rousseau's views of moral education. I will return to Suchon before concluding. At this point, let us assess how Le Doeuff's own creativi-

ty becomes productive in expressing the dynamic relationship between the imagery of spatial location and intellectual freedom in which the interior and exterior function together (Le Doeuff, "A Little Learning" 74–89). Le Doeuff focuses on a significant problem:

[I]s the fact that women very seldom adopt the position of creator in philosophy linked to a ban (it would be enough that they should be given to understand that they were not capable of it), or to the structure of the act through which one establishes oneself as someone who is going to produce one's own work, an act which seems to involve assertion of oneself as a super-consciousness with an overview of everything that has been thought until now or is being thought at the moment, in the streets, in other fields of knowledge and in the works of one's predecessors? Theoretically I tend to favour the second interpretation and yet my personal experience tells me that prohibition is a force which unsettles our understanding. (*Hipparchia's Choice* 147)

As already noted, Le Doeuff may claim in the above text that she has never read the *Critique of Pure Reason* cover to cover, yet she had already studied the imagery and metaphors in the latter as a necessary dimension of philosophical argumentation. Thus, Le Doeuff initiates a way to read Kant which is unaffected by either her former school teacher's ban or the tradition of reading a great philosopher as an unquestioned Master of the subject.

In *The Philosophical Imaginary*, Le Doeuff considers how Kant distances himself from his own text when it comes to the seduction of an illicit confidence (or over-confidence) in overstretching the boundaries which he has marked out for the understanding. She indicates an illicit confidence in the seduction of the text's imagery which pushes reason to move out into the uncharted seas. Basically, Le Doeuff's structural analysis of the functioning of the philosophical imaginary in Kant helps (us) to avoid either the no-confidence, as in her school teacher's approach, or the unquestioned confidence (the "yes" of the disciple) following the Master's approach to learning. No prohibition can hold the philosopher on the secure land, even Kant asks whether we are "under compulsion to be satisfied;" yet his answer is unstable: "there may be no other territory upon which we can settle" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 257).

A DYNAMIC, DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP OF IMAGE AND CONCEPT

Le Doeuff's reading of Kant's text proposes a continual back and forth movement between conceptual thought and imagery. For her, the image

in a philosophical text is neither "radically heterogeneous to" nor "completely isomorphous with" the philosophical concepts. In exploring "the island" in Kant's first *Critique*, Le Doeuff elucidates four stages of a dynamic relationship of image and concept (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 6–7).

First, despite Kant's apparent insistence to the contrary, the image, at an initial stage, represents what has been established by discursive thought: it establishes this by denial. So with Kant's passage on the island of truth, in the "Transcendental Analytic," he aims to repeat what he has just established in earlier chapters (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 102–255, 257); that is, the extent, or in fact the limitations, of the pure understanding are made visible with this spatial imagery. The mariner is safe as long as he, or she, does not venture off the edge of the island. A second mark of Kant's unwitting denial is his metaphorical description of the island as seductive: "the land of truth—enchanted name!" Seduction is to be resisted but this very acknowledgement of enchantment is seductive.

Second, the image or metaphor has to be investigated to see if it is an isolated feature in the philosophical text or if it appears more than once in the same or another text by Kant. Le Doeuff calls this "an iconographic investigation" (*The Philosophical Imaginary* 9) which reveals, in the case of Kant's island, that the image re-appears in the first *Critique* (259; 665) and his other texts, including the *Critique of Practical Reason* and in his essay "Conjectural Beginning of Human History;" the latter speaks of the yearning to return to the South Sea islands—as in the story of Robinson Crusoe—which Kant insists is a sign of laziness and a failure to face up to the responsibility of reason, and the human choice to have knowledge of good and evil (Kant, "Conjectural Beginning" 68). Le Doeuff finds that "the northern isle" in the passage from the first *Critique*, "the island one must content oneself with, has its symmetric antithesis in the island of the South Seas [which appears in Kant's "Conjectural Beginning" as] the seat of the Golden Age, which must be utterly renounced" (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 9). Thus, she shows the necessity of imagery for our conceptual thought, even in the writings of Kant, whose difficulty was thought to be blocked from her as a (young) woman.

Third, it is necessary to trace the source of the image beyond the text in other, previous philosophical writings (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 9). Le Doeuff finds the source of Kant's island imagery in Francis Bacon whose work she knows well from her translation of Bacon's *New Atlantis* into French. Le Doeuff's subtle knowledge of Kant emerges in her own work on Bacon; notably, on Bacon's insistence that the sceptics "waver from one side to the other, like an orator speaking from a ship-deck, and they behave towards their idols like lunatic lovers who curse their

loves but can never leave them” (qtd. in *The Philosophical Imaginary* 9). Having recognized the link from Kant back to Bacon’s image of “the island of truth” which is surrounded by a mighty ocean in which many an intelligence will drown in storms of illusion, Le Doeuff not only discovers the imagery on which Kant’s system rests, but moves on to critical ground for a structural analysis of this philosophical imaginary.

Fourth, there is this final stage of structural analysis of the imagery and its relation to a question being evaded by Kant’s text. The metaphor of the island supports the conviction that we should secure our dwelling in the land of understanding and not wander elsewhere. But as Le Doeuff unfolds her reading of the relationship of conceptual thought and imagery, we find her teaching us a lesson in philosophy, about confidence and learning (Le Doeuff, “A Little Learning” 80–84). To see this, read Kant’s words:

22

Vain regrets for a golden age promise us unalloyed enjoyment of a carefree life, dreamt away idly, or trifled away in childish play. Such yearnings have been stimulated by stories such as Robinson Crusoe and reports of visitors to the South Sea Islands. (Kant, “Conjectural Beginning” 68)

Next, recognize how Le Doeuff’s text recalls the security of Kant’s northern island. And yet she alludes to the above, too, here:

The promise of the island of the understanding is balanced by some terrifying dangers . . . one avoids the discomfort of the icy fogs but at the cost of renouncing the dream of discovery, the call of new lands, and hope. (*The Philosophical Imaginary* 12)

Again, Le Doeuff’s reflection on “the dream of discovery,” of pleasures, connects to Kant’s “Conjectural Beginning of Human History:” “The existence of such yearnings proves that thoughtful persons weary of civilized life, if they seek its value in pleasure alone” (Kant, “Conjectural Beginning” 68). Along with this historical and cultural background on the ambivalence of the island imagery from the northern and southern seas, Le Doeuff portrays the formation of the Kantian subject as one riddled by sacrifices and historically determinate tensions:

the subjectivity which finds pleasure in the passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a subjectivity which is socio-historically determinate. The island . . . dates from the eighteenth century, and marks an epoch: philosophers had previously been in the habit of offering us more joyful and directly desirable things at the end of the path of knowledge—holding out in their discourse a prospect of islands to which we might more happily transport ourselves. In considering then, the historical

singularity of the Kantian island, one should also not forget the historical situation . . . of a dated historical formation which strives to think . . . on questions which are those of an epoch, and of a social category . . . (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* 14–15)

In part, due to the fact that Kant's passage about the northern island is known to belong to the earliest drafts of the *Critique*, Le Doeuff proposes that the metaphor of the secure island is a "dialectical presupposition of the theory:"

Insofar as [the passage] sets up a distinction (the foggy ocean/the island where one can remain), it is indeed an allegory of the basic distinction between the legitimate (empirical) use of the understanding and its confusing use . . . But [the passage] departs from this simple allegorical function . . . it is a counter-allegory, to the degree that it founds the possibility of retrieving the myth of an earlier philosophical practice [to seek] "eternal happiness" [under] "the auspices of metaphysics."

When one closes the *Critique of Pure Reason* everything will, in the short ending of a chapter, have been recovered . . . it is only under the auspices of metaphysics that the scientific republic can work towards eternal happiness.

For this closing recovery of a primacy of philosophy and of a totality in which knowledge, concord and happiness converge, no proof is or can be offered. (*The Philosophical Imaginary* 16)

Thus, with Le Doeuff, we find a movement of repudiation and return in Kant: "we shall always return to metaphysics as to a beloved one with whom we have had a quarrel" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 664).

There is a significant sense in which the imagery which the philosopher employs unwittingly yet dogmatically forces the reader to agree, stage by stage, with a certain relationship between concept and metaphor; and this is what has been established by the philosophical imaginary. Of course, philosophical questions remain. How does the image legitimate the confidence of secure knowledge, while the understanding is unstable due to reason's constant striving in its pursuit of the unconditioned totality? Doesn't reason itself threaten the loss or lack of ethical confidence?

ETHICAL CONFIDENCE: OR, ON THE CREATION OF A SPACE FOR POLITICAL FREEDOM

Ultimately, Le Doeuff's creation of a mental space and an interior freedom, with the help of the philosophical imaginary, aims to make possible a public space for learning free of sexist, imperialist and so, unethical pro-

hibitions. In fact, Le Doeuff's method of locating a text in its historical context and in political life seeks to discover "discontinuity." This means that we should locate Kant's philosophy in his own text and in his social context.

Roughly, to apply this method of locating a text's imagery in order to discover discontinuities, we should notice that Kant's writings, in the 1780s–90s about the island of understanding—the secure, but seductive land of truth—or, the northern isle as opposed to the south-sea islands, are located politically and socially in the Prussian state. Now, Prussia, in the first half of the eighteenth century, is subduing islands such as East Frisian islands in the North Sea (which today are German), Wolin in the Baltic Sea (which today is Polish, but was not in the eighteenth century), Uznam in the Baltic Sea (which today is partly Polish, but was not Polish earlier). At the time Poland had river islands which were also taken by Prussia; in particular, in 1793 Prussia took Poland's river island in the centre of Poznań. In this manner, the Le Doeuffian method would aim to locate a text for (Polish, in particular, but also other) readers today, in order to recognize discontinuity between what is argued and what is admitted in the margins of the text (the ambivalent significance of the island imagery); in this way, social-political reality appears in what is discontinuous in the text's margins; and this gives ground for changes in our reading of the past and present. Arguably, whenever past philosophical texts are re-read by a mind which can think and dialogue with both a text and its context, then, a discontinuity will emerge, however small. This re-reading includes the feelings and affections of the heart which are implicit in the work. If the discontinuity is sufficient, it gives an impetus to create a brand new world by recognizing and overcoming the difference between what is said and what is imagined; so, a salient difference can provide the potential for novel ideas and so, for change.

To take an example from Le Doeuff, over a number of years she finds in her reading of Gabrielle Suchon a paradigm case for her feminism. Although Suchon is a seventeenth-century woman, Le Doeuff is able to bring Suchon out from the forgotten margins of Rousseau's seventeenth-century philosophy, in order to speak on a number of levels to women and/ in philosophy. In the case of Suchon, the goal of her philosophy is "a new decipherment of the world as it was, a new set of ethical values, and a new art of deciphering the existing world from a point of view determined by these [new] values" (Le Doeuff, "Women in Dialogue" 12). Furthermore, in Le Doeuff's own account:

[I]n the Cartesian play, there was no pre-arranged category or space that could have accommodated a Gabrielle Suchon. She had to create her own

space, her mental space, for what she called . . . "the conversation of my solitude, the use of my time, the work of my mind, the feelings of my soul and the affections of my heart," with all this dedicated to the Holy Trinity, but with a clearly acknowledged ambition: to wake women from their slumber, to invite them to read and become self-taught and establish small societies to argue with one another, and exercise their own free minds this way. For the joy of developing their minds and also of becoming politically creative. For Suchon imagined her readers practising their ability to philosophize sufficiently for them to become thus able to put forth propositions about how life in society could be better arranged – particularly regarding the relations between the sexes. (Le Doeuff, "Women in Dialogue" 11–12)

In conclusion, allow me to return to Altman's review of *The Sex of Knowing*, in order to agree that Le Doeuff does not advocate "a women's way of knowing." Instead Le Doeuff encourages us to work together and, as Altman insists, "If there is a better way of doing something—if, for example, collaboration is better than competition in academic work—women ought not to claim it as 'women's way of knowing' and congratulate ourselves for having thought of it. Rather, we should seek to teach it to everyone as a better way" (Altman 15). This encouragement is Le Doeuff's contribution to creating, what I maintain is, ethical confidence in the reading and the writing of texts by women and others who are traditionally excluded from philosophy.

WORKS CITED

Altman, Meryl. "Waiting for Lady Reason." *Women's Review of Books* 22.2 (Nov. 2004): 14–15.

Anderson, Pamela Sue. "The Lived Body, Gender and Confidence." *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate*. Ed. Pamela Sue Anderson. Dordrecht: Springer, 2010. 163–80.

Bacon, Francis. *New Atlantis*. Ed., intro. and notes Susan Bruce. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 149–86.

Birch, Dinah, ed. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Blumenberg, Hans. *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1997.

Conrad, Peter. *Islands: A Trip Through Time and Space*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2007.

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. Ed. and intro. Thomas Keymer. Notes Thomas Keymer and James Kelly. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. London: Continuum, 2004.

During, Lisabeth. "Islands and Theatres." *Operative Philosophy and Imaginary Practice: Michèle Le Doeuff*. Ed. Max Deutscher. Amherst: Humanity, 2000. 223–48.

Kant, Immanuel. "Conjectural Beginning of Human History." *On History*. Trans. Emil L. Fackenheim. New York: Macmillan, 1985.

---. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan, 1952.

Le Doeuff, Michèle. "Engaging with Simone de Beauvoir." *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*. Ed. Margaret A. Simons. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004.

---. *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.* Trans. Trista Selous. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

---. "A Little Learning: Women and (Intellectual) Work." *French Feminist Philosophy*. Ed. Kelly Oliver and Lisa Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 74–89.

---. *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Trans. Colin Gordon. London: Continuum, 2002.

---. *The Sex of Knowing*. Trans. Kathryn Hamer and Lorraine Code. New York: Routledge, 2003.

---. "Le sexe de la philosophie." *Pensées pour le Nouveau Siècle: Entretiens*. Ed. Aliocha Wald Lasowski. Paris: Fayard, 2008. 449–75.

---. "Women in Dialogue and in Solitude." *Journal of Romance Studies* 5.2 (Summer 2005): 1–15.

---. *Vénus et Adonis, suivi de genèse d'une catastrophe*. Évian-les-bains: Alidades, 1986.

Mackay, Robin. "Philosophers' Islands." *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development* 6 (2010): 431–57.

Moi, Toril. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Moore, A. W. "Bounds of Sense." *Philosophical Topics*. 34.1–2 (Spring-Fall 2006): 327–44.

Nye, Andrea. *Feminism and Modern Philosophy: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Rockwood, Camilla, ed. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. 18th ed. Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap, 2009.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile, or On Education*. Ed. Christopher Kelly. Trans. Allan Bloom. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2009.

Dorota Filipczak

University of Łódź

“Alternative Selves” and Authority in the Fiction of Jane Urquhart

ABSTRACT

The article engages with “alternative selves,” a concept found in *The Stone Carvers* by a Canadian writer, Jane Urquhart. Her fiction is first seen in the context of selected texts by Lucy Maud Montgomery, Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro, who explore the clash between female characters’ conventional roles and their “secret” selves. My analysis was inspired by Pamela Sue Anderson’s *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, which stresses the need for “reinventing ourselves as other” in the face of biased beliefs and dominant epistemology. In particular, my article refers to Anderson’s concern with Kant’s imaginary from *The Critique of Pure Reason*, where “the territory of pure understanding” is projected on the island, while desire, chaos and death are identified with the sea. Seen through the prism of a feminist reading of the philosophical imaginary, the sea becomes the female beyond. Urquhart’s three novels: *Away*, *The Stone Carvers* and *A Map of Glass* dissolve the opposition between Kantian island and water, by showing how reason is invaded by desire and death, and how the female protagonist embodies the elements that have been repressed. Urquhart’s fiction, which is “landscape driven,” provides the image of a dynamic relationship between the qualities that form a static binary opposition in Kantian discourse. Mary in *Away*, Klara in *The Stone Carvers* and Sylvia in *A Map of Glass* all subvert the dominant epistemology by following their desire, which becomes “a positive energy” and not “a deviation from a good rational norm,” to refer to another concept by Anderson. Urquhart’s Mary, Klara and Sylvia have to contend with power vested in collective beliefs and stereotypical construction of femininity. By venturing into the liminal zone beyond the territory of “pure understanding,” the three protagonists regain their voices and discover their authority. The article ends with the analysis of a Homeric intertext in *A Map of Glass*, where Sylvia identifies with Odysseus “lashed to mast” so that he would not respond to the call of the siren song. Reading Homer’s passage

on the siren song, one realizes that the use of the Kantian imaginary turns Ithaca into the island of truth, and the sea into the stormy beyond, identified with desire, death and femaleness. While the *Odyssey* suppresses the dangerous message of the siren song, Urquhart's fiction rewrites it and reclaims it as positive inspiration for the female protagonist.

ABSTRACT

28

In *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* Pamela Sue Anderson sets out to refigure biased beliefs and challenges “the dominant epistemology” by stressing the need for “reinventing ourselves as other” (18). The other is understood here in two ways, as “the repressed other of female desire” and “the outsider on the margins of patriarchy.” The idea has long been present in literature in a different guise. As many novels of Canadian women writers demonstrate, “the repressed other of female desire” has always sought entry into literary discourse. For example, the trilogy about Emily Byrd Starr by Lucy Maud Montgomery made claim to the erotic and creative potential in a woman controlled by an unimaginative family and patriarchal construction of femininity. Though Emily finally succumbed to the glamour of an idyllic union, she came closest to Montgomery's own yearning to reinvent herself as other. Montgomery identified with her own heroine, whose greatest wish was to become a writer (*After Green Gables* 88).

The importance of Emily books for Canadian women writers can be seen in Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro. Laurence's Vanessa from *A Bird in the House* also reinvents herself as a writer. One story in the cycle “The Half-Husky” shows Vanessa receiving an unusual gift from a Ukrainian outsider to the brick house of Grandfather Connor. Vanessa gets a dog of mixed blood, who grows into a fierce creature because he has been taunted by another outsider. The way that animals in this short story cycle exteriorize the nature of people echoes Amerindian stories, as Margaret Atwood observed in her letter to Laurence (2). The half-husky might also be seen as a counterpart of Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, because he illustrates the fierce, creative urge in Vanessa. This urge cannot be tamed by the smell of floors polished with beeswax, which is disdained by *Steppenwolf*, and eventually abandoned by Vanessa, when she makes an exit from the world of convention into the world of writing (Filipczak, *Unheroic Heroines* 291–92).

Laurence's term for the repressed other in a woman was “that other self of hers.” The writer used the phrase with reference to her mother in

Dance on the Earth, in a passage describing her mother’s love for music, her artistic self, which was eventually abandoned because she could not reconcile it with wifely and maternal duties (38). “That other self of hers” connects with the underground self in the fiction of Alice Munro, especially *Lives of Girls and Women*, where the intertwined erotic and creative desires of Del Jordan constitute one of the secrets in “deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum” (210). Del lives a trivial life, but her mind wanders into fiction. And so does her body when she leaves town to make love to Garnet French, who later nearly drowns her in the Wawanash River because she refused to convert to his creed and marry him. Del gothicizes her experiences in the last chapter of her novel, where she reinvents herself as the author of a Gothic text, whose plot disturbingly transforms and completes whatever did not happen to her.

The phenomenon of “that other self of hers” appears in the fiction of Jane Urquhart, who, like Laurence and Munro, acknowledges the importance of the Emily trilogy on her own growth as a writer (Hammill 113). Starting with her first novel *Whirlpool*, through *Away* into the latest fiction, Urquhart’s female protagonist is the one who challenges the dominant ideology by following her desire. *Away* is unique in projecting the safe structure of mental habits on an island and turbulent desire on the ocean. This brings to mind the opposition set up by Kant in an image of an island in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, which is so convincingly explored by Pamela Sue Anderson in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* and in the article from this issue of the journal. Here is an excerpt from the former: “[m]odern, philosophical texts have frequently used images of the sea as outside territory of rationality, in relation to the (rational) secure ground of an island” (xi). In this context, Jane Urquhart’s *Away* can be seen as text that dissolves the opposition in the philosophical imaginary, for the island of Rathlin in the north of Ireland is suddenly deluged by a tidal wave carrying silver teapots, cabbages, barrels of whiskey, and finally a dying sailor from a shipwrecked vessel. The sailor is found by one of the female protagonists, Mary O’Malley, which changes her fate, and the fates of women from the next generations of her family.

An excerpt from Kant’s philosophical masterpiece quoted by Pamela Sue Anderson states the following: “the territory of pure understanding . . . is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth—enchanting name!—surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion” (qtd. in *Feminist Philosophy* 11). In the words of the author

Kant uses the sea to represent the danger of false belief and illusion as contrasted with the true beliefs and secure reality of the island. The fem-

inist objection to the latter is that desire and disorder associated with water and fluidity are feared, while reason and order linked with stability and solidity are highly valued. (xi)

Jane Urquhart's novel certainly ventures into the turbulent sea of desire through the character of Mary who is transformed into the other when the boundary between the island of reason and the ocean of desire collapses as a result of the tide. Urquhart's description of the tide transforming the island and at least one of its inhabitants is not unique in Canadian literature. *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* by Jack Hodgins is set in Port Annie on an island buffeted by the Pacific Ocean in British Columbia, and tells a similar story of a young woman's sexual awakening:

30

Just when Angela Turner had decided to give up and leave Port Annie, where nothing ever happened to a girl except this never-ending rain that would drive her crazy, the giant wave had washed up into town and left a Peruvian sailor on the flowered sheets of her unmade bed. (41)

In contrast to the sailor who dies in the arms of Mary in *Away*, this one proves very much alive, elegant and ingenious in the sexual education he offers to the otherwise sexless Angela (a telling name indeed), who enjoys him for quite some time in her isolated house before he finally leaves her in order to join the crew of his ship. In the narrative by Hodgins the wave breaking into Port Annie is connected with many magical events, such as the arrival of an amazingly beautiful woman through whose agency the title character Joseph Bourne is miraculously resurrected. The collapsing of the boundary between the turbulent ocean and the clean, ordered city, now strewn with seaweed and pregnant with change, signals the incursion of magic realism, the mood that also pervades *Away*.¹ Both authors talk about the visitation by a tidal wave, the invasion of reason by desire, the transformation of a chosen character by the encounter with the other, who brings in the excluded element of physicality. Both connect nicely with the image from Kant, whose rigid distinction between land and sea they actually dissolve. A question arises about how perceptive an observer of nature Kant actually was. He is known to have spent his life in Königs-

¹ For the analyses of *Away* in the context of magic realism see: Anna Branach-Kallas, *In the Whirlpool of the Past: Memory, Intertextuality and History in the Fiction of Jane Urquhart*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2003, 141–152; Maria Edelson, “‘The story will take her wherever it goes:’ Narrative and Landscape in *Away*,” *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart*, ed. Dorota Filipczak and Agata Handley, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010, 63–74; Agnieszka Rzepa, *Feats and Defeats: Spaces of Canadian Magic Realism*, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2009, 73–79, 97–99.

berg, whose historical centre includes two islands on the river Pregel. Kant only travelled to the places in the vicinity of Königsberg (Reiss xvii). Tidal movement must have made scant impression on him, for the Baltic rises and falls very little in comparison with other seas. In fact, Kant’s distinction between land and water may have been influenced by the river islands on the Pregel. Let us quote an excerpt from *Away* describing what happens on the island of Rathlin, a parodic echo of Kant’s northern island, which lies off the most northern coast of Ireland:

The night before a furious storm had reduced the circumference of the island by at least ten feet. It had snatched overturned curraghs from the shore and dispatched seven of Mary’s favourite boulders to God knows where. The sandy beach nearest the girl’s cabin had been made off with as well and had been replaced with a collection of stones resembling poor potatoes. No one—not even those who had spent some time on mainland beaches—had seen their like before and they were rumoured to have come from the land where no grass grew and nothing breathed. (4)

Commenting on Kant’s image, Pamela Sue Anderson raises the question of the relation between a female philosopher and the sea from Kantian imaginary (*Feminist Philosophy* 12). I shall borrow this question in order to apply it to the female character in Urquhart’s fiction and her relation to the Kantian ocean, whose mediator she becomes on the island of supposed truth.

Urquhart’s Mary O’Malley is believed to have been taken “away” in a mysterious way, becoming forever an outcast from the community, despite its unremitting efforts to socialize her back into her conventional role. In Mary’s case, “that other self of hers” (to use Laurence’s phrase) is a gift from the dying sailor who kindles enough love in her to estrange her from the community. Mary is the mediator between stability and order on the island and turbulence of the ocean, which submerges the ship called Moira and its sailor who utters the name of the ship in front of Mary, thus changing her identity for ever. Mary swims naked in the ocean with her demon lover, and imagines sexual union. He introduces her to the world of submerged structures, sunken architecture, attributes of life on the land now buried in the sea of desire. Caterina Ricciardi draws readers’ attention to the fact that Mary recognizes the sailor as a visitor from the “otherworld island.” The critic asks if Canada, where Mary is taken away in the literal sense much later, becomes “Oisín’s or Saint Brendan’s isle to be searched for in the west, across the sea, far away from Ireland” (70). This interpretation would further destabilize the Kantian opposition between island and ocean. The island of Rathlin has its “otherworld” opposite, while Canada turns into a mythical Irish isle, as if each of them had its doppelgänger. Ricciardi’s comment hints at the motif of descent, which

is also noted by Anne Compton, who compares the condition of Mary to that of Persephone, who “will live in this world and in the otherworld” (135). While Persephone connects death and desire, the descent “under water” also brings to mind “the waters of death” in biblical Sheol, a perilous experience that may but does not have to be a prelude to regeneration (Filipczak, *Valley* 48–49). This, in turn, connects with the descent into “that other self of hers” or “underground self,” a necessary catalyst in the metamorphosis of other Urquhart heroines.

The name and Irish context of the protagonist of *Away* cannot but provoke associations with Mariolatry. Mary is a virgin, though she gains complete knowledge of a male body from her single act of watching over the dying sailor. Thus she is at the same time pure and possessed by the other, and, characteristically, she ends up handed over to a man who wants to marry her, though, like New Testament Joseph, he knows she has belonged to the other. Mary is an unusual echo of biblical Mary because she is endowed with the gift of eloquence. Rather than pray, she sings the rhymes that provoke the suspicion of a priest, who is willing to “thrash” the demon out of her if necessary. Mary’s refusal to go back to her former self finds a most interesting expression in the scene that might be read as a reversal of Annunciation. In order to free her from her demon lover, Father Quinn tries to exorcize Mary repeatedly in the presence of her mother and her future husband. He resorts to all possible means at his disposal: prayer, holy water, psychological pressure. Mary comes up with one word that is relevant in the context:

“No,” she said quietly, and it was the first word she had spoken.

“No,” she said again into the distance of the room.

“Cast off this shadow, Mary,” the priest was saying “that stands between yourself and God.” (*Away* 48)

Pressure of ecclesiastical authority, which is supposed to transform Mary into God’s handmaid, fails to elicit her agreement, let alone her self-effacement. Mary stands her ground, and in her thoughts belongs to someone else. Brian marries her, and promises to protect her. Mary’s visions disappear when she becomes a mother. In the face of devastating potato famine the couple move to Canada with their son, much like Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt. Mary gives birth to a daughter in the new land, symbolically transforming it into the locus of new life. Yet she is later taken “away” again, after she comes into contact with a vast expanse of water. On that memorable day her son Liam sees her apron flapping on a clothesline in the wind. The apron is the costume connected with the role that Mary never fully identified with, so she was able to discard it.

In the words of Anna Branach-Kallas, Mary is “the doubly colonized other.” As she notes, Mary’s husband

. . . who has always sought for a Celtic bard among his students and is filled with sorrow because he has never found one, which makes him fear that Gaelic culture will disappear, fails to notice that he has given his learning to a real poet—his wife. (138)

Branach-Kallas sees Mary as challenging the stereotypes of Irish peasant women and Canadian pioneer women. In the latter form Mary resembles the first of Urquhart’s fictional heroines, Fleda McDougal, who writes herself out of the military, nationalistic and domestic scripts that her husband Major McDougal prepared for her. Fleda is trapped in the image of an angel in the house, and in a fantasy of femininity spawned by a poet who adores her, but she resists both. Her journal, whose final words reveal her voice, might be seen as a reconstruction of *écriture féminine* in nineteenth-century Canada. It ends with the words “[s]etting forth,” which encapsulate the condition of Urquhart’s heroines: setting forth from the islands of objective “truth,” following their own subjective desire for potential that can be found only beyond the secure confines.

In her novel explicitly dealing with a female artist, *The Stone Carvers*, the author shows us a protagonist who also yearns to reinvent herself, but, like the previously mentioned female characters, she is confined in the homely structure of custom and propriety. A descendant of German immigrants to Ontario, Klara Becker lives an orderly life in the village of Shoneval until her peace of mind is disrupted by the intrusion of an Irishman, Eamon O’Sullivan, who falls in love with her.

One of the scenes describing his courtship of Klara claims particular attention.

That night as she teetered on the edge of sleep, Klara heard music so achingly sad, so astonishingly pure and clear, that her entire body was alert to the sound. She walked furtively over to the window, as if she feared she might awaken a number of unfamiliar ghosts or alternative selves. (86)

The quotation leads us into “the territory of dreams and memory . . . a milieu in which Urquhart excels,” to use the words of Timothy Findley from his review of *Storm Glass* (14). Klara guesses that the “music so achingly sad” is the sound of the fiddle played by Eamon in the orchard, and “her entire body” is “alert.” At the same time she is caught in a Gothic situation. Her erotic desire manifests itself as a taboo, a Gothic secret whose presence she fears to acknowledge because it might destroy

her conventional image. Her desire must appear fearsome to her because she has interiorized male disapproval of female expressiveness. As stated by Anderson in her comment on Kristeva, female desire “has a negative meaning for patriarchy; in the patriarchal configuration of Adam and Eve, it is a conscious inclination to deviate from a good rational intention” (*Feminist Philosophy* 151). Klara cannot reach for her potential, because she has not yet accepted her “alternative selves.” She can only experience her sexual drive “furtively” and “on the edge of sleep,” but “the following morning she had almost convinced herself that the music and the figure in the orchard had been merely an unsettling dream” (Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers* 86). Interestingly, the night scene recalls Mary O’Malley’s communion with the demon lover. His “song was like no other song,” and it became a source of forbidden knowledge, somatic and spiritual.

Eamon challenges Klara’s desire for “passion and imagination” (99), which has been subdued by the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception who attempted to transform their protégée into a docile handmaid. Klara is described as the one who would like to know the secret lives of saints, especially “moments of sin.” Thus she is “alert” to “alternative selves” underneath the facade. This is exactly why the nuns try to divert her attention from martyrs and visionaries to abbesses, connected with hard work, as a way to ward off temptation. In a very ironic passage the text intimates to us how the nuns try to prevent “Klara’s idle hands” from becoming “the Devil’s playground” (100). Indeed, Klara is very conscientious in her role as seamstress, and as woodcarver working on the figure of an abbess for the local church. What the nuns do not foresee is that Klara will not be prevented from discovering her “alternative” self, which will inevitably emerge as a result of her passion for Eamon. Her “idle hands” explore Eamon’s body only “furtively” at first, when she takes measurements for his red waistcoat. Later the same “idle hands” sculpt Eamon’s face in Walter Allward’s monument dedicated to soldiers killed in the First World War.

While she is taking measurements, which is an erotic overture to the relationship, Eamon declares his passion for her, and she finds herself responding in kind. Eamon voices his desire for a red waistcoat, and does not change his mind when Klara chastises him for a flashy colour. His passion for her is voiced with equal intensive way. Her mind fraught with images of black, grey and white garments, a black book of measurements in her hand, Klara is both repelled and attracted by the explicitness of desire. “I’ll die of this” (80), Eamon declares. His image of agony through love connects with Klara’s grandfather’s allusion to passionate Irish saints, which he made in response to her question: “Would my abbess ever have been in love?” (100). If the abbess is seen as Klara’s self-portrait, it is essential for her to ask such a question.

Interestingly, Klara Becker and Eamon O’Sullivan can be juxtaposed with Gretta Conroy and Michael Furey in “The Dead,” the last short story in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Michael Furey, of whom Gretta says: “I think he died for me” (252), is as passionate as Eamon. The couple go for walks in the country just like Eamon and Klara. Michael stands under Gretta’s window to confess his love, much like Eamon, whose “nocturnal appearances” delight Klara. And Michael has a good voice; when Gretta hears Bartell D’Arcy sing after the party at Gabriel’s aunts she seems mesmerised by “distant music” (Joyce 240), which makes both Michael Furey and her “alternative” self resurface from memory in the confession she makes later in front of her husband, Gabriel. An association that suggests itself at this stage is that the music Eamon made in the orchard on a memorable night lingered in Klara “on the edge of sleep,” and Eamon’s memory beckoned her from distance many years later. After a fruitless existence in Shoneval, her time filled with tending a bull and cow, Klara becomes aware again of her “alternative selves” of artist and lover.

Klara has travelled across the ocean in male disguise, apt for her artistic vocation, and thus has managed to become one of the carvers working on the war memorial. Her real identity is unmasked by Walter Allward, when she is altering one of his figures. It is then that her companion Giorgio falls in love with her. Klara eventually confesses Eamon’s name in front of him, like Gretta, who voiced Michael Furey’s name in front of Gabriel. Yet Gabriel could only feel humiliated by Gretta’s passion for a man who had worked “in the gasworks,” whereas Giorgio lets Klara mourn Eamon.

Klara’s alteration of Allward’s monument can be called female dialogue with a tradition² that Allward stands for. Allward’s previous work is the sculpture of colonial founding fathers, hence a heavily paternalistic statement. The marble for the war memorial is cut by his engineers in the very quarry that served emperor Diocletian, which connects Allward with the Roman Empire while continuing the link with the British Empire inherent in his earlier project. The difference between him and Klara is like that between a male philosopher and his feminist interpreter. Allward wants the universal in the monument, but Klara makes the sculpture singular, drawing on her embodied experience of sexual love. Her vision is accommodated by the sculptor, and thus it becomes a personal inscription on an otherwise impersonal body of work. Alana Vincent says: “Urquhart chose the figure with the least visible face of any on the monument onto which to project her own narrative” (80). Urquhart’s novel is a monument

² Cf. Michèle Le Doeuff, “Women in Dialogue and in Solitude,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 5:2 (2005): 1–15.

in itself, and a dialogue with the tradition of war heroism, whose revisionary interpreter she becomes.

In the act of chiselling Eamon's features on the monument designed by Allward, Klara reverses the myth of Pygmalion; she symbolically recreates Eamon, and also realizes herself as an artist. This echoes her previous work on the red waistcoat, which she recreated for herself after Eamon's death. Like Ishtar braving the underworld to reach for Tammuz, like Isis restoring dismembered Osiris to life, Klara re-members Eamon. Other critics also connect her descent into the trenches with myth. Branach-Kallas sees Klara as Euridyce, who is led from the world of shadows into light by Giorgio, her Orpheus ("Gothic Palimpsests" 49). Ann Compton states that "like the figures of Greek myth [Klara] descend[s] into a lower world as Euripides' Alcestis does when she offers herself to Hades as a substitute for her husband . . . or as Ariadne does to guide Theseus out of the labyrinth" (139). While I do not find Compton's interpretation convincing, it is evidence that Jane Urquhart's fiction resonates with allusions to mythology and the classics, and this I shall return to later.

Female desire is certainly the focus of *Away* and *The Stone Carvers*. Interestingly, a passage from *The Stone Carvers* might be used to comment on the condition of the protagonist in *Away*. When Klara ponders the lives of saints and other stories that the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception tell her for moral guidance, she comes up with the following:

She believed (even more heretically and secretively) that the Virgin Mary had been in love with the Holy Spirit, and that she had spent the remainder of her days pining for this spirit and longing for another miraculous union. (99)

The text contains a trace of *Away*, and confirms my interpretation of Mary's condition. Though she is Virgin Mary à rebours, Mary O'Malley pines for another miraculous union all her life and does not rest until the union is consummated in her own death. Klara's Virgin Mary turns out to be a passionate woman like all female characters in Jane Urquhart's fiction. Klara endows the Virgin Mary with the sexual desire that was stamped out or duly removed from her image under Christian patriarchy.

The imagery of the novel is reminiscent of *Away*. When Klara and Eamon fall on the ice together and their hands touch, she is still frozen into her conventional role. Yet when Eamon startles her into eroticism during a ritual of taking measurements, Klara seems "to be moving in a dream *through water*" (80; my emphasis). Also, like Patrick in *The Whirlpool*, and the sailor in *Away*, Eamon is a beautiful young man, which Klara notices when they both, though separately, undress in order

to swim chastely in the pool. The scene also anticipates their conjunction intertextually, because water is the element of Mary swimming out naked to merge with her demon lover. At the same time, the seascape conjured up in Urquhart's novels invites comparison with *Elemental Passions* and *Amante Marine* by Luce Irigaray. *Away* brings in the repressed element of water which transforms solid land. Water flows its surreptitious course in *The Stone Carvers*, where it surfaces to dissolve the solidity of the land on which the monument stands, in particular, the tenuous solidity of the underground corridors, into which Giorgio and Klara descend in order to make love in the face of death, thus enacting the sentence in the last chapter of the *Song of Songs*: “love is strong as death.” The military structure is suddenly invaded by desire: “she believed her body, the candlelight, and the walls of the tunnels were all turning to water, and that she might drown in herself, in him” (355). Later, after the love scene, Giorgio and Klara are described as explorers travelling a “river system they had yet to name” (356). This time the Kantian opposition between land and watery expanse is undercut in a different way. The portion of land given to Canadians in return for their action in war becomes an island whose base dissolves in the “tributaries” of hidden passageways. The only solid structure seems to be Allward's monument, which reaches into the air and merges with it. There is a subtle allusion to *Away* here, and reversal of its imagery. Mary O'Malley is led by her demon lover to admire the underwater structure, a city in the ocean; Klara is led by Giorgio and “his light” to discover a network of tunnels built during the First World War like an underground river system, where walls turn to water. Both images collapse the opposition between fluid water and solid earth.

Water imagery keeps resurfacing in Urquhart's *A Map of Glass*, where the reader encounters an island whose geographical identity is contested. Some consider it a river island, while others see it as an island on the lake whose waters merge with those of the river. Known as Timber Island, it was inhabited by Andrew Woodman's ancestors. They had drained the bog in the area so successfully that the land began to lose water. Sand crept into the houses, slowly seeping into kitchen utensils and beds, to finally pile up in the windows, cutting off sunlight and air. Reversing the imagery connected with the monument and its surroundings in *The Stone Carvers*, the text shows how the island washed by waters becomes, paradoxically, a desert. Seen as a metaphorical comment on the Kantian island of truth, Timber Island reflects the condition of the mind that has excluded desire and chaos as represented by vanished water. The condition of the island is embodied in its sole occupant, a middle-aged spinster artist, Annabelle. Her exclusion of desire consigns her to a life of dryness, practicality and routine. In her essay on *A Map of Glass* Marta Goszczyńska interprets Annabelle

and other characters through the prism of the novel's intertextual link to Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" ("Cursed Islands" 93–105). In fact, Tennyson's river island could easily be combined with the Kantian land of truth and enchantment washed by the waters of death.

This is what we find at the beginning of the novel, where Jerome seeks inspiration for his art in the total solitude of deserted Timber Island, now covered with snow. Yet Jerome's feeling of security is suddenly shattered by the sight of "a drowned man," "a floater," to use a word from *The Whirlpool*, where Niagara Falls and its vicinity become the scene of spectacular tragedies, suicides and exploits that end in death. Death encroaches upon the artist's isolation, while he tries to retain the purity of contemplative experience, much like St Jerome, to whom he is compared. This Gothic visitation opens an alternative script to Jerome, the text of desire, which displaces his own narrative. After his return to Toronto he is visited by Sylvia, who claims to have been the drowned man's lover. She shares the story of her desire with Jerome. And, she shares the journals connected with Andrew's ancestors from Timber Island, thus making the "floater" regain his voice. Reverting to the *Song of Songs*, Sylvia speaks of her love in the face of death, much like Mary O'Malley.

When Sylvia's husband, a doctor, finds her and has a conversation with Jerome, he explains that his wife does not distinguish between hallucination and truth. The man she described as her lover was an Alzheimer's patient who had wandered off on his own in winter, and eventually died. Malcolm's testimony throws light on Sylvia's condition. Sylvia becomes a different person during flights from her ordinary life, and she creates genuine relationships for herself in lieu of the missing sexual connection with her own husband. Malcolm's clinical judgement is distorted by his trust in reason and distrust of imagination. His insistence that Sylvia cannot make friends contradicts the reality of her experience with Jerome and Myra.

The "alternative self" in *A Map of Glass* echoes and transforms a similar phenomenon in *Away*. Sylvia is also "taken away" from her ordinary self, but as she is a twentieth-century heroine, her condition is diagnosed medically, unlike the condition of Mary, who, for superstitious nineteenth-century Irish people, was simply possessed by an evil and recalcitrant spirit, much like the Gerasene demoniac from the Markan Gospel. Sylvia confesses to Jerome the story of her "secret" self, to use the adjective from the novel. Like Mary, she discards her "previous self," to use the expression from *Away*. The two phrases highlight Urquhart's preoccupation with "alternative selves" which allow female protagonists to venture into dream and desire of more substance than reality controlled by reason.

In conversation with Jerome Sylvia says that she was saved from being run over when Andrew Woodward got hold of her. She conjures up the

image of Andrew holding her, which brings to mind Mary and the demon sailor whom she holds close to herself. While reminiscing about the later stages of her relationship, Sylvia says:

The idea of him, you see, kept its arm around my shoulders, just as my peninsula kept its arm around the lake, protected me, and kept me safely distant from everyone else. The distance, of course, was not new, but the phantom encircling arm was a surprise until it became a habit like breathing, or like pulse. (134)

The language Sylvia uses combines the Gothic with the somatic. She describes her lover as a phantom, this making him close to Mary’s demon lover. The quotation brings to mind Mary swimming naked in the sea until the idea of her lover took shape in the water and she felt herself being entered by him.

Sylvia makes tactile maps, which are substituted for the body in her confession. Her lover is the peninsula against which she defines herself in her fluidity as a lake. The water connects the three analysed books; Mary and her lover swim in the ocean; Klara and Eamon indulge in erotic overtures in the shadowed pool; Sylvia is the lake enacting conjunction with the peninsula identified as the lover. The water is a fitting matrix for the emergence of an “alternative self,” which surfaces like a foetus from amniotic fluid. This refigures the Kantian binary opposition which leaves no room for either waters of birth or death, Kant keeping land and water apart, and himself safe from the female beyond.

The water imagery guides us into a particularly revealing intertext explored below. Sylvia’s confession to Jerome throws light on the condition of other Urquhart heroines. This is what she says about her lover and herself:

He often stood on burning decks of one kind or another when all but he had fled. And I . . . I seemed to be constantly lashed to the mast by those who had, for my own safety—or was it for theirs?—tied me there. (128)

At least three allusions may be embedded in this excerpt. The first is connected with a poem by Felicia Hemans, a Victorian poet who glorified domestic ideology (Carlyle 44–45). Jerome remembers the well-known line from the poem that Sylvia alludes to: “the boy stood on the burning deck, when all but he had fled.” Another literary allusion concerns Longfellow’s *The Wreck of the Hesperus* which tells the story of a skipper who takes his daughter out to sea and ties her to the mast when storm breaks out. He dies in the storm, and so does his daughter, whose body, still tied to the mast, is found on the shore. Her bondage recalls crucifixion, and since her purity symbolizes the American nation, she becomes

a foundational sacrifice (Miskolcze 62). Sylvia sees herself and Andrew as victims of the ideology that foisted repressive stereotypes on men and women alike. Yet, hidden beneath the two allusions is the most important image, that of Odysseus, who is lashed to a mast so that he will not be seduced by the siren song.

According to Lillian Doherty, the author of “Sirens, Muses and Female Narrators in the *Odyssey*”, the siren song is a subversive text within the *Odyssey*, and therefore its power must be contained so that Odysseus may achieve his homecoming (82). Sylvia may be said to personify the condition of Odysseus, bound to leave home and wander aimlessly. In her case the siren song might stand for the lure of “the alternative self,” the subversive voice from the uncharted territory beyond the confines of her domestic role. The siren song posits the danger not only to a female version of Odysseus but also to the social order that keeps her “lashed to the mast” for her own safety. This is where *A Map of Glass* meets *Away*, where the motif of seduction by a demon lover corresponds to possible seduction by sirens in the *Odyssey*. Doherty states that sirens belonged with the Greek folk world just like mermaids, underworld demons and other monstrous creatures (82). Mary’s demon lover from *Away* meets all these criteria. He is connected with the underworld, like a mermaid who supposedly stole a fisherman from the island of Rathlin in *Away*. The demon lover is thus a male counterpart of the sirens, who seduces Mary with his appearance and song. He offers her knowledge, but also subverts social order and ultimately leads Mary to her death in Canada.

Sirens in the *Odyssey* are connected with seduction that relies on speech (Doherty, “Sirens” 86). In *Away* Mary is metamorphosed by the first and last word of a dying sailor, and she embraces the word *Moirai* as her new name, signifying the intrusion of an “alternative self” which displaces her “previous” identity. Klara Becker is also seduced by the power of Eamon’s passionate speech, a volume of Irish poetry that he asks her to read, and the music he makes in the orchard. Sylvia appreciates Andrew for the intimate knowledge of the land.

In each of the above books the female protagonist reinvents herself as other, by following a desire which has been repressed. Mary, Klara and Sylvia become outsiders who refuse the attraction of safe domesticity, and venture into a liminal zone fraught with the danger of death and the promise of knowledge. In this they change the pattern connected with Odysseus, who has to ward off temptations that would prevent him from coming home. Mary, Klara and Sylvia are transformed by the experiences that might offer a parallel to the siren song. In T.F. Rigelhof’s review of *The Stone Carvers*, predating *A Map of Glass*, Jane Urquhart is compared to Homer in her “uncanny ability to interweave historical events, legends,

folk tales, visions, anecdotes, longings and journeys” (54). One could add that she also undercuts and subverts the monumental and heroic elements of Homeric tradition. Commenting on the experience of reading *The Stone Carvers*, Rigelhof thinks of a student recounting the experience of reading the *Odyssey* (55). The *Odyssey* predates the Kantian opposition between secure island and perilous, stormy sea. Reading Homer’s passage on the siren song, one realizes that the use of a Kantian imaginary turns Ithaca into the island of truth, and the sea into the stormy beyond identified with desire, death and femaleness. The unexpected surfacing of this intertext in Urquhart’s latest novel is connected with a thorough transformation of this episode. As Lillian Doherty reminds us, the *Odyssey* “can be seen to elide or circumscribe the voices of dangerous females” (Doherty, *Siren Songs* 63). This is bound to happen since the siren song is viewed and judged from the perspective imbued with the author’s patriarchal bias. Seen in the context of Jane Urquhart’s writings, the siren song becomes an inspiration for the female protagonist, awakening her hidden potential like “distant music” in Joyce’s “The Dead.” The myth is thus refigured and metamorphosed, just like the myth of Adam and Eve rewritten by Pamela Sue Anderson with the use of Kristeva and Ricoeur. In such rewriting “desire comes to be recognized as a potentially positive energy” (Anderson, “Abjection” 221). And the Kantian warning against the perils of water, his preference for enchantment offered by the island of truth, are confronted and transgressed. Only through such refiguring and rewriting can the authority of “alternative selves” emerge and last.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Pamela Sue. “‘Abjection . . . the Most Propitious Place for Communication’: Celebrating the Death of the Unitary Subject.” *Bodies, Lives, Voices: Gender in Theology*. Ed. Kathleen O’Grady, Ann L. Gilroy and Jeanette Gray. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998. 209–30.

---. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

Atwood, Margaret. Letter to Margaret Laurence 18 Jan. 1971. York University Archives and Special Collections. Call No. 1980–001/001(43).

Branach-Kallas, Anna. “Gothic Palimpsests: Exploring Multiple Forms of Haunting in Jane Urquhart’s Fiction.” *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart*. Ed. Dorota Filipczak and Agata Handley. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010. 37–51.

---. *In the Whirlpool of the Past: Memory, Intertextuality and History in the Fiction of Jane Urquhart*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2003.

Carlyle, Norma Clarke. *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love: the Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Welsh*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Compton, Anne. "Romancing the Landscape. Jane Urquhart's Fiction." *Jane Urquhart: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Laura Ferri. Toronto: Guernica, 2005. 115–46.

Doherty, Lillian Eileen. "Sirens, Muses and Female Narrators in the *Odyssey*." *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey*. Ed. Beth Cohen. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 81–92.

---. *Siren Songs: Gender, Audiences and Narrators in the Odyssey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Edelson, Maria. "'The story will take her wherever it wants to go': Narrative and Landscape in *Away*." *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart*. Ed. Dorota Filipczak and Agata Handley. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010. 63–74.

Filipczak, Dorota. *Unheroic Heroines: The Portrayal of Women in the Writings of Margaret Laurence*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2007.

---. "The Valley of the Shadow of Death." *Biblical Intertext in Malcolm Lowry's Fiction*. Ed. Paul Tiessen. *Malcolm Lowry Review* 43–44 (Fall 1998–Spring 1999).

Findley, Timothy. "Through the Looking Glass." *Books in Canada*, June–July 1987. 14.

Goszczyńska, Marta. "Cursed Islands of Solitude: 'The Lady of Shalott' in Jane Urquhart's *A Map of Glass*." *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart*. Ed. Dorota Filipczak and Agata Handley. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010. 93–105.

Hammill, Faye. *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada 1760–2000*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003.

Joyce, James. "The Dead." *Dubliners*. London: Penguin, 1996. 199–256.

Laurence, Margaret. *Dance on the Earth: A Memoir*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998.

Miskolcze, Robin. *Women and Children First: Nineteenth-Century Sea Narratives and American Identity*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

Montgomery, Lucy Maud. *After Green Gables: L. M. Montgomery's Letters to Ephraim Weber, 1916–1941*. Ed. Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Tiessen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Munro, Alice. *Lives of Girls and Women*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990.

Reiss, Hans Siegbert. *Kant: Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Ricciardi, Caterina. “Away and the Meaning of Colonization.” *Jane Urquhart: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Laura Ferri. Toronto: Guernica, 2005. 65–77.

Rigelhof, T.F. “Stone Dazzling: *The Stone Carvers*.” *Jane Urquhart: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Laura Ferri. Toronto: Guernica, 2005. 51–56.

Rzepa, Agnieszka. *Feats and Defeats: Spaces of Canadian Magic Realism*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2009.

Urquhart, Jane. *Away*. London: Bloomsbury, 2002.

---. *A Map of Glass*. San Francisco: MacAdam/Cage, 2006.

---. *The Stone Carvers*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2001.

Vincent, Alana. “Making Memory Solid: Body, Landscape and Identity in the Canadian National Vimy Memorial and Jane Urquhart’s *The Stone Carvers*.” *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart*. Ed. Dorota Filipczak and Agata Handley. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010. 75–86.

Agnieszka Łowczanin

University of Łódź

Who Are You, Mrs Walter Shandy, Aberratio Naturae?

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the critically unacknowledged aspect of the canonical *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne: the authorial delineation and narrative management of the character of Mrs Shandy, who is a silent presence in the background even though the pivotal personal events for the narrator of this spoof-autobiography are his conception and birth. The novel, otherwise thoroughly structurally and thematically experimental, seems to be fossilized in the ancient and Christian philosophers' assumptions about the physical incompleteness of the "weaker vessel" and the malign influence of her disturbing physiology, which for centuries fed into the ontological concept of a woman as Nature's aberration, *aberratio naturae*. Mrs Shandy's muteness, a striking contrast to her husband's verbosity, her absence and exclusion from the affairs of the male dominated household seem to run counter to the novel's progressive form and linguistic audacity, the sociological shifts slowly taking root and medical discoveries made before and during this age of paradoxes.

ABSTRACT

Tristram Shandy is a challenging read. An example of "postmodernism before there was modernism to be post of,"¹ and a canonical work of nonsensicality, it abounds in experimental everything: conversational narration,

¹ A line from film adaptation of *Tristram Shandy*. Michael Winterbottom, dir. *A Cock and Bull Story*. UK, 2005.

nonexistent plot, authorial distancing, unaffected presentation of human idiosyncrasy, spontaneous rapidity of plot progression, its digressive retardation and relaxed meandering. After Defoe and Richardson it is a gratifying read. Sterne's lightness and apparent nonsensicality quicken one's imaginative step after his predecessors' puritan narratives, with their anchor in the unquestionable truth of the Scriptures and their flattened morality. Pioneering as their novels were, their moralistic precepts and didactic nerve tied their fantasy tight. And even though Richardson may be considered the first novelist to successfully draw forth the potential of the unseen, in comparison with Sterne both *Pamela* and *Clarissa* have a suffocating moralistic aura, which, among other things, forbids formal and thematic experimentation. Even Richardson's follower, Fielding, who peppered this newfangled genre with his Eton-acquired erudition, with theoretical preludes and with narrators who treat the reader as intellectual partner, still seems harnessed by principle and expectation. In the light cast by Sterne, Fielding is systematic, explanatory and overtly methodical. Realizing the limitations of the literary convention he adopts and the medium of communication ascribed to it, Sterne refuses to be constrained in any way and instead fuses various forms of artistic expression. As a result, his narrator resorts to doodles and asterisks, to a blend of languages, to descriptions of gestures his characters make and to songs they sing when language fails to sufficiently articulate thought and emotion.

Sterne has Tristram, his narrator, announce that "writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation" and that no writer who knows "the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all . . . but halve this matter amicably" and leave something for his reader to imagine (127). Tristram declares also that, provided he follows "along the line of his story,—he may go backwards and forwards as he will" (375).

Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going down one pair of stairs? for we are got no farther yet than to the first landing, and there are fifteen more steps down to the bottom; and for aught I know, as my father and my uncle Toby are in a talking humour, there may be as many chapters as steps. . . .

The deuce of any other rule have I to govern myself by in this affair—and if I had one—as I do all things out of all rule—I would twist it and tear it to pieces, and throw it into the fire when I had done . . . (282)

His thoughts are wayward, and so his narration appears to be, subordinated as it is to his inner impulses rather than to a conventional chain of cause-effect. On close examination, however, the novel's notorious anarchy is only skin-deep. Sterne's metafictional insertions, like those that

assert the supremacy of the narrator, reveal sense and structure behind choppy chaos. Under the facade of incoherent plot and disjointed digression emerges a narrator who may well be jovial and convivial, but who is in full control of both his slippery narrative and the characters who move within it—held precisely like puppets on strings.²

The novel is a fictitious autobiography of the character-narrator Tristram Shandy who, at the end of his life, revives his long-dead family members and friends in a process of narration and rejoices in their literary resurrection. Apart from Book VII, where Tristram recounts his journey to France, the novel centres on a domestic hearth, a typical country gentry household with its army of family members, friends, acquaintances and servants, and Mr and Mrs Shandy, who are at this whirlpool's core.

46

Or are they? Walter Shandy, Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, Yorick and Obadiah certainly are. Hardly a chapter passes without mention of one of them, a few of them, or all of them. Mrs Shandy, however, the wife and the mother, with the exception of but a few scenes, is merely alluded to, does not have a hobby-horse the way all the others around her do, or a definable personality, or any idiosyncrasies either. She is a shadow that passes without even a first name after she marries, ceasing to be “the said Elizabeth Mollineux” and acquiring a new identity, the one she is referred to throughout the novel, Mrs Shandy.

If the novel's chaos is only skin-deep and in fact carefully managed, its structure is likewise well organized. The multi-layered plot consists of three major time-planes in reverse chronological order: Tristram's fictional presence, his early childhood, and the account of the history of his family which, from Tristram's perspective, belongs to his pre-natal stage. In the same way, the spatial arrangement of the novel is dimensional too. The Shandy household falls into four major areas: the parlour, the upstairs bedrooms, the kitchen and the garden. The allotment and circulation of characters is strictly related to the topography of the house; segregation determines their belonging. Walter Shandy, Uncle Toby and his servant Corporal Trim, Pastor Yorick and Doctor Slop are about the only ones seen in the parlour, the kitchen is peopled by servants, and the garden is where uncle Toby relives the glory of his wartime past.

This is all very well, but where is Mrs Walter Shandy to be found?³

She is most likely to be encountered upstairs, as this is the domain of the ladies: Mrs Shandy and her maid Susannah. She is hardly ever to

² Compare Grażyna Bystydzińska for a detailed analysis of movement and theatrical references in *Tristram Shandy* (72–79).

³ I would like to thank Dorota Filipczak for drawing my critical attention to the character of Mrs Shandy.

be seen, and never heard in the parlour, with the gentlemen. There is no disorder in Shandy Hall, no anarchy in the understanding of one's place; in comparison with his formal experimentation, Sterne appears surprisingly conventional in his determination to keep to the established patriarchal pattern of position and power.

This tightly woven patriarchal pattern specified that women's position was defined by their socially "constrictive" roles as "wives, mothers, housekeepers, domestic servants, maiden aunts" (Porter 36) and by their "relationship to a man" (Hufton 16). For centuries, European philosophical and theological thought was steeped in misogynist depreciation of women; ancient and Christian philosophers belittled woman as an "incomplete man," as the "weaker vessel" (Bogucka 123). Where philosophy and theology led, medicine echoed, in line with the ancients. Aristotelian philosophy perceived the female as an imperfect man and Galen posited that "the female body was only a turning inside out of the male" (Berriot-Salvadore 349). Plato exerted a malign influence with his view of the womb as an animalistic entity existing independently inside the female body (Bogucka 124). The image of this disturbingly powerful female organ "as a wandering animal within an unstable one" gave rise to a perennial debate about whether a woman should be regarded as a truly human being (Berriot-Salvadore 359). Renaissance anatomists and doctors perceived the female body as monstrous, as *animal occasionatum*, an accidental creature, and woman as *defectus naturalis*, Nature's mistake, and *aberratio naturae*, Nature's aberration, a mistaken creature (Bogucka 123).

We can detect the reverberations of this approach in Sterne. Trying to explain his sister-in-law's reluctance to admit a male doctor during delivery and unable to put it politely, Uncle Toby concludes that she "does not choose to let a man so near her *****" (120). Shocked at his brother's ignorance concerning matters of the other sex, Walter Shandy endeavours to clarify the basics of female anatomy and so embarks on an almost "dissectible" passage which reveals both a misogynistic objectification of the female body and a characteristic coarse humour. He urges uncle Toby to "at least, know so much as the right end of a woman from the wrong," at which the old bachelor fixes his eyes upon "a small crevice, formed by a bad joint in the chimney-piece." In a typically Shandean manner, Walter's divagations remain forever unresolved:

Now, if a man was to sit down coolly, and consider within himself the make, the shape, the construction, come-at-ability, and convenience of all the parts which constitute the whole of that animal, called Woman, and compare them analogically.—(121–22)

Aristotelian and Platonic thought was so pervasive that over the centuries it resulted in the assertion of not merely the imperfection but also the treacherous weirdness, if not viciousness, of femaleness. Sexual dimorphism remained a mystery, and ignorance about the substance of the ovarian cycle led to the conjecture that the female temperament was too cold, too moist, thus causing “the man’s seed to rot.” Galen’s physiology fed into a theory of temperaments which labelled woman as unstable by nature. Scientific decrees proved fertile ground for superstition, and so, following the ancients, an unshakable belief persisted that a woman was “weak, quick to anger, jealous, and false, whereas man was courageous, judicious, deliberate, and efficient” (Berriot-Salvadore 352–4). Such bias reverberates in Tristram’s insistence on referring to the adversaries of life as “she”: Fortune, “the ungracious Duchess,” answerable for the calamities of life, and Nature, “that death-looking, long-striding scoundrel of a scare-sinner,” are both female. Unpredictable, inexplicable, they embody the qualities associated with a temperamental, ungraspable, evasive and therefore perilous femininity. For Walter Shandy, women are still aligned with the irrationality of Nature, seen as a part of, as one with, the elements, “fire, water, women, wind. . . . ‘Tis some misfortune . . . to have so many jarring elements breaking loose. And riding triumph in every corner of a gentleman’s house” (290).

However, any social history gives evidence that such theories on the female body dominated European medical discourse only until the late seventeenth century. Many sources confirm that with the Enlightenment came a steady elimination of the Aristotelian myth of the incomplete woman (Bogucka 143, Berriot-Salvadore 354). Throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries female bodies gradually ceased to be perceived in terms of deficiency, and, in line with the teleological credo that “nature does nothing in vain,” were beginning to be examined as distinct entities (Berriot-Salvadore 356). So the examples quoted above are of a startlingly obsolete nature, already anachronistic by the standards of the eighteenth century, and Walter Shandy appears to voice pre-Enlightenment prejudices and sentiments. Therefore, if the novel is a masterpiece of subversion, a playful joke poking fun at everyone, everything, itself included, can the presentation of Mrs Shandy be taken at face value? Isn’t she an object of contentious scrutiny, and the way she is perceived, her narrative delineation, a satire?

The novel was published in an era of unprecedented advancement in anatomical research, and Sterne clearly displays awareness of the animated medical discourse of his time. Dutchman de Graaf had discovered and described the ovaries in 1672, thus annulling the long-held Aristotelian and Hippocratic view that woman was passive in the act of procrea-

tion. De Graaf's hypothesis gave rise to ontological discussions about the so-far unquestionable male supremacy in the sphere of reproduction, acknowledging a woman's role as its vital constituent. Her role in the process of gestation was elevated from that of a ship to which men brought their merchandise (Berriot-Salvadore 365). Advanced as these seventeenth-century medical discoveries were, many practitioners nevertheless determined to adhere to the Hippocratic pre-ovarian two-seed system well into the Enlightenment, asserting woman's passivity in accordance with the established divine and political hierarchy (Berriot-Salvadore 367). De Graaf's discovery was soon counterbalanced by the discovery of spermatozoids, which in the last decades of the seventeenth century "restored man's prestige as creator." This too, though initially welcome, soon met with criticism, mainly from physicians who "could not accept that humankind grew from a kind of worm" (Berriot-Salvadore 366). Considering the above facts, the opening passages of *Tristram Shandy* may shed light on Sterne's involvement in and attitude to contemporary medical discourse. The novel famously begins with the scene of conception, interrupted by Mrs Shandy, a moment which, according to her husband's theory, had a devastating impact on their son's future constitution, his "successes and miscarriages" (35). By mentioning the significance of the "homunculus," or miniature perfect human being, which long predates any theory of sperm, Walter, speaking through Tristram, shows blatant disregard of the enlightened practitioners' theory of spermatozoids. And his understanding of the mother's role in the act of conception would appear to demonstrate that he has not kept up to speed with a change in medical discourse: her active role remains unacknowledged, her contribution merely to remain mute and receptive, as all the "animal spirits" are believed to be carried by the homunculus. Her untimely yet innocent question to make sure her husband has wound up the clock is held responsible for scattering the animal spirits, and consequently for ever remains answerable for Tristram's oddities. It seems that when Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy speak of the "injury" done to Tristram, making the mother's diversionary enquiry the culprit for her son's misfortunes, Sterne is being playfully ironic about the presumed superior male role in conception. In keeping with the novel's tone, he cites and mocks a medical discourse in one go.⁴

⁴ Compare Robert E. Erickson's argument in *Mother Midnight. Birth, Sex and Fate in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne). Erickson, too, notices inconsistency in Sterne's depiction of the intercourse scene; however, he attributes it rather to a change in perspective on the issue of pleasure in intercourse and, consequently, on "how to represent the act of human propagation" that took place in midwife manuals from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century (225).

The example he gives to justify Walter's theory, Tristram's unorthodox farting, is so trivial and crude that it cannot be taken as a legitimate response, but a parodying, subversive declaration revealing the absurdity of long-held views. Moreover, it is symptomatic that Uncle Toby enjoys the privilege of being introduced to the complexities of Walter's theories, most of which concern Tristram, but that his wife, the mother, does not; she is portrayed as for ever remaining in the dark, ignorant about the essence of the gentlemen's remarks. She is denied access to the real meaning of their argument, yet is evaluated on the basis of her understandably incompetent contribution to the discussion.

50

My Tristram's misfortunes began nine months before he ever came into the world.

—My mother, who was sitting by, looked up,—but she knew no more than her backside what my father meant,—but my uncle, Mr Toby Shandy, who had been often informed of the affair,—understood him very well. (37)

In his history of the origins of the English imagination, Peter Ackroyd makes an observation about female travellers, among whom one of the earliest recorded examples was Margery Kempe, who paved the way for later eminent travellers. He proposes that their journeys were “fuelled by attitudes of discontent and sentiments of exclusion; the only way to escape the masculine world was, literally, to get away.” The essence of their rambling spirit lay in “the affirmation of individuality and individual experience . . . and their desire not to be chastened or modified by male preconceptions.” Mary Wollstonecraft and Lady Hester Stanhope, for example, both disdained the label of feminine powerlessness, and regarded travelling as a gateway to at least partial liberation. One of the first and most renowned literary expressions of this feminine yearning was Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*, verbalizing the wish of women who “longen . . . to goon on pilgrimage” (Ackroyd 191–92). In this light, Mrs Shandy's attempts at breaking away from the masculine web that entangles her at home are restricted and pathetic; the only journey she is mentioned to have made is to the place she specified for the supposed childbirth. She was legally entitled to this right according to the marriage settlement, which stated that the very end of pregnancy, six weeks before childbirth, was the only time when she could act “as if she was a *femme sole* and unmarried” (67). Considering herself pregnant, Mrs Shandy avails herself of her granted right, determines to go to London, and enjoys a brief moment of freedom to act as an adult, independent individual. However, it turns out that she has put her husband to trouble and expense in vain, as this time she is not

with child. Returning from London, her husband is “in none of the best of moods,—pshawning and pishing all the way down,” and resolves that next time he will exercise a clause in their marriage settlement, added on the advice of Toby Shandy, which specifies that after an unnecessary journey made upon “false cries and tokens” Mrs Shandy should forfeit the right to such expeditions in future. Walter Shandy does not inform his wife of this resolution, and of the clause she might have been unaware only until she is properly with child. This single attempt of Mrs Shandy to follow her own will ends with a humiliating defeat when authoritarian male punishment commands her to lie in with her next child in the country to balance her husband’s previous unnecessary expenses.

This meditation on lack of personal liberty, precisely specified in the marriage settlement, illustrates an essential assumption of the time, namely, that the main purpose of marriage was understood as “the reproduction of the species.” Since children represented “the perpetuation of property,” a woman’s main role in adult life was reduced to that of procreator and mother (Hufton 34–5); “she was an heir-producing machine” (Porter 41). This passage is also a literary exemplification of the fact that, under common law, wives were subject to the will and disposition of the husband. Throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, as Sir William Blackstone put it, “In marriage husband and wife are one person, and that person is the husband” (Porter 38). In polite society a woman’s “first duty was to obey her husband” (Porter 43). Hence Mrs Shandy is present in the novel only in relation to matters concerning her role as Tristram’s mother; her whole life, the government of her body included, is totally under her husband’s jurisdiction.

Walter Shandy is the one who determines the frequency of their intercourse. Being a methodical man, he performs the act once a month, having before performed his other regular responsibility, winding up the grandfather clock. There is little spontaneity or pleasure for either spouse. Walter Shandy treats the procedure mechanically, approaching the “animal mechanism” of his wife with judicious precision (Erickson 227). The question Mrs Shandy asks shows that she too perceives coition in terms of a contractual obligation she is burdened with on the first Sunday night of every month.

Walter Shandy is the one who determines not only where his wife is to lie in but also who is to deliver the baby. Because childbirth is to take place in Shandy Hall, Mrs Shandy is benevolently granted the right to be attended by a country midwife, but when problems emerge, Walter Shandy intervenes with Doctor Slop, the man-midwife, “a man of science.” The scene becomes a two-storied battlefield for power between the ladies upstairs and the gentlemen downstairs, mediated by the servants running

to and fro. Below are Walter Shandy—the master, the husband, the cerebral father—and Dr Slop, familiarized with all the “Improvements . . . in all branches of obstetrical knowledge, but particularly in that one single point of the safe and expeditious extraction of the foetus” (159), who initially arrives “unarmed,” without his newly-invented forceps, crotchet, squirt, and other “instruments of salvation and deliverance.” Above are Mrs Shandy, the wife, the mother in painful labour, undergoing breech delivery, confined to country-house childbirth against her will, assisted by the old midwife. The sloppiness of Dr Slop is not only titular; the cuts on uncle Toby’s hands, the result of demonstration of the forceps on his fists, are a potent metonymy for Mrs Shandy and Tristram’s injuries. For most of the childbirth scene Dr Slop is downstairs, untying the green bag containing his instruments, then demonstrating them, then in a debate on whether what the midwife sees is the child’s hip or head, and when he finally does get upstairs his ineptitude causes permanent damage to Tristram’s nose. He belongs with Walter Shandy and his fellow erudites, glittering their exchanges with Latinate diction, and proving completely ineffective in the hour of need. After several hours, when cooperation between midwife and doctor is indispensable, Susannah reports that:

. . . my poor mistress is ready to faint,—and her pains are gone,—and the drops are done,—and the bottle of julap is broke,—and the nurse has cut her arm,—(and I, my thumb, cried Dr Slop) and the child is where it was . . . and the midwife has fallen backwards upon the edge of the fender, and bruised her hip as black as your hat . . . (195)

and Dr Slop is summoned upstairs. Tension between him and the midwife becomes palpable; all he has to say is that it would be proper if she came downstairs. The whole incident is a demonstration of power: professional, of doctor over midwife, but also patriarchal, of man over woman, resulting in neglect of the woman in labour. Here, Sterne is winking at the conflict between the traditional approach of female midwives, relying almost solely on their experience and “their innate and uniquely feminine mastery of ‘touching,’” and the new phenomenon of male midwives, equipped with the forceps designed by Dr Smellie, a controversy that raged around the time of *Tristram Shandy*’s publication (Erickson 212). The second half of the eighteenth century certainly saw improvements in obstetrics, such as an advancement of version, that is, turning the infant’s body in the womb so that it comes out preferably head, or at least breech, first (Stone 59). Dr Slop demonstrates unpardonable ignorance on this matter when he blatantly declares “Pshaw! A child’s head is naturally as soft as the pap of an apple . . . and besides, I could have extracted by the feet after” (198). For

Walter Shandy, too, the upstairs bedroom, serving as delivery ward, is a “garrison . . . in the mutiny and confusion” (195). He is preoccupied with the unobstructed delivery of his child, ensuring intactness of its main organs, that is, its brain and genitals. He summons all the best philosophers, “of all ages and climates,” to go against Nature and “the nonsensical method of bringing us into the world by that part foremost.” Therefore, for the sake of avoiding the “force of the woman’s efforts, which, in strong labour pains, was equal . . . to a weight of 470 pounds averdupoise acting perpendicularly” upon the bones of a child’s cranium, causing “havoc and destruction” to the “infinitely fine and tender texture of the cerebellum,” he wants his child to be delivered by Caesarean section or, at least, have it turned “topsy-turvy” to be extracted by the feet, so that “instead of the cerebrum being propelled towards the cerebellum, the cerebellum, on the contrary, was propelled simply towards the cerebrum where it could do no manner of hurt” (165). The whole chapter is absurd, yet it serves as a perfect example of Shandean convoluted logic. Both Dr Slop with his army of tools and Walter Shandy with his philosophers and gobbledygook are in a no-win position either with the forces of Nature and Fate, or with the directorial narrator, who makes them marionettes for satire. They lose against the silent, upstairs presence of the “upright, motherly, notable, good old body of a midwife,” a “woman of few words” whose only tools were “a little plain good sense” and many years’ experience (41–42).⁵

Walter Shandy is the one who determines the way their son is to be educated. Philosophers are summoned to provide ample evidence that “the offspring . . . is not so under the power and jurisdiction of the *mother*.” And even though Yorick objects: “But the reason . . . equally holds good for her,” Walter Shandy retorts: “She is under authority herself” (383). Thus, in line with book-won precept and convention, the father embarks on the production of *Tristra-paedia*, the system of education for his son. The speed at which this work is composed also illustrates *Tristram*’s narrative quandaries about dissonance between the passage of real and fictitious time. Again Walter Shandy’s procedural approach becomes

⁵ One contemporary scholar expresses a stance in a manner which seems to reverberate with these 18th century debates, elevating men midwives over old-fashioned unequipped females. He attributes the fact that a high child mortality rate abated in the mid-18th century to positive changes in the medical profession, who “at last began to take the problem seriously.” As a consequence, “male midwives appeared, who possessed stronger hands and who pioneered two extremely important technical advances . . . version . . . and the slow development of efficient forceps, the use of which would extract the infant without killing it in the process” (Stone 59). Porter seems to approach the problem more open-mindedly, and while, too, paying attention to the fact that “traditional female midwives were challenged by the fancy new male *accoucheur*, armed with forceps,” he also notes that “forceps, if dirty, or clumsily handed, did more harm than good” (294).

his own snare: the pace of his writing is slower than the passage of time, and as a consequence Tristram cannot benefit from his father's educational designs but is "all that time totally neglected and abandoned" to his mother (368). Sterne is speaking in an age that witnessed an attitude change to familial emotion; more overt affection between spouses and between mother and child are noted in the late eighteenth century. A new quality of mothering, especially in the infant and toddler stage, was coming into vogue (Porter, Stone). When Tristram talks about being "abandoned" to his mother, again we are in the realm of irony: he mimics and parodies the sentiments of his father, who time and time again champions the still-prevailing misogynist inflexibility.

54

Walter Shandy is also the one who determines when their son is expected to change from "his vest and tunics" into more boy-like gear—"breeches." The conversation between the spouses here is a farcical enactment of expected female subservience:

—We should begin to think, Mrs Shandy, of putting this boy into breeches.—

We should so,—said my mother.—We defer it, my dear, quoth my father, shamefully.—

I think we do, Mr Shandy,—said my mother. . . .

—They should be of leather, said my father. . . .

They will last him, said my mother, the longest.

But he can have no linings to 'em, replied my father.—

He cannot, said my mother.

'Twere better to have them of fustian, quoth my father.

Nothing can be better, quoth my mother. — . . .

I am resolved, however, quoth my father, . . . he shall have no pockets in them.—

—There is no occasion for any, said my mother.—(422–23)

Even though a dark-age view on female physiology was swept away by the Enlightenment, pessimism about female rationality remained openly voiced. Intellectual inferiority continued to be perceived as the stamp of femininity. Walter Shandy thinks and acts according to his maxims: "*That women are timid:*" And 'tis very well they are—else there would be no dealing with them" (564). Mrs Shandy becomes what women are expected to be and continue to be for generations to come, "practically . . . completely insignificant . . . in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell, and was the property of her husband" (Woolf 38). Her timid views are "quenched in the flood of his views" (Woolf 83).

There are moments, however, when Walter Shandy finds his wife's inability to voice her own opinion debilitating.

It was a consuming vexation to my father that my mother never asked the meaning of a thing she did not understand.

That she is not a woman of science, my father would say—is her misfortune—but she might ask a question.

My mother never did.—In short, she went out of the world at last without knowing whether it turned *round*, or stood *still*.—My father had officiously told her above a thousand times which way it was,—but she always forgot. (452)

Both Mr and Mrs Shandy are ensnared here: she is not as limited as Tristram depicts her, nor as brainless as her husband believes. He, despite the acquired expectations of what a wife should be, longs for an intellectual companion and is irritated by what he perceives as his wife's intellectual limitation.

Now she had a way . . . and that was never to refuse her assent and consent to any proposition my father laid before her, merely because she did not understand it, or had no ideas to the principal word or term of art, upon which the tenet or proposition rolled. . . .

This was the eternal source of misery to my father . . . (584)

Both Mr and Mrs Shandy fall prey to convention and gender-ascribed expectation, telling him to subordinate her legally, intellectually and emotionally, telling her to be subservient. They perform their correct gender roles throughout: he sees a brainless heir-producing housewife in her, she learns quickly a simple marital truth, the one that Jane Austen will soon aptly verbalize: “imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms,” as men desire nothing “more in woman than ignorance” (Austen 71).

The eighteenth century, which embraces *Tristram Shandy*, was an age of paradoxes. Locke affirmed that man and wife form a “conjugal society” by a “voluntary contract,” yet have different “understandings” and “wills.” Therefore, since it is “necessary that the last determination, i.e. the rule, should be placed somewhere, it naturally falls to the man’s share, as the abler and the stronger” (Locke). His “conjugal society” may be read as conjugal subordination (cf. Le Doeuff 187). But Locke on education was much more egalitarian, more so than Rousseau for example, and he advocated that education for girls should be fundamentally the same as for boys. Samuel Johnson too. On the one hand he said: “Sir, a woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all.” But on the other hand, he argued for better education for women, better conditions of living for the underprivileged ones, and criticized social constraints which drove them

to prostitution (Johnson). In the mid-1750s he declared that: "In former times, the pen, like the sword, was considered as consigned by nature to the hands of men." But the eighteenth century saw more harbingers of feminine creativity in literature (for example, the Fair Triumvirate of Wit: Behn, Manley, Haywood), rousing Johnson to conclude that "the revolution of years has now produced a generation of Amazons of the pen, who with the spirit of their predecessors have set the masculine tyranny at defiance" (Ackroyd 363). Even though these voices sound shot through with dictatorial benignity, bowing to segregation and prejudice concerning the "fair sex," and even though woman often remains an object in this masculine discourse, they also reveal a gradual shift taking place in the male-dominated Age of Reason.

56

In Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, Le Doeuff finds "the figure of women responsible for their own subjection," which results from the idea that the husband's intellectual superiority grants him power in the family. Since marriage in Locke's understanding is based on consent, "a woman's marriageability is judged by the consent she gives to domination by male intellectual superiority." In other words it was "necessary for woman to have a diminished intellect, to place herself outside reason and to recognize a masculine character in every mental product" (Le Doeuff 188). This certainly is the way Sterne delineates Mrs Shandy; the male household she inhabits perceives her as a character "of no deep reading," as "not a woman of science." But since Walter Shandy's bookishness and philosophizing is parodied throughout, so too is his perception of his spouse and the whole "female lot." His arrogance and ineffectiveness go hand in hand with his impotent, impractical, unnatural theories, which also include those relating to females, and consequently to the distribution of power in the family. Consenting to a woman would, in his opinion, "infallibly throw a balance of power, too great already, into the weaker vessels of the gentry," and since they already have many other "usurped rights," in the end it would "prove fatal to the monarchical system of domestic government established in the first creation of things by God." Mr Shandy advocates "paternal power" and grieves over the fact that for a century it has been gradually "degenerating into a mixed government" which "seldom produced any thing . . . but sorrow and confusion" (75). Analyzing another man's behaviour, two hundred years later, Virginia Woolf will comment on such an attitude: "He is protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority" (83).

Correspondingly, Mrs Shandy's own understanding of compulsory dutiful female "imbecility" is not to be taken at face value. If Sterne, a formally audacious writer, chooses to present any character with narrative rigidity, suspended like a puppet, unheard, hardly seen, "halved," that character certainly is Mrs Shandy. As a married woman Mrs Shandy agrees to

place herself outside reason and decision. But to compensate, she develops survival strategies. When her husband fusses after their unnecessary and costly trip to London—which was her attempt to exercise authority over her own body, if only for a few weeks—she seems to have learnt her lesson: subdued, she yields and resolves “to sit down quietly, and make the most of it” (71). Having acted against the designs of her husband, she so exposes herself to his humours, vexations, disquiet and fretting—which, as she complains to Uncle Toby, “would have tired out the patience of any flesh alive” (70)—that she resolves to avoid any such commotion in future. When Tristram recounts his family’s grand tour through France, he mentions that he is accompanied exclusively by male companions: the father, Uncle Toby, Trim and Obadiah. All of the family go, except the mother. Her ostensible reason for staying behind is to finish knitting her husband “a pair of large worsted breeches—(the thing is common sense)—and she not caring to be put out of her way” (489). But this can be seen as an act of free will under cover of marital duty, a peculiar subversion of the idea of a journey, a journey, so to speak, within her own household, where for a few weeks she may exercise untrammelled power and inhabit her own downstairs parlour, otherwise the domain of the gentlemen.

Other literary works of the period can be read as similar, though often unintentional, commentaries on inequality of the sexes and its consequences in the domestic sphere of life. Wollstonecraft devotes a whole chapter of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to such writers who “have rendered women objects of pity, bordering on contempt” (150). This can be, at least partly, attributed to what Adrienne Rich called “the omnipresent patriarchal bias” (40). It hushed women, denied them access to education and, as Wollstonecraft recognized, sacrificed their potential to “libertine notions of beauty” and instead offered them petty accomplishments, employment “contract[ing] their faculties” to such domestic activities as needlework, embroidery or parlour music (147). Thus Richardson—probably inspired by the circle of women with whom he surrounded himself, called “the female senate”—endows the eponymous Pamela and her benefactor, Lady B, with outstanding erudition, but when this otherwise outspoken Pamela agrees to marry Mr B, she is made to comply with the 48 rules proposed by him, such as: “2. That I must think his Displeasure the heaviest thing that can befall me.... 6. That I must bear with him, even when I find him in the wrong” (Richardson 448). Smollett makes the female characters of his *Humphry Clinker* an illiterate Tabitha Bramble and a naive and superficial Lydia, her niece, whereas the gentlemen, Matthew and Jerry, are both Oxonians, sophisticated and observant letter-writers.

Women were schooled in reticence. Mrs Shandy chooses to be silent. But isn’t her silence a manifestation of wisdom in a household enveloped in

a plethora of verbal nonsense, voracious for theoretical speculation, ruled by a man who brings abstruse argumentation to the marital bedroom? If the novel is parody and satire, Mr Shandy—the most outspoken of its characters, “a philosopher in grain, speculative, systematical,” together with his single-minded outlooks and mechanical sex-consciousness—is certainly its target. What seeps into *Tristram Shandy* is a subtle suggestion that an ideal stance is a blend, an equilibrium of male and female elements, a truly “male-womanly mind,” and world, to extend Virginia Woolf’s proposal. This is achieved by the ability of the male narrator to divulge his “female” sentimentality, understood here as an ability to love and feel for his characters, display a humane understanding of each of their idiosyncrasies, notice trivial details about their demeanour and incorporate them as essential factors which constitute them as human beings—a quality which allowed Woolf to classify Sterne as an androgynous writer, together with Shakespeare, Coleridge and Keats (85). Above all, however, this male-female amalgam is traceable in the delineation of Uncle Toby, the most memorable and likeable character, the one who is remembered by Tristram to have had female sensitivity and “the modesty of a woman.” Praising Uncle Toby, Tristram avails himself of the opportunity to address the “Madam” reader and elevate “That female nicety . . . and inward cleanliness of mind and fancy, in your sex, which makes you so much the awe of ours” (90).

Analyzing *Tristram Shandy* as a Midwife Book, Erickson comes to the conclusion that for Tristram, the narrator, “Woman and the feminine is a far more complicated and problematical subject than for his father” (204). The interpretative key to Mrs Shandy is certainly not to be found in her husband, fogged as he is by Platonic philosophy, mechanical reason and ill-informed convention. Tristram-the-narrator narrates his mother the way his father perceived her. But Tristram-the-character sees women with a double perspective which encompasses not only the troubled vision of his own mother, a wife, a woman wed to and tied by her social position, but also his own reflection, untainted by marital experience, his own idea of socially unrestrained, potent femininity which inscribes the universe. This encompasses his images of other women—like his great Aunt Dinah, who married a coachman, or his dear, dear Jenny who “looks at her outside” whereas he, Tristram, “at her in-. How is it possible we should agree about her value?” (375)—but also his uneasy vision of the essences of the universe, often personified as female. Nature is not only a “scoundrel of a scare-sinner” but is also praised for making “everything so well to answer its destination.” It “seldom, or never errs, unless for pastime, in giving such forms and aptitudes to whatever passes through her hands.” Creative power, digression, Fancy, Wit, Pleasantry: in Sterne they are all feminine in nature.

Uncle Toby is the character whom Nature “formed of the best and finest clay—had tempered it with her own milk, and breathed into it the sweetest spirit” (597). He is the one who professes a truly humane vision, retaining a perceptiveness Walter does not have. With Nature, whatever creature she models “you are sure to have the thing you wanted,” yet, it remains forever inexplicable why she should “so eternally bungle it, as she does, in making so simple a thing as a married man” (596).

Who are you, Mr Walter Shandy, *Aberratio naturae*?

WORKS CITED

Ackroyd, Peter. *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2002.

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Ware: Wordsworth, 2000.

Berriot-Salvadore, Evelyne. “The Discourse of Medicine and Science.” *A History of Women in the West*. Vol. 3. *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*. Ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994. 348–88.

Bogucka, Maria. *Gorsza płeć. Kobieta w dziejach Europy od antyku po wiek XXI*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2006.

Bystydzieńska, Grażyna. *W labiryncie prawdy. Studia o twórczości Laurence’a Sterne’a*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 1993.

Ericsson, Robert A. *Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Fate in Eighteenth-Century Fiction (Defoe, Richardson, Sterne)*. New York: AMS, 1987.

Hufton, Olwen. “Women, Work, and Family.” *A History of Women in the West*. Vol. 3. *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*. Ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994. 15–45.

Johnson, Samuel. “Women Preaching ... /Dog Walking ...” *The Samuel Johnson Soundbite Page*. 15 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.samueljohnson.com/dogwalk.html#53>>.

Le Doeuff, Michèle. *The Sex of Knowing*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Locke, John. *Concerning Civil Government: Second Essay. The Philosophy Resource Center: The Radical Alchemy*. Chap. 6. 2003. 26 Feb. 2010 <<http://www.radicalacademy.com/hcfcfilehome5d.htm>>.

Porter, Roy. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Bantam, 1977.

Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Sterne, Laurence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945.

Alison Jasper

University of Stirling

Michèle Roberts: Female Genius and the Theology of an English Novelist

ABSTRACT

Since Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* in 1949, feminist analysis has tended to assume that the conditions of male normativity—reducing woman to the merely excluded “Other” of man—holds true in the experience of all women, not the least, women in the context of Christian praxis and theology. Beauvoir’s powerful analysis—showing us how problematic it is to establish a position outside patriarchy’s dominance of our conceptual fields—has helped to explain the resilience of sexism and forms of male violence that continue to diminish and destroy women’s lives because they cannot be seen as questionable. It has also, I would argue, had the unintended consequence of intensifying the sense of limitation, so that it becomes problematic to account for the work and lives of effective, innovative and responsible women in these contexts. In order to address this problematic issue, I use the life and work of novelist Michèle Roberts, as a case study in female genius within an interdisciplinary field, in order to acknowledge the conditions that have limited a singular woman’s literary and theological aspirations but also to claim that she is able to give voice to something creative of her own.

The key concept of female genius within this project draws on Julia Kristeva’s notion of being a subject without implicitly excluding embodiment and female desire as in normative male theology, or in notions of genius derived from Romanticism. Roberts’ work as a writer qualifies her as female genius in so far as it challenges aspects of traditional Christianity, bringing to birth new relationships between theological themes and scriptural narratives without excluding her singular female desires and pleasures as a writer. This paper—as part of a more inclusive, historical survey of the work of women writers crossing the disciplinary boundaries between literature and Christian theology over the last

several centuries¹ also asks whether, in order to do proper justice to the real and proven limitations imposed on countless women in these fields across global and historical contexts, we need, at the same time, to reduce the Christian tradition to something that is always antithetical or for which women can take absolutely no credit or bear no responsibility.

ABSTRACT

62

Then it seemed to her she was in her cell, watching the cocoon crack open. Out struggled a creature with great wet, dragging wings that were stuck together. It twitched and flared. Shook out flags of billowing colour, reared its head . . . she woke up screaming, convinced she was going to die. Not a nightmare but real. The great wings beating above her, the hot pulse of its desire, so close, the fireball eyes staring into hers.

The butterfly filled the tiny room. It trembled. It was ready. At last she realised it had come out of herself. (Roberts, *Impossible Saints* 35–36)

FEMALE GENIUS

Today, an understanding of “genius”, originating in the period and style of European culture and thought known as “Romanticism”, remains definitive (Battersby 104). This frames “genius” as a typically masculine quality that, when it is associated with women, takes on all the implications of freakishness or madness (Battersby 128–30). In coining the term “female genius”² as a way of expressing the idea that, in spite of normative frameworks, women can achieve in their own name, Julia Kristeva concedes that they will be limited by masculinist thinking and patriarchal institutions. Nevertheless, she rejects the idea that woman is excluded from the category of genius *by definition* and she resists this gendering of genius as exclusively masculine in two ways:

¹ This paper forms a part of a larger project in which the idea of female genius is used as a means critically to analyse the theological work of other English women writers from the 17th, 18th and 19/20th centuries. See, Jasper, Alison, *Female Genius And Women Doing Theology: Four Historical Cases In The Western Tradition*, (Waco, TX, forthcoming).

² Julia Kristeva’s ideas about female genius are laid out in three volumes called, collectively, *Female Genius: Life, Madness, Words—Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, Colette, a trilogy by Julia Kristeva* and published by Columbia University Press in the European Perspectives series.

(i) The first way has to do with how she understands the development of the human subject as a speaking subject. She rests her account of this speaking subject on a psycholinguistic description (Sjöholm 16–22) in which the interplay of gendered dimensions of the psyche remain, in an optimal sense, continually and productively in play. The maternal body in this context, rather than being seen as a kind of trap for women as Simone de Beauvoir had understood it, constitutes a point of pivotal significance straddling the divide between nature and culture (Sjöholm 57) forming a part of the signifying process itself; “not a murky undercurrent of language, but an aspect of it” (Sjöholm 22). If differentiated male and female identified elements are essential to the development of the subject and neither, in the optimal sense that produces forms of symbolic representation and language, overwhelms the other, then the development of the subject itself cannot be relied upon to support cultural hierarchies or sexist theory and practice.

(ii) Secondly Kristeva opens up the idea of genius to a much wider range of activities or modes of being including elements of embodiment and female desire that are excluded in traditional and normatively masculine theology or from dominant western notions of genius derived substantially from European Romanticism (Battersby 15). Women are female geniuses because they are artists, writers and human beings alongside men and in their own right but not through the conventional exclusion, for example, of their maternal emotions or their female desires. This definition of female genius opens up the field of possibilities to many women, both living and dead who have been geniuses in every context not excluding the maternal (Kristeva, *Arendt* xv).

At the end of her trilogy on female genius, Kristeva distinguishes three characteristics which can be related to the work and lives of the three women she has designated as such: Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and Colette. These characteristics focus on a recognition evidenced in all they do and write of the key sense in which the “ego is inseparable from the variety of its relationships” (*Colette* 420), the need to “[tend] to the capacity for thought” (*Colette* 421) and a capacity for birth or rebirth in the sense of bringing about new beginnings (*Colette* 422–23).

To summarize: Julia Kristeva’s notion of female genius is grounded in the feminist theory Simone de Beauvoir initiated in 1949 in *The Second Sex*, in spite of her own lack of confidence in a woman’s ability to achieve this accolade (*Second Sex* 722–23). It builds on Beauvoir’s conviction that genius and a woman’s ability to take up the position of subject, are closely related (*Second Sex* 723), but proposes a complete transformation of the term “genius” making this a possibility for women doing traditionally “womanly” things as well as excelling in those fields and accomplishments normatively reserved to men. The female genius, as Kristeva understands

her, lives a singular life, distinguishable from other lives by its unique circumstances which include limitations imposed by patriarchal and masculinist structures but which do not thereby exclude her from female genius by definition. The creativity of female geniuses, as Kristeva sees them, fosters relationships; physical, sexual and emotional according to longstanding female association, certainly, but also in all other possible fields. The achievement of this subject position, that for Kristeva is inextricably bound up with the female-identified body's motions and drives, tends to the capacity for thought, and can find expression through the pleasures and pains of bringing into being—giving birth to—children, relationships, language and other forms of symbolic representation; from *parcour*, pantomime and finding the optimum life/work balance, to set theory or econometrics. The birth or rebirth of insights, motions and movements this generates may indeed change worlds—as Beauvoir's insights have changed worlds—or no less significantly, it may transform a single life; that of the female genius herself. In sum we could say that female geniuses resist manufactured pleasures—whether they are made seductive by virtue of their cheapness and availability like fast food and commercial TV, or imposed on them by authoritarian forms of politics and religion that seek to contain or marginalize women and “the feminine”. They are wary of standardized banalities that are as unrewarding as they are undemanding of thought and which ultimately cannot save us from the maladies of our souls³ and they distinguish between unique pleasures accessible through those things a woman brings into being and tailors or births for herself in singular circumstances, and merely accepting what temporarily distracts or appeases her,⁴ or suits the convenience of the normative, male culture in which she lives.

MICHÈLE ROBERTS

Michèle Roberts was born in 1949 and brought up in the London suburb of Edgware. Her mother was a French Roman Catholic and she attended Roman Catholic schools in London, before going to University in Oxford in 1967, to study English literature. After graduating, she intended to train as a librarian but instead she fell in love (Roberts, *Paper Houses* 35) with feminism and committed herself to the life of a writer and feminist activist in London. To date, she has written fourteen novels and three collections of poetry as well as works of non-fiction. She won the Booker Prize in 1992 for *Daughters of the House* and was made *Chevalier de L'Ordre des*

³ See, for example, Kristeva, *New Maladies* (6–10).

⁴ See further discussion of this theme in Kristeva's work in Jasper 'Revolting Fantasies' (212, note 7).

Arts et des Lettres by the French government. She is Emeritus Professor of Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, UK. She is presented here as a case study for female genius—as defined above—in respect of her life, literary work, but also in respect of what I would call her theology. The idea of the female theologian continues in many circles to be framed as improper; Christian theology is the province of the ordained clergy or the divinely inspired male minister, and a woman's place is not to teach or have authority over men, nor to tell the powerful theological story for herself.⁵ She had better confine herself to literature, for example; an acceptable field for women precisely because it has been seen to require the guiding masculine hand of theology or philosophy to gain legitimacy (Walton, *Imagining Theology* 34–48). However, within a theological culture that continues to be viewed as normatively male, Roberts exemplifies the female genius who works and creates in pursuit of her desires—including her desire to understand and communicate with God—without bracketing off all she is as a woman.

Roberts exemplifies Kristeva's view that values are not static or frozen standards but that it is in the process of tending to the—maternally instigated—capacity for thought by calling them into question, whether on the level of the individual's psychic life or in relation to societies at large, that they acquire “a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life” (Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said* 12). So, in Roberts' novels and poetry, prefaces and introductions, as well as in her autobiographical *Paper Houses*, she generates a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life, by vigorously challenging what she experiences as the static immobility of traditional institutions—for example, patriarchal attitudes towards women as they are enshrined within the Roman Catholic Church's teaching and practice. Her singular practices of writing challenge its theological structures and cast the nature of God's relationship with the world in terms of conceptual and social relationships she fashions for herself as a woman. She questions notions of God as disembodied male and body as sacrificial, expendable and female, through the sensual evocations of carefully crafted words that produce, for example, a God who is “. . . not Father, not Lord and King”, but “. . . blackness, darkness, sweetness, limited to no one shape but part of everything . . .” (*Impossible Saints* 182) Roberts' representation of God distances her from early Christian, patristic disputes coloured by both Hebrew scripture and classical philosophy. However, her sensual evocations of a God are rooted in her protagonist's—and surely also her own—childhood memories of

⁵ Traditionalist typically refer to the Pauline or pseudo Pauline books of the New Testament, for example 1 Timothy 2:11–15; 1 Corinthians 14:33–36; Ephesians 5:22–24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3–16.

Catholic Christian worship: “. . . with its brilliantly-lit choir slung with gleaming lamps, its gaudy plaster and gilt decoration, its shrill-voiced choir . . . its hideous and lifelike crucifix whose Christ drew your eyes with his nailed body arched and twisted in agony . . .” (*Impossible Saints* 182)

The values of the past are not being swept away in individualistic, solipsistic disregard but rigorously interrogated in the light of a different kind of community; one that includes rather than excludes women and what they have been cast to represent within a masculinist economy.

66 However, this is not to suggest that it is simply because she identifies herself as a feminist, challenging patriarchal Christianity, that she can be accounted as a female genius, but rather to claim her as such because, in a context within which she is primed to respond in accordance to values and frameworks—be they Roman Catholic, masculinist, bourgeois—she brings something new to birth through the exercise of thought, bringing values into question in a process in which her female, embodied desire has not been bracketed off from the start. Writing in the “white heat” of early second wave feminist thinking, Roberts has a different take on Christianity from earlier women and some sharp new analytic tools to use. But I would argue that the nature of her female genius depends more on how she uses those tools than in their specific character as “feminist”.

Aligning myself with Kristeva and against Beauvoir’s despairing dismissal of women’s claim to genius (*Second Sex* 723), my argument is that the achievements of women cannot be reduced to mirroring and silence, even within the especially contentious context of Christian theology and praxis. By writing novels with identifiably Christian themes, Roberts gives herself room to look at what was at stake. Her embodiment and desire are brought into account in order to pose that question and to explore sacred scripture and ecclesiastical power outside the Church’s sanctified roles of ordained clergy or professed religious. In other words, her voice could not be silenced by what Beauvoir called the female situation or condition.⁶ With Kristeva, I would say that Roberts did not wait for the female condition to evolve; “. . . in order to realize [her] freedom: is not “genius” precisely that breach through and beyond the “situation”? (*Colette* 407).

Of course we cannot sweep aside Beauvoir’s reflections on the female situation. To say that Roberts was able to write and thus to live, is not to suggest that the Curia of the Roman Catholic Church was going to take her views seriously. Neither can we say that this would not frustrate or limit her in any way. Roberts had invested a great deal in the life of the Church; she had been intensely religious as a child and adolescent (*Paper Houses* 5). In her last years at school, she had even thought about joining

⁶ See for example, Beauvoir, *Second Sex* (608–40).

a religious order. But in her late teens she broke with the Church, unable to accept any longer what she saw as its attempts to control the expression of her female sexuality (*Secret Gospel* 9)⁷ or her passion for knowledge (*Paper Houses* 11). Yet though she views herself in adulthood as an atheist, as a mature writer she still admits the significance of her connections with the Roman Catholic Church's attitudes and values (*Paper Houses* 130). In other words, what a feminist critique reveals about the damage done to women by patriarchal frameworks should not be dismissed in this attempt to show the possibility of female genius. It comes as no surprise that when Roberts engages—for example with the Church's account of Jesus' dis/embodiment—the encounter is often profoundly disturbing and painful. However, the temptation from the feminist perspective, at this point, is to see Roberts' experience in almost entirely negative terms—simply one more illustration of that female situation or condition in which women are reduced, in Kristeva's words, to “fuming against metaphysics” along with Beauvoir because they seem to be confined within her analysis of woman as “the Other”, merely defining the male: “in order to posit her a facticity and immanence and to refuse her access to true humanity, the humanity of autonomy and freedom” (*Colette* 405). I would argue it is too simplistic to suggest that the Christianity of Roberts' childhood ceased to be important to her as an adult—however problematically—or that she was only able to be a creative writer in so far as she could escape from its framing. This, it seems to me, is to fall back into Beauvoir's mind-set in *The Second Sex*, paradoxically colluding in that exclusion by definition, against which she otherwise struggled so relentlessly. I would suggest instead, that Roberts' journey towards female genius comes about through continuing engagement with the personal and theological relationships of the patriarchal Church that feminist theory has often cast in such a hostile light—and not without cause. This engagement can be seen as a kind of thinking that does not bracket off female desire or the pleasures of writing. We can say that it is the act of female genius to envisage an alternative: “to imagine a Christianity which was inspired by women as much as by men.” (*Secret Gospel* 9). In other words, female genius is achieved in the pleasures of dialogue with these problematic structures, just as much as in any straightforward repudiation. She does not need even to be a feminist. Of course, it is clear, nevertheless, that Roberts was influenced by contemporary feminist theory and theology (*Paper Houses* 69); that she fell in love with feminism (*Paper Houses* 35). However, in Julia Kristeva's trilogy, *Female Genius*,

⁷ *The Wild Girl* was first published in 1984 with Methuen. An edition under a new title, *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, with a new preface was published by Vintage Books in 2007.

Arendt, Klein and Colette “manifested their freedom to explore without heeding the dominant trends, institutions, parties or schools of thought” (Arendt xix). My case for calling Roberts a female genius does not rest on her ideological perspective, so much as on her willingness to continue writing and to raise questions when she encounters limitations on her freedom to think, form new relationships or bring projects to birth even as she grapples with the pressures to bracket off aspects of herself that had been deemed unacceptably feminine within a normatively masculine framework.

WILD GIRL/SECRET GOSPEL

68

In *The Wild Girl*, Roberts seems to imply, beyond mere critique, that there is something more to Christianity than patriarchy; an idea she may have begun to form at University, when she worked on some notable medieval women mystics including Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and Mechtild of Magdeburg and recognized that their mystical and theological insights were achieved without conformity to male theologians or in accordance with the authority of ordained clergy (*Paper Houses* 11). Arguably then, it is in the spirit of these women, as well as under the influence of second wave feminism—about which she began to read after graduation (*Paper Houses* 69)—that she writes her novel, *The Wild Girl*, which implicitly questions some fundamental patriarchal assumptions about the nature of God and divine incarnation but does so from the singular perspective of a woman who writes for the sustaining pleasure it gives her. Of course, the book takes on board the findings of an emerging feminist biblical scholarship in the 1970s and 80s with which Roberts was acquainted, through friends⁸ and her own reading, particularly of Elaine Pagels’ work on the Gnostic Gospels.⁹ As a student Roberts had read M.R. James’ *The Apocryphal New Testament*, liking “its smell of heresy, of banned stories” (*Paper Houses* 11) but the idea of banned Christian texts specifically concerning or written by women in the earliest centuries of the Christian era, gained wider currency with the publication of Pagels’ work on the Nag Hammadi texts. Pagels’ work, informed by stirrings in feminist theory, helped to familiarise a wider readership with texts such as the Gnostic *Gospel of Mary* in which Mary appeared to play a more prominent role than canonical biblical exegesis allowed. In identifying the wild girl of her novel with the reformed prostitute tradition-

⁸ For example, novelist and theologian, Sarah Maitland (*Paper Houses* 130).

⁹ The Nag Hammadi library about which Pagels writes and within which the texts that particularly inspired Roberts’ novel, *The Wild Girl*, can be found, comprises 52 texts which were recovered from caves in the Jabal al-Tārif mountain near the town of Nag ‘Hammādi in 1945. Work on the texts suggests that some may date from as early as the 2nd century CE.

ally associated with Mary Magdalene, Roberts deliberately took issue with the Church's practice of reducing women to the polarity of holy sexless mothers and bad sexy whores (*Secret Gospel* 9) and here there is no denying the feminist tone. In the Author's note (in both 1984 and 2007 editions) to *The Wild Girl*, for example, Roberts acknowledges the influence of the Nag Hammadi texts and particularly "Thunder, Perfect Mind" on this novel and makes explicit reference to the evidence that, in 4th century Egypt, their use was officially discouraged¹⁰ implying that they had been read and valued before that date and valued enough in some part or parts of the Christian community for the copies that were discovered in the 1940s to have been carefully preserved. Feminist reading prompts Roberts to speculate imaginatively that in the early Church some significance aside from sinful materiality may have been associated with women and the feminine, and to construct her novel on that basis. In the preface to the 1984 novel, Roberts cites the comments of her friend—writer and feminist theologian Sarah Maitland—that contemporary theological scholarship agrees the Gospels "are not simple reportage but the first attempts at theology" (qtd. in *Wild Girl* 9), to indicate that in writing this novel, she was, at one and the same time attempting to dissect and recreate a myth. Like Kristeva's female geniuses, she strives to achieve her position as subject, by formulating a new theological relationship through the pleasures of writing that answers to her own needs rather than those of the malestream. In doing this, however, *The Wild Girl* was also drawing the New Testament narrative of Jesus into relationship with the preoccupations of Roberts' own life in London in the 1970s and 80s characterized by changing sexual mores and gender roles, a new emphasis on materiality and lifestyles which drew on psychoanalysis or non-Western traditions that seemed less ambivalent about the female body than traditional Christianity. Heather Walton proposes the feminist suggestion that by making Jesus and Mary Magdalene lovers:

Roberts touches the place of pain women experience in relation to the eradication of female sexuality from the dominant tradition. . . . In the process she re-visions divine and human authority and presents male and female existence as potentially harmonious; capable of generating interpenetrating erotic pleasure rather than perpetual enmity. (Walton 81–82).

Some readers loved *The Wild Girl* and, predictably, some were offended.¹¹ For Roberts, however, even more than make an ideologically feminist

¹⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria's Easter letter in 367 called for apocryphal writings to be eliminated from all the monastery libraries in Egypt. See, Meyer, ed. (xiii).

¹¹ There was an attempt to get the British publishers Methuen prosecuted for blasphemous libel and Roberts received her share of hate mail (*Paper Houses* 264).

point, it confirmed her in her own mind as a writer. Writing was not a substitute for living but—as the work of female genius—it made living possible; it rooted her as subject in the work of representing the misogyny of the Christian Church and bringing it into question. Through her writing she could identify and resist the kind of bracketing and exclusion that had been so prominent an element of her previous experience of Christianity, come to some clearer understanding of theology/God-talk, and live more freely (*Paper Houses* 217).

So *The Wild Girl* expresses Roberts' singular commitment to her own pleasures, ambitions and curiosity. In the energetic struggling with language “repeatedly diving into the unconscious to find new forms, new stories, new meanings of words” (*Paper Houses* 217) she found her anchorage, writing her pleasure and using this as a means of negotiating the currents within a context characterized but not exhausted by the tenets of feminist criticism. In form, the narrative of *The Wild Girl* partakes of a traditional feminist strategy of “revision” familiar from the theoretical work of Adrienne Rich for example (“When We Dead Awaken” 1971) whereby old texts and narratives are read against the grain of existing patriarchal interpretations. Today, feminist theologians and critics may be more wary of attempting to re-read the existing traditions—however resistantly—for fear of contributing to essentially conservative forces by privileging their mythic forms (Walton 86) and this may be a warning well taken. Yet for Roberts in the early 1980s, this was her way of suggesting new kinds of relationships to address the particularity of her own challenges. For example, in accordance—after Beauvoir—with the feminist construction of women as outside or beyond the normative perspective, Roberts paints a picture of female potential “at the margins.” On the refuse heaps created by masculinist exclusions, women do not simply endure but create and give life to the unexpected and the unforeseen. In one of Roberts' accounts of her character Mary's dreams, the destructive energy of fire and the promise of new life are combined in a vision of a burning refuse tip: “On the top of the [great heap of rubbish] which had become a pyre someone had abandoned a baby, a tiny girl who began to cry. . . .” (*Wild Girl* 17). Writing the story of a sexy, holy woman, Roberts voices her objections to Christian representations of Christ, of women and of Gospel offered throughout her formative convent education, but seeks through the pleasures of writing to shift us into a new framework within which, in her project, relationships between God and humankind, men and women can be seen differently. The heterogeneous mixture of colours, sounds and moods in old—biblical—stories and newly voiced—female—priorities kindled in the writing, are like the steaming, smoking refuse heap Roberts describes in the passage referred to above, digesting recognisable forms of language, thought

and relationships, to produce the odour of decay but also fire for cleansing and fertile ground for new writing.

As I have already said, however, this is not to ignore the constraints or the implicit violence of either Roberts' context in the London of the 1970s and 1980s nor of her own responses. Roberts knows that female bodies continue literally to be thrown onto the rubbish heap behind the sacrificial altars of patriarchal and misogynistic idealisations and Heather Walton notes in relation to some of Roberts' other novels that concern themselves with Christian and theological themes, that some of Roberts' later work appears to express "a sense of irrecoverable loss" (Walton 84). Nevertheless, though her story about Mary describes the limitations she imagines would be faced by the first century woman who felt called to take a role of leadership in the movement led by Jesus, she is also, as both protagonist and author, taking on the role of theologian, concerned with finding new ways to find meaning as well as to talk about God, Christianity and the Church. Roberts draws on the Gnostic theologies of the Nag Hammadi library and other Apocryphal texts but expands the hints they give about gender as symbolic framework. She plays with the idea of the originary divine fullness or *pleroma*,¹² and with the mythic dramas that speak about falling or splitting and ultimately healing and returning to fullness. She weaves the story of Mary, as a first century wild child, into the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, passion and death, augmenting it with a resurrection appearance based on the account in the Gospel of John and an apocryphal account of Mary Magdalene's attempts to explain her final encounter with the risen Lord to the rest of the disciples.

Roberts expresses her theological response to these issues, drawing on Gnostic and apocalyptic imagery explored in another series of dream sequences. In the first dream sequence, in which she focuses on the story of creation, Ignorance, the son of Sophia, is like the Gnostic demiurge of the Valentinian myth. Charged with the manual labour of creation by higher powers, he imagines that he is God and forgets his own created nature. He forgets his own origins in a larger divine fullness, typically represented in Roberts' novel through the imagery of marriage or sexual encounter. We might want to critique its implicit heterosexism but it succeeds in counterbalancing masculine singularity with the feminine, in a material and embodied as well as in a spiritual sense. In interpreting the dream, Jesus tells Mary that creation is an ongoing process in which different—here male and female—forms of knowledge are involved. The nature of the story as concerned with a "fall" of some kind points to the consequences

¹² This idea is addressed, for example, in the Tripartite Tractate—a treatise of Valentinian theology included in *Nag Hammadi Texts*. (Meyer ed. 45–84; 685–88).

for God's people, of ignoring the dual nature of God as both masculine and feminine (*Wild Girl* 82) and of forgetting—the work of the children of Ignorance—what they originally knew.

Mary's dream visions remain dark and chaotic and that is hardly surprising. Though Roberts is benefiting from the work of earlier feminist writers, her thoughts must still have seemed somewhat outrageous when she listened with the ear of the dominant culture and the work, though pleasurable to a degree that sustained her writing, had to be undertaken without any complete confidence that she would be taken seriously. Her fears as author working in her "writer's garrett" in London, are reflected in her vision of Mary, in a tiny first century community, no longer supported by the earthly presence of Jesus, facing the suspicion and scorn of people to whom she feels obliged to speak about the unaccountable vision of divine and feminine fullness she and Jesus had explored together. Dream sequences take on an apocalyptic character. As Mary/Roberts struggles to give shape to her dreams, she draws on the extreme violence of the biblical book of *Revelation* to express the level of difficulty that would be required to rid men and women of the visions the Christian Churches have fed them under the influence of Ignorance. Mary faces up to the "red mist" of her "bloodlust and desire for revenge" directed by her feminine persona at the anti-Christ who, in a final, revelatory collapse, she recognises as "naked and vulnerable" simply a man, stretching out his arms towards her and all the other injured women of history (*Wild Girl* 173).

In the final sequence of the book, Roberts is neither defiant nor triumphalist. She clearly believes there is still enough female suffering at the hands of men in the twentieth century, not to speak of all there has been in the past, to justify the words she puts into the mouths of the women who attend the apocalyptic judgement of men (*Wild Girl* 172). Nevertheless, she closes with Mary's words of restraint and perplexity, concerning the book she had written about the best and the worst the world had to offer women:

I do not want this book to cause outrage, I do not want my work to lead anyone into danger. I shall carry with me in my heart the words that I must speak in future, and I shall leave these words buried under the tree, to ripen there or to rot. It seems to me that ideas are dangerous. Have not my visions taught me how we are willing to kill each other for the sake of an idea, for the sake of keeping a dream pure and intact? Yet, too, the force of Ignorance is an equal danger, and my mission, as I heard it plainly in my dream, is to warn against Ignorance, and to preach an Idea. In this great tumult of soul, in this confusion, and with a divided mind, I shall depart, with a baggage of doubt. (*Wild Girl* 180)

In this concluding sequence of *The Wild Girl*, there is uncertainty. In her own voice, in the preface, Roberts distinguishes her account as “poetic” rather than “scholarly” (*Wild Girl* 9). The notion of the “poetic” indicates, surely, not just a different mode of thought and creativity but also a similar lack of confidence about those categories within which I have placed her, that is as theologian. This would make sense. I have argued strongly that to be a female genius does not imply immunity at every point from the potentially malign influence of patriarchal culture so much as to engage with it, drawing on the maternal birthing body of the female geniuses’ own energies and pleasures to fuel contestation and challenge and to forestall exclusive definition within that culture. A contemporary feminist critique has theorized the extreme difficulty of this in degrees not excluding the total silencing of erasure. Yet women like Roberts continue in numerous ways that we may see or we may not, to defy those limitations and arguably also to bring about transformations, not the least of which has been the development of feminist theory itself.

It has been my object so far to show how the work of the female genius who creates or births without reference to an exclusively masculine power of divinity, can be illustrated in the singular circumstances of individual lives, such as that of Michèle Roberts. In a world after Freud of course, the language of the unconscious comes naturally to Roberts and she links it consistently with her creative work. “Diving into the unconscious” brings her in contact with a realm that is chaotic and disturbing and in which she sometimes fears she will get lost (*Paper Houses* 126). Yet it is in engaging with this affective strangeness and discomfort through the process of writing—contesting inherited symbolic representations of Christianity for example—that she is able to give shape to energies and to think creatively. Writing and rebellion (*Paper Houses* 55) literally go hand in hand in her life as she gives up the certainties and securities of marriage or a settled career to experiment with Marxism and feminism, sexuality, foreign cities and countries and to explore and make sense of all this through writing.

CONCLUSION

Beauvoir concluded that women’s lives had been “dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition and social standing to certain men—fathers or husbands for example—more firmly than they are to other women”.¹³ At the same time I believe that women have not merely suffered but sometimes dealt with this fragmenta-

¹³ Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 19.

tion; creatively sustaining forms of resistance, tradition and connection in limiting circumstances. In this essay I argue that it is crucially important, in order to contest any lingering sense of male domination, not to gloss over the lives of women as if they must have failed because of these limiting circumstances.

Specifically in relation to those women who write to make sense of Christian theology, I have used the idea of female genius to suggest that the idea of their insignificance—or even absence—is an illusion produced by the normatively male context Beauvoir defined so acutely in *The Second Sex*. Whilst we can never forget that women have been driven into madness,¹⁴ some, perhaps many, have refused to discount desire and accept silence, pursuing in some way, an understanding of God on their own terms that of course include the struggle with a normative male perception of their worth. In these terms it is possible to see Roberts' work as an illustration of the subject position Beauvoir showed us was so hard to achieve and Kristeva describes as female genius. She is a writer, valuing the “hot pulse of [her] desire” (*Impossible Saints* 36) sufficiently sometimes to acknowledge that it confirms her as a female genius, genuinely involved in doing theology. And perhaps we see that insight given literary form, in Roberts' female character who awakens with terror to her own creativity—the passage with which this piece began.

WORKS CITED

Battersby, Christine. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. London: Women's, 1994.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984.

Jasper, Alison. “Revolting Fantasies: Reviewing the Cinematic Image as Fruitful Ground for Creative, Theological Interpretations in the Company of Julia Kristeva.” *Theology and Literature: Rethinking Reader Responsibility*. Ed. Gaye Williams Ortiz and Clara A.B. Joseph. New York and Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Kristeva, Julia. *Colette*. Trans. Jane Marie Todd. New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2004.

¹⁴ See, for example, Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, 1984, for a classic treatment of this theme.

---. *Hannah Arendt*. Trans. Ross Guberman. New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2001.

---. Interview with Philippe Petit. *Revolt, She Said*. Trans. Brian O'Keeffe. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 2002.

---. *New Maladies of the Soul*. Trans. Ross Guberman. New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Meyer, Mervin, ed. *The Gnostic Gospels: The Sacred Writings of the Nag Hammadi Library, The Berlin Gnostic Codex and Codex Tchacos*. London: Folio Society, MMVIII, 2007.

Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken," *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*. Selected and ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi. New York and London: Norton, 1993. 166–77.

Roberts, Michèle. *Impossible Saints*. London: Virago, 1998.

---. *Paper Houses: A Memoir of the '70s and Beyond*. London: Virago, 2007.

---. *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*. London: Vintage, 2007.

---. *The Wild Girl*. London: Methuen–Minerva, 1991.

Sjöholm, Cecilia. *Kristeva & the Political*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Walton, Heather. *Imagining Theology: Women, Writing and God*. London, New York: Clark, 2007.

Joanna Kazik

University of Łódź

“Of all creatures women be best,
/ Cuius contrarium verum est”:
Gendered Power in Selected Late
Medieval and Early Modern Texts

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine images of the relationship between men and women in selected late medieval and early modern English texts. I will identify prevalent ideology of representation of women as well as typical imagery associated with them. I will in particular argue that men whose homosocial laughter performs a solidifying function of their community seek to reiterate their superiority over women through seemingly playful and inclusive humour. I will attempt to show that what appears to be good-natured entertainment is actually a weapon used against women who, often accused of no sense of humour, are ridiculed and commanded to succumb to male authority. I will also discuss the triumphant tone of both poems and dramatic writings whose cheerful tone functions to marginalize women and to reinforce the misogynistic foundations of public life.

ABSTRACT

Courtship in medieval and early modern Europe was to a great extent celebrated as part of communal life. Intimate encounters between men and women, both on the individual and social levels, became an organized ceremony in which the lovers were assigned pre-scripted roles and an elaborate public ritual was expected of the suitor and the beloved. The structure of

wooing was a neatly organized movement that had more to do with a process of negotiation than a spontaneous outburst of affection and hoped to establish authority in the relationship. The orchestrated progression of courting subsequently led to marriage in which the bride was transferred from her father to her husband. The moment of passage from the pre-nuptial state to marital life was similarly ritualized and observed with appropriate ceremonies, especially in royal families whose weddings often signified a political agreement.

The tension between the rigidity of public celebration and the privacy of personal feeling is reflected in late medieval and early modern carols of courtship and marriage with special force. Their strict form provides fine contrast to the festive setting for which they were usually intended and the clash of the two creates an adequate framework of expression that reveals the conflict between the focused organisation of the ritual and the interactive spirit underlying it.

It is the aim of this paper to analyse prevalent ideology of gender representation in selected secular late Middle English and early modern carols. I will argue that the game of courtship serves to reinforce the strength of the community of men, while husbands' relational complaints in carols of marriage reiterate men's authority over women. I will also attempt to show that the apparent humour or elegance of some poems functions as an instrument of control that consolidates gender imbalances. The analysis of poetic forms will be supported with an examination of images of secular marriage in the mystery cycles.

The play of courtship in which the partners contend for power is enacted in a fifteenth-century carol of the holly and the ivy (MS Harley 5396). The plants which stand for the masculine and feminine principles compete against each other in a game of alternate praise and scorn in which “maystry” is the final reward. The outcome of the conflict, however, is announced as early as in the burden in which the vine is encouraged to surrender to the holly:

Nay, Iuy, nay, hyt shal not be, iwys;
Let Holy hafe the maystry, as the maner ys. (Greene 82)

The chorus proclaims the rule of the shrub. The imperative “let” requests that the ivy should give in to her competitor¹ while the speaker/

¹ Interestingly, the carol survives in a later sixteenth-century version (Balliol College, MS 354). The conditional “let” of the earlier poem is replaced by the modal “must” which obliges the ivy to submit: “Nay, nay, Ive, it may bot be, iwys, / For Holy must haue the mastry, as the maner is” (Greene 82). For a discussion of the carol-like movement between the two poems see Chaganti.

singer asserts that it is customary for men to have control over women. The invocation of social tradition and practice legitimizes the holly's right to power and endorses his desire for higher status. Short, monosyllabic words used in the first line of the burden make the demand specific, and the symmetrical alliteration of the second line foregrounds the priority of the holly. The opening negative particle, "nay," reveals the definiteness of the speaker's tone and imposes obedience on the ivy. The refusal to let the vine enjoy privileges is forceful in its directness and brusqueness, and bears dramatic qualities, often exploited on the medieval stage.² The dramatic and relational conviction of a forceful opening phrase is then used in the carol as a rhetorically effective figure which emphasizes the strength of the denial.

78

The holly's claim to power is supported by a list of his qualities that surpass the ivy's monochrome poverty of looks and expression. The vine is attended by the owl while

Holy hath byrdys, a ful fayre flok,
The nyghtyngale, the poppynguy, the gayntyl lauyrok. (Greene 82)

The asymmetrical arrangement of the plants' retinues serves to advance the shrub. Bird symbolism allows the carol to stress the excellence and finesse of the holly which not only is fair to behold, as announced in the first stanza, but also enjoys the company of cheerful birds that outnumber the ivy's court. The nightingale and the lark in particular imply charm, perfection and singularity of the holly. The song of the latter is melodious and impresses by the power of the bird's voice as it rises high in the sky. The former is described in medieval and early modern texts with special affection: it compels by the sweetness of its song and the generosity of its spirit while it stays alert in the early hours of the morning to announce the beginning of a new day (Barber 159). The "poppynguy," as Greene suggests, should be interpreted not as the jay, but as the slender barb-tipped-tongued green woodpecker who "drums for his lady-love and yaffles or laughs out glassy and clear, in the sunny green tops of the woods" (382). The uniqueness and beauty of their company, poetically described by Greene, stands in sharp contrast to the gloom and taciturnity of the solitary owl which scares others with its screeching voice. Associated

² In early sixteenth-century *Magnyfycence*, Felicity interrupts Liberty in mid-sentence, reminding him that "Nay, suffer me yet ferther to say" (Skelton 219) while the chief vice in mid-sixteenth century *Like Will to Like*, Nicol Newfangle, begins the opening monologue, very much like Richard III in Shakespeare's tragedy, with a vigorous "now" when he enters the stage laughing: "Ha, ha ha, ha! now like unto like: it will be none other, / Stoop gentle knave, and take up your brother" (Fulwell 2: 309).

with the night and death, it is lazy, excessive and loathsome as “its roost is filthy from its droppings” (Barber 149). The repulsive nature of the bird symbolizes the ugliness of its mistress and recalls the lack of control that is associated with unruly women.

Chaganti notices that the internal imagery in the carol expresses a distaste for excess and anarchy, from the appetite of the owl which eats the ivy’s black berries to the uncoordinated dance “with no control” (94). The ivy’s inability to dance, implied in the reference to weeping and wringing:

Holy and hys mery men, they dawnsyn and they syng;
Iuy and hur maydenys, they wepyn and they wryng, (Greene 82)

further exposes its shortcomings as a woman. John Stevens points out in his examination of courtly love and the courtly lyric that “there is a nobility proper to each sex, and in the dance a man shows his manliness and a woman her womanliness in ‘gentyll behaving’, the one to the other” (168). Thus the vine’s lack of dancierly skills diminishes her femininity and indicates both her individual inferiority and the inferiority of her gender represented by the attending train.

The contrasting habitats of the plants are used to argue the superiority of the tree, placed inside a warm, festive hall where his splendour finds a befitting context. The vine, on the other hand, is pictured outside where she is exposed to the cold weather:

Holy stond in the hall, fayre to behold;
Iuy stond without the dore; she ys ful sore a-cold. (Greene 82)

The holly enjoys the attention of the revellers and seduces them by his pleasing appearance, but the ivy, banished from the collective merriment, suffers frost bite. Her exclusion from the round dance of the carol undermines the inclusive nature of carol-singing. The verb “stond” can be either description or command and gives particular lexical and semantic power of control to the speaker since, as Chaganti observes, “articulating the situation might mean accomplishing it” (94). The word “dore” additionally creates a physical barrier between the two worlds. By being relegated outside the communal sphere, women are placed in a position which makes them symbolically invisible and unable to respond. Through the figure of the door, women are made liminal, while the threshold established by the physical borderline removes them from the direct vision of men.

Paradoxically, however, the removal of the ivy and her court outside the hall exposes them to observation by others and aligns women with the impurity of external space. The expulsion reflects the spatial arrangement of gendered morality which is constructed along “The opposition

between the good woman in the household and the bad woman in the street” (Salih 125). A similar use of space can be noticed in a fifteenth-century carol praising holly (MS Eng. poet. e. I) where the shrub is associated with a jubilant hall in the first line of stanza two. The plant’s detractors are silenced by being forced into a basket and possibly taken out into the street and to the nearest public house (Greene 383):

Whosoeuer ageynst Holly do crye,
In a lepe shall he hang full hye. (Greene 83)

Lists of women’s faults are aggregated in another fifteenth-century carol (MS Eng. poet e. I) to generate a cumulative effect of female inadequacy, malevolence and mischief. This short riddlic poem offers a series of brief quizzical descriptions of three figures or animals that share a certain wearisome feature:

80

Ther wer iii wyly; 3 wyly ther wer:
A fox, a fryyr, and a woman.

Ther wer 3 angry; 3 angry ther wer:
A wasp, a wesyll, and a woman.

There wer 3 cheteryng; iii
Cheteryn ther wer:
A peye, a jaye, and a woman. (Greene 239)

The animal metaphors that conclude the descriptions in the first line of each stanza carry critical implications: women are accused of crafty deception, malice and excessive speech. Additional interpretative connotations of these vices reinforce the misogynistic tone of the carol and link the sins of the tongue or the soul with those of the flesh. The weasel is not only a symbol of cunning but also of sexuality and thus imperfect humanity, inherited from Eve as a result of original sin. The animal, for instance, appears in Chaucer’s “The Miller’s Tale” in the sexualized description of the jealous carpenter’s wife, Alison, whose body was “As any wezele . . . gent and small” (Robinson 3234). Similarly, friars’ corrupt morals are ironically alluded to in “The Wife’s of Bath’s Tale,” which describes a land patrolled by “lymytours and othere hooly freres” (Robinson 866) who guarantee that

Wommen may go saufly up and doun.
In every bussh or under every tree
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour. (Robinson 878–81)

No more flattering is the association between women and the jay’s characteristic harsh cries and the prolonged mewling notes that Greene refuses to attribute to the holly in the previous poem, or in the vocal chattering of magpies. The poem makes a connection between raucous birds and women’s verbal experience. Like the birds, women are thought to be talkative, loud and unable to control their speech which is perceived as invasive and tiresome. It is construed as garrulousness and, associated with the craving to indulge, is believed to represent fallen morals: thought to be a typically female trait, it symbolizes incontinence, either spiritual or sexual. As a sin of both the soul and the flesh, talkativeness in women was criticized in contemporaneous literature. Following the tradition of conduct books, Christine de Pizan warns women of different ranks and social positions against loquaciousness. The elite class are advised by her that only foolish wives engage in violent and noisy housewifery as these things “are most unseemly in a woman” and that “There can be no sensible behaviour without moderation, which does not require malice or anger or shouting” (148–49). She also reminds maidens wishing to ensure their respectability and good reputation that they “must not be in any way forward, outspoken or loose,” should maintain a humble manner and avoid gratuitous speech as “It is a very ugly thing in a girl to be argumentative,” especially in the presence of men whoever they may be (161). Similarly in the early modern period, women’s speech “was liable to be negatively constructed by men” and was often restricted or linked to places and situations traditionally equated with women, such as household chores, child bearing and rearing and market matters (Mendelson and Crawford 212–13).

The progression through a series of vices in the poem objectifies women by linking specifically irksome features of notoriously difficult animals with women and, eventually, by advocating violence in the final stanza. The exposure to female excessive nature, as perceived by men in the carol, is countered with male physical aggression which subjugates the female persona and colonizes her body. Corporal disciplinary prescriptions in the final stanza:

Ther we 3 wold be betyn; 3 wold be betyn ther wer:
A myll, a stokefysche, and a woman. (Greene 239)

appear to provide a suitable punishment for female deficiencies depicted in the strophes and are a reward for men’s implied patience with women. Grinding or pressing are inherent in the work of a mill and in the curing of fish. They also seem similarly intrinsic in the taming of women who have to be broken down to be of service to men. Their authority is thus not only ensured through tradition or spiritual control but is also imposed by force.

In the poem, women's irritating behaviour sanctions male aggression that is premeditated, organized and incorporated into the framework of social organization. It also legitimizes abuse which aims at reintroducing supervision over the potentially dangerous female body. At the same time, it indirectly expresses a latent belief in the masochistic desires of women who secretly dream of being possessed and controlled.

The poem additionally objectifies women not only through the treatment suggested in the lines but also by its very form. Women are perceived as puzzles that have to be deciphered. They are seen as a problem that requires active decoding in an act of comic misogyny (Johnson 145). The wish for semantic control over subversively illusive women reveals the need to thrash out their meaning and, by this, to gain mastery over them.

82

While conjugal love was encouraged by the medieval Church (McCarthy 94), chastising women by their husbands was commonly practised in the late medieval and early modern periods. Women, guilty "of sin and temptation, of forbidden pleasures and lusts, of needful fears and repressions, haunted by the same old shadow of Original Sin, the same ascetical ideals as their ancestors" (Owst 377), seemed to deserve punishment for their trespasses, actual and potential, including within marriage. Domestic violence is documented relatively well in legal and didactic literature (McCarthy 1410–11; Amussen, "Being Stirred" 74–75). As a corrective measure, it was used regularly, also to obtain sexual services (Amussen, "Punishment" 13), and enjoyed such popularity that a sixteenth-century London by-law had to introduce an evening time limit after which wife-beating should stop to avoid disruptive or excessive noise (Mendelson and Crawford 128). Cruelty constituted grounds for medieval divorce *a mensa et thoro* 'divorce from bed and board' and was one of the most common reasons cited in legal suits (McCarthy 141; Elliott 47). However, applications for separation or annulment of marriage were rare. Divorce was granted or marriage was declared invalid only infrequently, and the practice of domestic abuse continued in the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, with the wife sometimes silenced by the ineffectiveness of the legal process (Elliott 47–48).

Not surprisingly then, physical aggression against women is celebrated and encouraged in the carol as socially and legally accepted while it is women's predilection for violence that is criticized. This approach to violence is consistent with common practices of the time as "The focus of greatest popular concern (at least until 1640) was not the abusive husband, but the violent disorderly wife" (Amussen, "Being Stirred" 75). Physical abuse by women is seen in literary writings as shameful as it challenges the husband's power and jeopardizes his position, and their belligerence incapacitates men, both in the literal and figurative senses. In a fifteenth-century carol

“Of all creatures women be best...”

(MS Sloane 2593), a young married man warns his peers against marrying older women because of the control they exercise over men. The husband complains that:

If I aske our dame bred,
Che tayk a staf and brekit myn hed
And doth me rennyng under the led;
.....

If I aske our dame fleych,
Che brekit myn hed with a dych. (Greene 240)

The staff and the dish become symbols of female desire to control men. The grotesque staff offers an iconic and ironic representation of misconceived status while the crowning of the man's head with a dish parodies this inversion of power. Another fifteenth-century husband sorrowfully complains of the maltreatment that he receives from his wife (MS Eng. poet e. I, 15th c.). Not only is she voraciously greedy and eats the food that he brings home or drinks all the good ale but she also readily strikes him when displeased:

If I sey ovght of hyr but good,
She loke on me as she war wod
And wyll me clovght abovght the hod;
Carfull [ys my hart therfor]. (Greene 240)

The violation of the rules of good house-keeping and her rough manner are perceived as madness of which the sorrowful man complains.

Such representations of the relationship between men and women are consistent with the overall perception of marital life in the late Middle Ages and early modern times. While from the point of view of the Church, matrimony helped keep the weaknesses of the flesh in check, men believed it was a harrowing experience imposed on them by women. As Shulamith Shahar points out, in bourgeois literature “the husband is described as having been caught in a trap,” and “the married woman is pictured as domineering, deliberately disobeying her husband, quarrelsome, demanding, interested in other men, straying, jealous” (77). The descriptive excess of female ill-temper is used to encourage sympathy for the misery of innocent husbands. Their martyrdom is validated through his domestic suffering.

The theme of the overshadowed husband who despairs because of the domineering wife derives from a common and well-established tradition of husband's complaint which forms a subgenre of Middle English lyric

(Epstein) and is suitably reflected in dramatic writings of the period.³ It is rendered with particular dramatic stamina in the flood pageants in the mystery cycles which stage the contention between Noah and his wife as well as in the pageant of the shepherds in the Towneley cycle where a group of shepherds weep over their unfortunate lives.

The second shepherd in the *Secunda Pastorum* pageant in Towneley comments on married life. He dejectedly complains of his wife, who is:

As sharp as thystyll,
 As rugh as a brere;
 She is browyd lyke a brystyll,
 With a sowre-loten chere;

 She is as great as a whall,

She has a gallon of gall, (13.146–54)

The plant and animal similes serve to expose the wife's physical unseemliness and the ugliness of her character. Unkempt, loud and voracious, she is likened to a whale which is perpetually hungry, with its stomach "so great that it could be mistaken for hell" (Barber 205). The whale is adept at deception as it "gives out a sweet scent" that attracts fish or tricks sailors into believing its back is an island before diving into the water and dragging "the ship down with it into the depths" (Barber 205).

The description of the monstrous wife who seems able to swallow her husband alive provides an *exemplum* that completes and illustrates the shepherd's mock homily. The speech directed to the audience is firmly placed in the reality of pastoral life in the pageant. The shepherds bewail the cold weather and poor wages earned by hard work "When mastermen wynkys" (13.227). The interlinking position of the husband's lament in between professional grievances positions it rhetorically in the public sphere of social and political evils, which is further strengthened by the structural harmony of the piece. The complaints of the shepherds unfold with precision typical of the Wakefield Master:

³ The theme of the boisterous wife was also frequently exploited in the fine arts and was fondly used in medieval misericords (Janicka 103). A misericord dating back to about 1300 in the church of St. Mary in Fairford, Gloucestershire, depicts a woman pulling her prone husband by his hair, his legs waving in the air (Janicka 103; "Fairford Church"). A violent fight between husband and wife, with the woman visibly getting the upper hand, is also depicted on one of the late fifteenth-century misericords in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. The woman ferociously pulls the man's beard and stretches out her leg, as if getting ready to kick him.

Each complaint is contained within six stanzas. The first and second shepherds have six stanzas each of soliloquy, the third, for variation, has three stanzas, then one of dialogue, and then another two to himself. They also have a less obvious similarity in the movement from complaint to resolution. (Meredith 154–55)

However, the comparison of the wife’s tyranny to natural phenomena or the oppressive power of the lord is not merely a form of comic relief that facilitates the dissolution of the complaint into laughter (Meredith 155), but it also legitimizes the misery men experience in married life and is validated by the seriousness of other laments. The interweaving of the antiuxorial complaint into an outpouring of rustic misfortune adds expressive power to the shepherd’s marital plight. The oppression of husbands placed in the context of social exploitation and the hardship of rural life encourages the reader/spectator to empathize with the abused husband.

The initial disobedience of Noah’s wife and her subsequent acquiescence when the prophecy conveyed to her husband comes true are used in the flood pageants of the Chester, York and Towneley cycles as particularly flamboyant illustrations of the male conquest over female unruly spirit. The biblical event is expanded in the mysteries and transformed into a domestic scene where a momentary inversion of power hierarchies serves to reinforce normative control over women as being spiritually deficient and failing to appreciate divine knowledge.

In the Chester pageant, Noah’s wife announces that “I will not come therin todaye” (3.218). She is unwilling to leave the town as she is too concerned about her friends who entice her to stay behind and enjoy food and drink. The wife, who according to Noah “is wraowe; / by God, such another I doe not knowe” (3.209–10), ignores the pleas of both her husband and their sons, and the men decide to bring her in by force. She is distracted by Japheth while Shem snatches her and carries into the boat: “In faith, mother, yett thow shall, / whether thou will or nought” (243–44), while the gossips, who ask to be let onboard, are left behind to drown.

In the York cycle, Mrs Noah refuses to accept her husband’s explanations and is unwilling to board the ark fearing its imperfect construction:

Trowes þou þat I wol leue þe harde lande
And tourne vp here on toure deraye?
Nay, Noye, I am nou3t bowne
To fonde nowe ouer þere fellis. (9.77–80)

Angered by her husband’s inexplicable revelations, she strikes him with a distaff:

What, wenys þou so for to go qwitte?
Nay, be my trouthe, þou gettis a clowte. (9.119–20)

However, she is made to change her mind once the downpour begins. When she realises the extent of the destruction and the loss of those who stayed behind:

My frendis that I fra yoode
Are ouere flowen with floode, (9.151–52)

Noah's wife prays with her family to thank God for the miraculous survival ensured by her husband.

86

Finally in the Towneley pageant of the flood, the couple engage in a vigorous and raucous fight. Threatened and struck by Noah, weary of his wife's continued carping and lack of cooperation, Mrs Noah suggests that her husband should be beaten until he turns blue all over his body (3.290) and heartily promises to reciprocate any blow she receives: "By my thryft, if thou smyte, / I shal turne the vntil" (3.315). She conveniently uses her distaff to fight back and strikes back so hard that Noah finds it difficult to move:

I may full ill gang,
The soth for the know;
Bot if God help amang,
I may sit downe daw
To ken. (3. 356–60)

Although initially afraid of the rain, Mrs Noah is still unwilling to board the ark as she is concerned about her spinning:

Sir, for Iak nor for Gill
Will I turne my face,
Till I haue on this hill
Spon a space
On my rok. (3.486–90)

When waters rise high, *Uxor* rushes into the ark "For drede that I drone here" (3.538). Although the couple continue fighting, the wife changes her mind, helps Noah and observes the horizon for signs of safe land.

The inclusion of extrabiblical narratives reinforces popular chauvinistic sentiments of the hen-pecked husband tradition. The conclusion of the event is known prior to its beginning and the comic potential of the incident relies on the tacit understanding of the uxorial short-sightedness, stubbornness and rebelliousness. It derides women by locating them in

a no-win situation whose result has already been decided and which they cannot overcome. At the same time, the denial of power and the attribution of numerous faults to women which appear “universal and a priori” (Bloch 3) are indicative of a fear of women as potential threats to the integrity of individual men as well as men as a group. Male anxiety about female unruliness results not only from a disturbance of domestic life but is also fuelled by a fear of the collapse of male authority as a wife’s disobedience challenges the husband’s individual position and endangers the social perception of his status. As Perfetti argues: “The private power exercised by the wife is authorized as long as it does not slip through the cracks of the household into the public arena” (189). The success of familial and social roles is then dependent on a performance enacted by both spouses to uphold the organization of marital life. The transgression of the established order, such as the odd hen-pecked husband or a passing moment of uxorial disobedience, offers a release of tension that hopes to acknowledge men’s dominant status.

What makes the critical attitude towards women in the carols and pageants of marriage vitriolic is the good-natured humour interwoven into them. In a sixteenth-century satirical carol (MS 354), the stanzas compliment women while the burden reverses the meaning of the strophes. Successive stanzas exalt feminine restraint in expression, steadfastness, patience, discretion, meekness, temperance, abstinence, and, finally, humility and humbleness. The attribution of these virtues to women is challenged by the burden which, repeated after each stanza, reminds the reader/listener that:

Of all creatures women be best,
Cuius contrarium verum est. (Greene 235)

The use of the chorus transposes the celebration of femininity into its critique. Language mixing creates deceptive flattery but the mock use of the Latin strengthens the misogynistic texture. The lexical transposition privileges men and excludes women from the joke.

A similarly ostensible tongue-in-cheek burden is found in the fifteenth-century riddlic carol of three unruly things discussed above. Interpolated between the puzzles that repetitively deprecate women is their glorification and, in particular, the glorification of female beauty:

Herfor and therfor and therfor I came,
And for to prayse this prety woman. (Greene 239)

While the chorus promises to praise women, the body of the carol meticulously itemises their faults. The conflict between the burden and the

stanzas is also played along the tension between weaknesses of the character and the visual pleasure derived from female physical allure and attractiveness. A connection is made between women's appearance and their usability to men while the enthusiastically friendly opening establishes the controlling position of men.

The celebratory tone of the burden resembles an address in honour of women. It thus implies a social gathering of people who listen to and partake of the joke. The puzzles become a consolidating factor which permits one gender to ally against the other. This strengthens homosocial bonds, while laughter at women's weaknesses offers freedom from the fear of them. Laughter at the explicit and implicit joke serves as a political tool that dispels status-related anxiety and helps men regain social authority.

88

Similarly, a sense of togetherness permeates the presentation of the holly and his company in the carol of the plants discussed above. "Holy and hys mery men" who dance and sing (Greene 82) form a strong group which symbolically renders the structural organisation of society dominated by men where, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notices, "there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (25). The organisation of the dance reveals the inner workings of the popular courtly ideal of wooing in which women are thought to enjoy the privilege of decision and freedom from subjugation.

Medieval and early modern stage practices additionally reinforce hostile stereotyping of women. Although it is impossible to ascertain the comic effectiveness of individual stage productions, theatrical cross dressing provided ample opportunities for parody and ridicule. Men in female roles, such as Noah's wife, may have been used to further antifeminist criticism displayed on stage. In her analysis of medieval comic literature in Europe, Lisa Perfetti notices that:

the image of a male on stage dressed as a woman could also have been exploited for burlesque purposes, particularly if the actor was a man rather than a boy. The male actor dressed as the farce wife might have used exaggerated tones and gestures to parody femininity and bring attention to the male body of the actor on stage. (173)

The additional subversive power of men in female roles is visible in the Towneley pageant where Mrs Noah directly addresses the audience to complain of her husband:

We women may wary
All ill husbandys.
I have oone, bi Mary,

That lowsyd me of my bandys!
If he teyn, I must tary,
Howsoever it standys,
With seymland full sory,
Wringand both my handys
For drede; (3.300–08)

The lines undermine Mrs Noah’s attempt to win the audience’s sympathy as she reveals her wily trick to deceive her husband with sorry semblance. Her vengeful nature is exposed in the speech as she confesses:

Bot if otherwhile,
What with gam and with gyle,
I shall smyte and smyle,
And qwite hum his mede. (3.309–12)

The play of genders is then enacted between the actor and the audience, and is dependent on the mutual understanding of the joke performed on stage. While the text seemingly bemoans Mrs Noah’s sorry fate, the theatrical enactment of it may actually exploit women turning them into the object of a performative trick.

Additionally, as public spectacles, the mystery cycles were staged in the open with unrestricted access by both men and women. The potential parodic excess of this theatrical transvestism possibly indicates women’s internalization of the norm of the male rule implicated in the presented events. Public, seemingly all-inclusive laughter at the inversion of normative relations reinforces the standard of male domination and positions women in a liminal role. As the high status of the humiliated husband is proven by divine intervention and his superior role prevails, the position of the woman is undermined.

Authority exercised by men and women in the late medieval and early modern texts dealing with courtship and marriage discussed above is used to uphold binary oppositions of gender division. They reproduce stereotypical representations of women in the context of relationships with men and assign rigid roles in which power cannot be negotiated. The imagery of inadequacy, achieved through the accumulation of feminine shortcomings, aims at making women insignificant. Perceived as a subversive threat to the brotherhood of men, they are confined to the margins of the collective experience to prevent transgression implicit in the fear of them. What makes the texts antagonistic is the use of deceptively friendly humour that prohibits gender negotiation and/or reconciliation. Laughter is used to defeat women and to unite the jubilant community of men whose ostensibly jocular attitude conceals ill-meant sentiments. Through latently hostile humour, women are laughed at and not with.


 WORKS CITED

Amussen, Susan Dwyer. "Being Stirred to Much Unquietness': Violence and Domestic Violence in Early Modern England." *Journal of Women's History* 6.2 (1994): 70. Academic Search Elite. EBSCO. Web. 10 Mar. 2010.

---. "Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England." *Journal of British Studies* 34.1 (1995): 1. Literary Reference Center. EBSCO. Web. 10 Mar. 2010.

Barber, Richard. *Bestiary, Being an English Version of the Bodleian Library Oxford M.S. Bodley 764 with All the Original Miniatures Reproduced in Facsimile*. 1992. Trans. Richard Barber. Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999.

Beadle, Richard, ed. *The York Plays*. London: Arnold, 1982.

Bloch, R.H. "Medieval Misogyny." *Representations* 20 (1985): 1–24.

Chaganti, Seeta. "Choreographing *Mouvance*: The Case of the English Carol." *Philological Quarterly* 87.1/2 (2008): 77–103. Academic Search Elite. EBSCO. Web. 10 Mar. 2010.

Elliott, Dyan. "Marriage." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*. Ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 40–57.

Epstein, Rober. "Lydgate's Mummings and the Aristocratic Resistance to Drama." *Comparative Drama* 2 (2002). N. pag. 14 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Lydgate's+mummings+and+the+aristocratic+resistance+to+drama.-a0104080539>>.

"Fairford Church." *Sacred Destinations: A Richly Illustrated Guide to the World's Greatest Sacred Sites, Religious Art and Architecture, and Historic Religious Places*. 2005–2010. 15 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/england/fairford-church-photos/slides/h-1630.htm>>.

Fulwell, Ulpian. "Like Will to Like." *A Select Collection of Old English Plays Now First Chronologically Arranged, Revised and Enlarged with the Notes of All the Commentators, and New Notes by W. Carew Hazlitt*. 1744. Ed. Robert Dodsley. 4th ed. 3 vols. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964. 303–59.

Greene, R.L., ed. *The Early English Carols*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1977.

Janicka, Irena. *The Comic Elements in the English Mystery Plays Against the Cultural Background (Particularly Art)*. Poznań: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1962.

Johnson, Ian. "Xpmbn: The Gendered Ciphers of the Book of Brome and the Limits of Misogyny." *Women: Cultural Review* 18:2 (2007). 145–61.

Lumiansky, R.M. and D. Mills, eds. *The Chester Cycle*. Early English Text Society s.s. 3, 9. London: Oxford University Press, 1986.

McCarthy, Conor. *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature and Practice*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004.

Mendelson, Sara and Patricia Crawford. *Women in Early Modern England*. 1998. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003.

Meredith, Peter. “The Townely Cycle.” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. 1994. Ed. Richard Beadle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003. 134–62.

Owst, G.R. *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.

Perfetti, Lisa. *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Pizan, Christine de. *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or the Book of the Three Virtues*. Trans. Sarah Lawson. London: Penguin, 1985.

Robinson, F.N. ed. *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Salih, Sarah. “At Home; Out of the House.” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*. Ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 124–40.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Shahar, Shulamith. *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Chaya Galai. London: Routledge, 1983.

Skelton, John. “Magnyfycence.” *Four Morality Plays*. Ed. Peter Happé. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 211–312. 1979.

Spector, Steven, ed. *The N-Town Play*. Early English Text Society s.s. 11–12. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Stevens, John. *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Stevens, Martin and A.C. Cawley, eds. *The Towneley Plays*. Early English Text Society s.s. 13–14. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Marije Altorf

St. Mary's University College

“Initium ut esset, creatus est homo”:¹ Iris Murdoch on Authority and Creativity

ABSTRACT

In 1970 the British novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch published both her thirteenth novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and her best known work of philosophy, *The Sovereignty of Good*. Given the proximity of these publication dates, it does not surprise that there are many points of comparison between these two works. The novel features, for instance, a character writing a work of moral philosophy not unlike Murdoch's own *The Sovereignty of Good*, while another character exemplifies her moral philosophy in his life.

This article proposes a reading of the novel as a critical commentary on the philosophical work, focusing on the tension between creation and authority. While Murdoch considers humans to be first and foremost creative, she is at the same time wary of the misleading nature of any act of creation. For Murdoch, any creator and any creation—a beautiful picture as well as a watertight theory—may transmit a certain authority, and that authority may get in the way of acknowledging reality. It thus hinders the moral life, which for Murdoch should be thought of as a life of attention—to reality and ultimately to the Good—rather than a series of wilful creations and actions.

A Fairly Honourable Defeat queries the possibility and danger of creation, through different characters as well as through images of cleanliness and messiness. Thus, the character whose book of moral philosophy is challenged and who is found wanting when putting his ideas to practice, likes ‘to get things clear’ (176). Another character, whose interferences create the novel's drama, has a self-confessed ‘passion for cleanliness and order’ (426). The saint of the story, in contrast, does not interfere unless by necessity, and resides in one of the filthiest kitchens in the history of

¹ Augustine, as quoted by Arendt 18. The quote is taken from *The City of God*, bk. XII, chap. 20. Arendt also provides a translation: “That a beginning be made man was created.”

literature. Yet, none of the main characters exemplifies a solution to the tension between creation and authority found in Murdoch’s philosophy. An indication of a solution is found in a minor character, and in his creations of outrageous bunches of flowers, unusual meals, and absurd interiors. Yet, its location in a subplot suggests that this solution is not in any way final. It is concluded that any final solution should not be expected, not in the least because of the pervasive nature of the tension between creation and authority, which goes well beyond Murdoch’s own authorship.

ABSTRACT

93

A Fairly Honourable Defeat is Iris Murdoch’s thirteenth novel. Published in January 1970 it precedes the publication of her best known work of philosophy, *The Sovereignty of Good*, by only a few months.² Given the proximity of these publication dates it does not surprise that there are many points of comparison between these two works. The novel features, for instance, a character writing a work of moral philosophy, not unlike Murdoch’s own *The Sovereignty of Good*, while another character exemplifies her moral philosophy in his life.

This article explores the relationship between the two works. More precisely, it reads *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* as a critical commentary on *The Sovereignty of Good*, focusing on the tension between creation and authority. While Murdoch considers any act of creation humans’ most important characteristic (“We are all artists” [*Metaphysics* 315; cf. 323]), she is at the same time wary of its misleading nature. For Murdoch, any creation—a beautiful picture as well as a watertight theory—transmits a certain authority. The presence of such authority raises concerns about mistaking this creation, and its creator, for the idea of perfection or good that lies beyond:

One may of course try to “incarnate” the idea of perfection by saying to oneself “I want to write like Shakespeare” or “I want to paint like Piero.” But of course one knows that Shakespeare and Piero, though almost gods, are not gods, and that one has got to do the thing oneself alone and differently, and that beyond the details of craft and criticism there is only the magnetic non-representable idea of the good which remains not “emphy” so much as mysterious. (*Sovereignty* 61)

² *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is published in January, *The Sovereignty of Good* in July (Purton 118, 120 respectively).

“One has got to do the thing oneself alone and differently.” In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, I argue, Murdoch explores various ways of this “doing the thing oneself,” as she questions the authority of creator and creation. Her argument in the novel, moreover, often comes in images of cleanliness and messiness, and of creating order in chaos. My argument consists of three parts. I first present the main ideas from *The Sovereignty of Good*. I then proceed to make some remarks about the relation between philosophy and literature, before I discuss the novel.

The Sovereignty of Good is probably Murdoch’s best known work of philosophy. It consists of three essays, which were all published before: “The Idea of Perfection” (1962), “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’” (1969), and “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts” (1967). Together they form a determined criticism of the contemporary moral philosophy and its emphasis on will and rational decision. In response, Murdoch develops a moral philosophy which emphasizes the constant work of the creative imagination rather than intermittent instances of will, and whose metaphors are those of vision rather than action. Moreover, she endorses a notion of the Good as central to moral philosophy.

In the earliest of the three essays, “The Idea of Perfection,” Murdoch presents her ideas through a lengthy comparison with Stuart Hampshire’s *Thought and Action* (1959) and “Disposition and Memory” (1962), while in the two later essays, “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’” and “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts” the opposing position is presented much more succinctly and generally (cf. Altorf 57ff.). Here, Murdoch even combines her criticism of analytical philosophy and existentialism in a single image, suggesting that they suffer from a similar infection: “Existentialism has shown itself capable of becoming a popular philosophy and of getting into the minds of those (e.g. Oxford philosophers) who have not sought it and may even be unconscious of its presence” (45–46).

Indeed, throughout *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch’s criticism is at its most forceful in a cumulative number of images. In “The Idea of Perfection” Murdoch criticizes Hampshire by comparing his notion of morality to a visit to a shop, in which the moral agent can objectively choose the possible action open to him or her (8). In “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’” the moral agent of “existentialism” is described as “an isolated principle of will, or burrowing pinpoint of consciousness, inside, or beside, a lump of being” (47), and in “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts” even to Milton’s Lucifer (78). These images point to Murdoch’s objections to the existing moral philosophy. Murdoch does not just reject the arguments, but also has empirical and moral objections. She does not think people are like this, or even that they *should* portray themselves thus (9).

What these images fail to acknowledge, Murdoch argues, is the *constant* struggle of any moral life. Morality is not limited to points of decision, which can be viewed with absolute clarity thanks to humans’ ability to always “step back” (*Existentialists* 194). For Murdoch, the moral life is a pilgrimage of constant creation and destruction of images (*Metaphysics* 317–18), under the authority of the Good (*Sovereignty* 88ff.). *The Sovereignty of Good* is perhaps best summarized by the following quote from Simone Weil: “We should pay attention to such a point that we no longer have the choice” (qtd. in Murdoch, *Existentialists* 159; cf. Altorf and Willemsen 13).

Murdoch typically refers to art to explain the status of an attentive mind essential for morality. Art is not identical to morality, but the best indication of what morality is like. The following quotation introduces not just the role of art in her moral philosophy, but also shows how Murdoch’s writing in its constant searching, questioning tone exemplifies the state of mind she seeks to describe:

Art . . . good art, not fantasy art, affords us a pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent. . . . Art then is not a diversion or a side-issue, it is the most educative of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be *seen*. . . . An understanding of any art involves a recognition of hierarchy and authority. . . . Good art . . . is something pre-eminently outside us and resistant to our consciousness. We surrender to its *authority* with a love which is unpossessive and unselfish. (*Sovereignty* 83, 85–86)

The relation between art and morality can be understood from the distinction Murdoch makes between good art and bad art—or fantasy art. Good art, as exemplified by the works of Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Velazquez or Titian (*Sovereignty* 63), is most of all characterized by its ability to resist the selfish tendencies of human nature. Murdoch does not have a very positive image of human beings. Taking her cue from Freud she holds that humans are “naturally selfish” (*Sovereignty* 76; cf. 50ff.). Good art challenges these natural egoistic tendencies in a way which is exemplary for moral philosophy. “We surrender to its *authority* with a love which is unpossessive and unselfish.”

The suggestion to surrender is at odds with the earlier “One has got to do the thing oneself alone and differently.” Even though Murdoch understands human beings as essentially creative, and moral pilgrimage as a creative process, the ultimate metaphor is one of vision and obedience. Wilful creation (“I want to write like Shakespeare”) is considered with suspicion. Indeed, in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* Murdoch concludes—albeit with an image—to the end of all imagery. Images should be regarded “as ladders to be thrown away after use” (318).

This tension has been subject of various studies, yet—I would argue—Murdoch herself was the first to notice it.³ In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* she proves to be one of her most prominent critics. Yet, before I start discussing this novel, it should be noted that Murdoch famously argued against my undertaking—that there is no premeditated relation between her philosophical and literary work. In the 1978 interview with Bryan Magee she declared to feel “an absolute horror of putting theories or ‘philosophical ideas’ as such into my novels.” Any philosophy in her novels appeared by incident, because, Murdoch argued: “I happen to know about philosophy. If I knew about sailing ships I would put in sailing ships; and in a way, as a novelist, I would rather know about sailing ships than about philosophy” (*Existentialists* 19–20).

This comment has baffled her readers, for there are numerous references to her philosophical work in her novels: characters use images from her philosophical work, have lengthy philosophical conversations, or write philosophical books which resemble *The Sovereignty of Good*. It seems improbable that these references could have been replaced by different ones to sailing ships. A discussion about love suggests itself as a tool of interpretation and a major concern for the novels in a way that one about, for instance, “sailing to the wind” never could. Murdoch’s characters often attempt to live her philosophy. And of course, on the various occasions in which Murdoch responded to papers on her work, she seldom seemed filled with horror when papers explored the relation between novels and philosophy (see, for instance, the discussions in Todd, *Encounters with Iris Murdoch*).

I have argued elsewhere that the interview with Magee should not be understood at face value (Altorf 2–6). I suspect that Murdoch was conscious of being the only woman in a series called ‘Men of Ideas,’ though this is difficult to verify.⁴ A more immediate reason I found in Magee’s introduction and questions, which ban many points of overlap between philosophy and literature from the conversation. In his introduction, Magee dismisses the possibility that writing style can be of significance for philosophical ideas, and later suggests to Murdoch that novel writing is radically different from writing philosophy, and that the sentences in her novels are very different from those in her philosophy. The former are “opaque . . . rich in connotation, allusion, ambiguity,” the latter “transparent . . . saying only one thing at a time.” For Magee, then, philosophy

³ Peter Conradi has systematically discussed this issue as one between the saint and the artist in Murdoch’s novels (*Saint and Artist*, passim).

⁴ On Murdoch’s ambiguous relation to feminism, see for instance Johnson, Griffin, Grimshaw, Altorf.

is straightforward and unambiguous, whereas literature is messy and ambiguous (*Existentialists* 3–4).

Literature is messy, philosophy is tidy. Even if Magee does not use these images, they seem appropriate in the present context—not in the least because *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* features one of the filthiest kitchens in the history of literature. (I’ll come back to it later.) The image of messiness points to an underlying difficulty which does not disappear by questioning the status of Murdoch’s answers in an interview. It reaffirms Murdoch’s observed philosophical unease about creation, in particular the wilful imposition of form in her novels. Murdoch’s novels may be highly structured, but—A.S. Byatt very rightly observed—“A novel, she says, has got to have form; but she seems to feel a metaphysical regret about it” (Byatt 216–17; cf. Wood). In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch replaced God with Good, and by doing so deprived the act of creation of its divine precedence. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* it positively becomes diabolical.

A Fairly Honourable Defeat shares various characteristics with Murdoch’s other 26 novels (cf. Todd, “Veertig”). The reader is introduced to a small group of friends and relatives of upper middle class Londoners—largely civil servants and academics—who find their reasonably peaceful existence disturbed by the arrival of an enchanter. A period of only a few weeks will witness the shattering of long-held certainties, the end of relationships, and the abandonment of moral principles. One of the characters will die, and at the end of the novel the group of friends is shattered over the world.

The enchanter in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is Julius King, who opens and ends the novel, and who has been understood to frame it (Conradi, *Saint and Artist* 205; cf. Gordon 68). His name are the novel’s first words, when uttered in a conversation of as yet anonymous speakers. They turn out to be “handsome” and “altruistic” Hilda and Rupert Foster, sitting at their swimming pool, on the evening of their twentieth wedding anniversary (*Fairly Honourable Defeat* 11). In the last chapter we find Julius King in Paris. Having started the chain of events which has upset the lives of a cosy group of friends, he is now enjoying the luxuries of the city: the Louvre, an opera, and good food in a restaurant recommended by Rupert. “Life was good” (447).

Julius King’s return to London follows his break-up of his relationship with Morgan Brown, sister to Hilda Foster, and still married to Tallis Brown, the saint of the story. Morgan also returns to London at the beginning of the book, but not with Julius. Julius is a biologist, who worked on chemical warfare, but stopped because—as he claims—he got bored (218). According to his own account, he starts for more or less the same reason the deception which leads to the break-up of Hilda and Rupert’s happy marriage, the destruction of Rupert’s book by their son Peter, and eventually to Rupert’s death (403). As a subplot, Julius also manages to almost

end the relationship between Simon, Rupert's younger brother, and Axel, a colleague of Rupert's.

Yet, Julius's major test concerns Rupert and Morgan. At the start of the novel Rupert is about to finish his book on moral philosophy, on which he has worked for eight years. Rupert calls himself a "Sunday-metaphysician" (27), though he also prides himself on his "philosophical training" (182), and academic achievements. He studied philosophy at Oxford, where he also did a PhD, and now works as a civil servant in Whitehall. The book has been written in evenings and weekends.

98 Julius is not impressed with Rupert or with his writing, but his decision to test them against reality—together with Morgan's "broken down version of Rupert's stuff" (404)—is more or less made impromptu (403, 408). He creates a farce that would not be out of place in any Shakespearean comedy (cf. Todd, *Shakespearean Interest*; Conradi, *Saint and Artist*). Through an exchange of old love letters, adjusted for the occasion, he makes Rupert and Morgan believe themselves to be the object of the other's passionate love. Both of them neglect to check the verity of the claims, but instead—as Julius later reflects—start a "sentimental pussy-footing around [which] produce[s] such a web of emotional confusion that they would no longer be in a position to verify anything" (406). To the outside world and even to themselves, it is no longer obvious that there was no passionate love at the start.

The test goes horribly out of hand, and the consequences surprise even Julius (408–09; cf. Gordon 67). Once Hilda assumes that her husband and sister are having an affair, the stable and seemingly unbreakable relationship between Hilda and Rupert is shattered, Rupert's book is destroyed by his son Peter—with a little help from Julius—and in the end even Rupert himself will not be saved. Drowned in the alcohol that has flown richly throughout the novel, he falls in the pool at the lovely Primrose house and drowns. A joke (Julius's?, Murdoch's?) has gone badly out of hand.

While it is not uncommon for one of the characters to die in Murdoch's novels, the ridicule and, later, violence and utter destruction of Rupert's work and life have always seemed to me out of order. At the end of the book, when the swimming pool is full of leaves and his wife has left for America with his sister, there is very little left of him. This destruction is all the more remarkable, as his ideas seem to resemble Murdoch's own philosophical work. And yet Rupert's book is discredited from the very start. The other characters are either scathing about it (Axel, Julius, Peter), or admire it without any acknowledgement of its content (Hilda, Simon).

Before looking for a possible explanation of Rupert's complete destruction, it is necessary to wonder whether such an explanation is to be had at all. When things happen in real life, it is not always possible to point

at one cause, or any cause at all. This is how Julius reasons when trying to explain the events (427ff.). Yet, a novel is not real life, and this novel is not just a realistic novel, even though it can be read as one (Grimshaw 36; Conradi, *Saint and Artist* 230). Moreover, this is a highly structured novel. Things do not happen by chance. Instead, almost all events in the novel are foreshadowed by earlier comments or events. Thus, the first few chapters do not only introduce the main characters, but also predict their actions. Hilda for instance suggests that “Julius is someone who might do anything because he was bored” (*Fairly Honourable Defeat* 13), and Rupert is said to be “unstable” and “lucky,” because “he hasn’t been tried” (35). There are constant concerns that animals—insects, but most of all the hedgehog—will drown in the pool, as they lack sufficient “sense of self-preservation” (16). The hedgehog indeed drowns before Rupert does (353). In another premonition of events to come, Rupert finds the “neat order [of his notebooks] destroyed by Julius’s inquisitive hand” (226).

What then could be the role of Rupert’s complete destruction in this highly structured novel? An obvious answer may be found in relation to Murdoch’s own writing. Yet, as the reader does not know the exact content of Rupert’s book, it is impossible to tell the extent in which it resembles Murdoch’s own *The Sovereignty of Good*. Even though, as Cheryl Bove observes, “none of [his] ideas is contrary to Murdoch’s moral philosophy,” that does not mean that it is the same (Bove 69). Moreover, even if one assumes that Rupert’s work resembles Murdoch’s, it is difficult to decide the significance of its destruction. It could just as well express her dissatisfaction with her own ideas (cf. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch* 501), as pre-empt any criticism. Even the toughest reviewer would have difficulty outdoing Rupert’s destruction.

Yet, I think yet another option more convincing. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* Murdoch is concerned, I would argue, not just or specifically with her own philosophy, but with *all* philosophy or *all* theory, when given more authority than deserved (cf. Conradi, *Saint and Artist* 215). This is especially true in relation to Rupert’s work, as well as Morgan’s new found notion of love. From the very beginning it is suggested that Rupert’s theory does not stand a chance against reality (*Fairly Honourable Defeat* 35). Axel mocks that Rupert’s book will be a “guide to behaviour” so that he could “follow it slavishly” (46). Julius explains to Rupert that any attempt at knowing the truth is illusion, or *theory* (222). Tallis considers Morgan “hopelessly theory-ridden” (213).

The endorsement or condemnation of theory is often accompanied by imagery of cleanliness and messiness. This is most evident in the contrast between Rupert on the one hand, and Tallis on the other. Rupert is, like Murdoch’s protagonists in other novels, little affected by time.

He is “boyish-faced” (11) with faded though still blond hair. Life does not have many surprises for him, and he is keen to solve any remaining issues sooner rather than later. Thus, at an early stage he summons Tallis because, as Hilda muses, he “wanted to get things *clear*. Men so often did” (176). In the conversation, Rupert urges Tallis to show the “authority of a husband” to get Morgan out of the “sordid and wretched world” she has been living in, the world of “prevarication and muddle and shabby thinking” (181–82, cf. 213).

Tallis, in contrast—whom Murdoch considered “the only one real saint as it were, or symbolic religious figure” in her novels (Dooley 108)—is from the very beginning associated with messiness (*Fairly Honourable Defeat* 20). He has difficulties making ends meet and takes too many jobs without being able to do any of them to satisfaction. He lives with his father, who dislikes him. He remains married to Morgan, who despises him. Every chance of changing this relationship is brutally interrupted by the entrance of one of the characters. He rarely finishes sentences when writing his lectures (105, 445). According to himself and others, he lives in a muddle and thinks muddled. He does not know how to sort out the junk from Morgan’s stuff she left at their home (208). After meeting Morgan a few times, he finds that “his physical love for Morgan was becoming unhinged and getting all mixed up with the muckheap of his mind” (210–11). He is short, has freckles and a bumpy forehead (83, 118). His clothes are often dirty (123).

Yet, most striking of all of these allusions I find the image of Tallis’s kitchen. As it is one of the more striking images from Murdoch’s oeuvre, it deserves a lengthy introduction. Its first description in the novel is given by Hilda:

It looked much as usual. The familiar group of empty beer bottles growing cobwebs. About twenty more unwashed milk bottles yellow with varying quantities of sour milk. A sagging wickerwork chair and two upright chairs with very slippery grey upholstered seats. The window, which gave onto a brick wall, was spotty with grime, admitting light but concealing the weather and the time of the day. The sink was piled with leaning towers of dirty dishes. The draining board was littered with empty tins and open pots of jam full of dead or dying wasps. A bin, crammed to overflowing, stood open to reveal a rotting coagulated mass of organic material covered with flies. The dresser was covered in a layer, about a foot high, of miscellaneous oddments: books, papers, string, letters, knives, scissors, elastic bands, blunt pencils, broken biros, empty ink bottles, empty cigarette packets and lumps of old hard stale cheese. The floor was not only filthy but greasy and sticky and made a sucking sound as Hilda lifted her feet. (68)

This kitchen does not leave any of the characters unmoved. All who dare enter it feel the need to respond. Their comment is one of condemnation or correction. Yet, while most people prefer not to enter this kitchen, it is the background to crucial conversations between Tallis and Julius. Indeed, it is Julius who actually cleans it, near the very end of the novel, after Rupert's death (426ff.). His cleaning, it should be added, has little lasting result. The kitchen soon returns to its usual state.

The kitchen has also elicited strong responses from its readers. As with other extravagant aspects of Murdoch's novels—for instance the dishes created by Bradley Pearson in *The Sea, The Sea* (1978)—interviewers could not hide their disgust. Thus, Jo Brans admits being “horrified” at the state of Tallis's kitchen: “there's sticky substance all over it, and the dirty milk bottles in which various things are growing, and really just this sort of horrifying filth.” While Murdoch's initial response is evasive (“I must say, I don't mind filth as much as you do”), she later explains the purpose of the filth: “it's symbolic of the situation that nowadays the holy man is sort of shaky, hopeless, muddled, he hasn't got a place. Somebody else has to clean up his kitchen and so on” (Dooley 165–66). Tallis, the holy man, has got no place, or as Hilda puts it in the novel: “Hilda thought, wherever Tallis is there's always muddle! Then she thought, this is unjust. Wherever there is a muddle, there Tallis is” (*Fairly Honourable Defeat* 178).

Commentators have explained Tallis's messiness as exemplifying the important virtue of acknowledging contingency. As David Gordon argues: “For Murdoch, mess (‘contingency’) is the salient quality of the world around us when perceived by a selfless consciousness” (65). Tallis *bears* the contingency, while Julius in his disgust for it *plots* (Gordon 36; cf. 19 and 65). Tallis's place in this world—the place of saints—is not decided by themselves, but by contingency, by what they find around them.⁵

And yet, Tallis does intervene. He is, as Gordon rightly notes, not as passive as Ann Peronett in *An Unofficial Rose* (37). Moreover, his interventions are crucial: the accurate blow in the Chinese restaurant prevents a threatening situation from getting out of hand (*Fairly Honourable Defeat* 241), and the decision to phone Hilda puts an end to Julius's plot, even though it cannot prevent the tragic death of Rupert (409). Yet, it is obvious that these are not wilful actions, but the result of attention—in a way predicted by Tallis, when he reassures Rupert and Hilda: “When I see what to do, I'll do it” (181; though cf. 221 where Rupert uses the same words). It is as if Tallis's whole life has to be directed towards doing good. Even if

⁵ At the same time, the kitchen as no place also exemplifies the symbolic role of Tallis and Julius, as high incarnations. This is the explanation provided by Murdoch in several interviews (see for instance Dooley 50–51, 73–75; cf. Conradi, *Saint and Artist* 205).

he cannot always do good, he is not allowed to waste any time or effort on cleaning the kitchen, or even to finish the sentences in his lectures. Tallis does not wilfully create, but only acts from necessity.

In Tallis Murdoch has succeeded in creating a saint for her moral philosophy. Yet, this feat comes at a cost. Tallis is doomed by his creator to stay in a filthy kitchen, to take on too many jobs, to continue a troubled relationship with his father, as well as with his wife, and to rarely finish his sentences, let alone lectures. Others act and create. Even Tallis's lodger, the Sikh bus driver who was the object of discrimination, has found a cause for action at the end of the novel (440). In Tallis, Murdoch also presents an alternative to her earlier misgivings about theory. It is made clear from the very beginning that in this respect also Tallis is Rupert's contrary. The latter, as Hilda rightly observes, has to mention about once a month that Tallis only got a second (22, 25). Tallis stumbles when Peter asks him why stealing is bad, whereas both Rupert and Julius later provide him with coherent exposés (182–83, 337 respectively).

The successful creation of this saintly character does not resolve Murdoch's ambiguous attitude to creation. On the contrary. It introduces the contradiction in terms of the successful creation that condemns its own act of existence. Even more importantly, in the opposition between (good) Tallis's concern for contingency, and (evil) Julius's wilful interventions, Murdoch's own novel writing resembles the latter—not the former. The image of the wilful creator—Murdoch the author—is Julius. Yet, as Gordon rightly observes, Murdoch is curiously coy about any relation between Julius and her own act of creation (Gordon 68). Creation is obviously not divine. It is the act of—whom some consider—the Devil (Conradi, *Saint and Artist* 205).

It seems, then, that *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* reaffirms Murdoch's philosophical wariness of creation: Rupert is destroyed because of his theories, Julius's plotting is shown to be evil, and Tallis is only allowed a few acts from necessity in his otherwise messy life. Even more than her philosophical work, the novel emphasizes the misguiding nature of any creation, or creator.

Yet, this is not the full story. One more suggestion presents itself when considering the notion of gender in this novel, a concept that has become a relatively recent object of Murdoch studies.⁶ *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* features three characters who cross gender: Tallis, Morgan, and Simon. Tallis is often portrayed as feminine. Hilda compares him to her husband thus:

⁶ Cf. footnote 4.

How different these two are, thought Hilda . . . Rupert is so strong and firm, so typically masculine and so marvellously honest. He wants complete information and straight answers and unambiguous positions. He wants clarifications and rational policies. Tallis is so much more indefinite and feminine. (179)

Significantly, the distinction between the genders runs along the same lines as that of theory. Thus, Tallis’s wife, “clever” Morgan, who has a doctorate in glossematics, is said to have liked to be a boy (16). When in an absurdly comical scene, she dresses in Simon’s clothes, the latter exclaims: “My God, Morgan, you look just like a chap!” The narrator hastens to explain that Morgan looked like “a clever boy, not even raffish, not even a dandy, just hard and clever” (165).

Simon is the third character said to cross gender divisions. Axel accuses him of having “the taste of a suburban housewife” (75). Peter sneers at him, for his dancing while wearing a wreath of roses (134), and Julius calls him “feminine,” because: “All the little dainty touches in this room are obviously Simon’s work. The cunning way those cushions are put, the graceful looping back of the curtains, the particular arrangements of the flowers, indeed the presence of the flowers” (305).⁷

In this last character one more image of creation is found. Simon—as the other feminine characters (Hilda and Tallis)—may not know much theory. Indeed, even in the field in which he should be the expert, he is often corrected by Axel (35). Yet, Simon is *also* the creator of outrageous bunches of flowers, of wonderful and original interiors, dishes, and even of outrageous outfits for himself and others. Simon is the master of abundant creation, and almost each time he is censured or ridiculed for it by the male theorists. Simon is, moreover, one of the few characters to come out of the period of enchantment relatively unaffected. We leave him at the very end, drinking “excellent” wine in the garden of a French hotel with “in his veins the warm anticipation of new happiness” (437). Admittedly, he feels slightly guilty and sad, but not very much so. The author has let him off. His comical, frivolous art of creation is redeemed in the authoritarian fiat of his happiness.⁸

⁷ Simon’s femininity is of course also an expression of a then popular image of homosexuality (Grimshaw 38ff.). Commentators agree that Murdoch’s portrayal of the relationship between Simon and Axel is exceptional for its time (Conradi, *Saint and Artist* 204; Gordon 144; Bove 70; Grimshaw 37).

⁸ Significantly, Richard Todd comes to a similar conclusion, though from a different starting-point. He argues that Murdoch uses Shakespearean comic devices to solve her philosophical and literary problems (*Shakespearean Interest* 80–81). And yet another, similar explanation may be found in Simon at one point being crowned with a crown of roses, a crown of thorns—as a comical Christ (133)? Unfortunately, I have had to leave the

A Fairly Honourable Defeat thus does propose a solution to the ambiguity central in *The Sovereignty of Good*, even if it is hidden in a subplot. Yet, I would hesitate to consider this solution final, or even to liken Murdoch's creations to Simon's—even though there are obvious points of comparison. Murdoch's wariness of existing images of creation and authority goes beyond the particularity of her authorship. It signifies a much wider challenge to authority, which can be put in terms of religion (the creator God) or gender. Murdoch was part of a generation of women philosophers, who despite their relatively novel position, emphasized their ordinariness. Yet, there is a growing amount of evidence that the existing imagery of authority did not always suit (cf. Rowe; Midgley 122–23). Murdoch's quest for an understanding of creation that is neither too authoritarian nor evil is a common quest, that cannot have a quick or easy answer. Yet, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* encourages us to start looking for it. The abundance of imagery in the novel has been far from fully explored, and provides further direction—as does Simon's ridiculous bouquet of flowers—“meant to be an absurdly large bunch” (35).

WORKS CITED

- Altorf, Marije. *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Altorf, Marije, and Mariëtte Willemsen. “Iris Murdoch en de verbeelding van het Goede.” Introduction. *Over God en het Goede*. By Iris Murdoch. Trans. and intro. Marije Altorf and Mariëtte Willemsen. Amsterdam: Boom, 2003: 7–30.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Willing*. New York: Harcourt, 1978. Vol. 2 of *The Life of the Mind*. 2 vols. 1978.
- Bove, Cheryl. *Understanding Iris Murdoch*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993.
- Byatt, A.S. *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch*. 1965. London: Vintage, 1994.
- Conradi, Peter. *Iris Murdoch: A Life*. London: HarperCollins, 2001.
- . *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*. 1986. London: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Gordon, David. *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995.
- Griffin, Gabriele. *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*. San Francisco: Mellen University Press, 1993.

religious imagery (including the relation between Tallis and his father) largely unexplored in this article.

Grimshaw, Tammy. *Sexuality, Gender, and Power in Iris Murdoch's Fiction*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005.

Johnson, Deborah. *Iris Murdoch*. Brighton: Harvester, 1987.

Midgley, Mary. *The Owl of Minerva: A Memoir*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Murdoch, Iris. *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1997.

---. *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. 1970. London: Penguin, 1972.

---. *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. 1992. London: Penguin, 1993.

---. *The Sovereignty of Good*. 1970. London: Routledge, 2001.

Purton, Valerie. *An Iris Murdoch Chronology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Rowe, Margaret. “Iris Murdoch and the Case of “Too Many Men.”” *Studies in the Novel* 36.1 (Spring 2004): 79–94.

Spear, Hilda. *Iris Murdoch*. 1995. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Todd, Richard, ed. *Encounters with Iris Murdoch: Proceedings of an Informal Symposium on Iris Murdoch's Work held at the Free University, Amsterdam, on 20 and 21 October 1986*. Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988.

---. *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearean Interest*. Plymouth: Vision, 1979.

---. “Iris Murdoch: veertig jaar romanschrijven.” *Wijsgerig Perspectief* 35.3 (1994/5): 66–71.

Wood, James. “Iris Murdoch's Philosophy of Fiction.” *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief*. London: Cape, 1999: 174–85.

Małgorzata Myk

University of Łódź

Let Rhoda Speak Again: Identity, Uncertainty, and Authority in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

ABSTRACT

Performing a rereading of Virginia Woolf's 1931 experimental modernist masterpiece of *The Waves*, in this article I focus on the elusive and conflicted character of Rhoda, whose significance has been either overlooked or marginalized in the available criticism of the narrative. By pointing out a number of problems in the existing scholarship devoted to Rhoda, I propose to define her as a transgressive figure of uncertainty through which Woolf develops a critique of the unitary self. My point of departure for the following essay is Toril Moi's perspective on Woolf's oeuvre as openly feminist and deconstructive. Consequently, I begin with Moi's emphasis on Woolf's commitment to the problematization of the Western male humanism's underlying concept of the unitary self. Drawing from a number of critical and philosophical perspectives, I turn to Kim L. Worthington's idea of subjectivity as a sustained process of interpersonal narrativization in order to offer a more nuanced account of Rhoda's identity as compound and implicated in the dynamics of intersubjective processes. I also consider Rhoda's much criticized rejection of identity vis-à-vis Woolf's strategy of impersonality, and, contrasting it with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological concepts of the flesh and anonymous existence, I contend that Rhoda renounces the unitary selfhood, which corroborates Moi's critique of Woolf. Through a close analysis of Rhoda's position versus the other characters, as well as by examining how Rhoda's ego boundaries are delineated in the narrative, I demonstrate that Woolf's conflicted heroine emerges as an astute critic of gendered reality, since she is the one who most acutely feels the dualistic nature of selfhood and it is chiefly through her that Woolf points to the need to overcome this dualism. Shannon Sullivan's feminist revision of the Merleau-Pontian perspective on the anonymity and the body as well as the Deweyan notion of transactionality further helps to elucidate

the ways in which Rhoda's experimental and subversive discourse engages in a polemic with the Cartesian conceptualization of identity presupposed on the dualism of mind and body simultaneously inquiring about a possibility of a non-dualistic and non-unitary conception of subjectivity. As a consequence, Rhoda gains authority and agency through uncertainty which prompts her to adopt an uncompromisingly and insistently questioning stance. Finally, I suggest reconsidering Rhoda's suicide as a metaphorical act of 'distancing,' as discussed by Zygmunt Bauman, via Adorno, in his 2006 *Liquid Fear*, another context for approaching Rhoda's uncertainty.

ABSTRACT

107

It is beyond our reach. Yet there I venture.

—Virginia Woolf *The Waves*

In her introduction to *Sexual/Textual Politics* tellingly titled "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Toril Moi observes that even though Woolf's project "reveals a deeply sceptical attitude to the male-humanist concept of an essential human identity," it has been frequently misconstrued by feminist critics (10). Moi, who identifies deconstruction of the concept of the unitary self as one of Woolf's major preoccupations, further points out that unitary selfhood is a notion central to traditional Western male humanism, a phallic self in disguise, based on an inherently patriarchal assumption that every individual needs to "adopt a unified, integrated self-identity" (7–8). It is hardly a coincidence that Moi devotes the opening chapter of her book of feminist literary theory to Woolf, whose writing was indeed deeply preoccupied with problematizing the 'Transcendental Ego'¹ through exposing it as a patriarchal construction, and instead conceived of subjectivity as implicated in a dynamic of intersubjective processes of *becoming* rather than *being*. As Roxanne J. Fand remarks in her book *The Dialogic Self*, in Woolf's time "being a woman was not without

¹ In her 2001 study *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*, Shannon Sullivan points out that "throughout history of philosophy, philosophers have claimed that there is an essential 'core' in humans that underlies all of their cultural and other differences. Some have called this core 'Reason'; others, 'the Universal Mind'; and still others, 'the Transcendental Ego.'" Sullivan's study questions this tradition by exposing essentialist and patriarchal thinking that stands behind it (73).

ego boundaries, but rather feeling ego as an imposition, . . . empowered for a man, disempowered for a woman” (45, my emphasis). Contributing to the impressive body of available scholarship devoted to Woolf’s oeuvre, I would like to propose a reading of her 1931 modernist masterpiece *The Waves* in the context of a number of critical perspectives that open new avenues for thinking about Woolf’s work, and show a commitment on her part to push the writing towards the non-unitary and non-dualistic conceptualization of female identity, as well as its dynamic evolution over time and recuperative potential. One such noteworthy perspective is offered in Kim L. Worthington’s *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction*, which re-examines a number of the currently debated critical approaches to the question of identity constitution, and effectively tries to overcome the poststructuralist impasse in defining the modern self that has been frequently enough bemoaned as fragmented or theorized along much more dramatic lines as being under the constant threat of complete dissolution. By contrast, Worthington sets out to explore subjectivity as “an active interpretative process”; “a narrative of personal continuity through time” (13). Her project’s emphasis on the spatio-temporal dimension of the self reminds us that subjectivity has always been implicated in the larger concept of intersubjectivity, since, as Worthington aptly states, “[o]ne’s conception of self is never fixed simply in one permanent structure of representation, but in a plurality of shifting affiliations” (80). Whereas intersubjectivity is undoubtedly an underlying trait of Woolf’s entire oeuvre,² it is particularly conspicuous in the experimental narrative of *The Waves*, where the intertwined planes of spatiality and temporality play a major part in structuring the characters’ collective and individual experience. Worthington’s approach may serve as a valuable context for rethinking *The Waves* as a text that is deeply preoccupied with the question of identity in process, which Woolf masterfully articulates through a set of characters whose interrelated soliloquies simultaneously and continuously test the singularity of ‘I’ in the common world “where many selves come to mingle and depart” (Worthington 165).³ As

² While intersubjectivity is by no means unique to Woolf’s oeuvre, I would like to underscore its particular significance in discussing the narrative such as *The Waves*. As a way of discovering and constructing one’s self through the selves of others and “interliving” with others, intersubjectivity is one of the key issues in Woolf’s text, and Rhoda is a figure most poignantly grappling with simultaneous conflicting desires for withdrawal into solipsistic individualism and a sense of belonging to the common world of shared meanings.

³ As a variant of dramatic monologue, soliloquy allows Woolf to avoid the constraints of the third person narration by creating an effect of withdrawal into a mode of narrativity that hinges on the stream of consciousness technique, and simultaneously allows for intersubjectivity through an on-going subconscious dialogue with others.

Woolf famously observed with a considerable dose of calculated irony in her *Letters*:

The six characters were supposed to be one. I'm getting old myself—I shall be fifty next year; and I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect oneself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feelings. Therefore I wanted to give a sense of continuity. (397)

Indeed, Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, Louis, and Percival form a kind of intersubjective continuum. They are present together on the stage of the world, but as each of them speaks, they are not necessarily always heard or seen by the others. As Worthington would have it, they actively participate in the sustained process of identity constitution through its narrativization over time when they 'interlive,' when they choose separate paths in life, when they are reunited at different points in their lives, and when they continue to coexist through their interrelated narratives even beyond the moment of their lives' closure.

In his compelling study *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, Jesse Matz reminds us that in Woolf's work intersubjectivity is always combined with her preoccupation with impersonality, which gave rise to her work's overarching question, resonating particularly strongly in *The Waves*, of how to "describe the world seen without a self" (287). According to this approach, intersubjectivity and impersonality should not be viewed as contradictory. As it will be explained further in the article, I trace the impersonality that Matz mentions in his study to Merleau-Ponty's idea of anonymity and, to be precise, the anonymous body, which, far from the negative sense of the word, for the phenomenologist implied the impersonal (i.e., shared and prepersonal) level of bodily existence. Matz also explains Woolf's approach to subjectivity by defining it as a conceptual variant of literary Impressionism that emphasizes "a phenomenological link of subject and world" that derives directly from Bergsonian notions of *duration* and *intuition* (26). In the chapter titled "Woolf's Phenomenological Impression," Matz underscores her commitment to expressing a whole range of interrelated indeterminacies and differences in mood and feeling, which makes Woolf's Impressionism "a matter of feminist epistemology" (176). For Matz, this literary kind of Impressionism is characterized by the fundamental problem, located somewhere between empiricism and phenomenology, of the radical *uncertainty* concerning subjectivity and the horror of its complete dissolution (29). Importantly, Matz suggests embracing this particular kind of uncertainty as a vehicle that offers "a range of possibilities" and that turns "dilemmas into options" (18). The potential of uncertainty emphasized by Matz constitutes the core of im-

pressionist modernist narrative of *The Waves*, all the more important when considered in the light of Woolf's openly feminist agenda. Uncertainty simultaneously structures and frustrates the world of interconnected selves in Woolf's work. Her characters, perversely described in one of her diary entries as "merely views," are, as Lisa Marie Lucenti observes, always precariously "fluctuating between acceptance and rejection of their own insubstantial nature" (Woolf, *The Diary* 264; Lucenti 75). The "seamlessly unified self," to resort to Moi's phrase again, is constantly questioned and deconstructed by all the characters of *The Waves*; in particular, it is the elusive figure of Rhoda that emerges as Woolf's main vehicle for articulating the above delineated concerns (Moi 8). In its focus on Rhoda's uncertainty and its precarious potentiality, this essay is based on a risky wager that the poignantly fragile self-effacing female character, whose performance is enacted through a number of fearful soliloquies to finally end in a suicidal flight long before the closure proper of the book, is part and parcel of Woolf's feminist project of reconceptualization of female identity that Moi chooses as a point of departure for her own argument in the opening lines of *Sexual/Textual Politics*. It is my contention that Rhoda's significance needs to be reconsidered in the light of textual evidence and critical contexts that are more sympathetic to the ambivalence that her complex character embodies.

While the available criticism of *The Waves* has not been entirely indifferent to Rhoda, she does not feature prominently in the scholarship devoted to the narrative. Indebted as I certainly am to a vast number of studies that offer significant analyses of the dilemma of the subject in *The Waves* and in Woolf's oeuvre in general, I find their characterizations of Rhoda reductive, if not entirely dismissive. Just to give a brief overview, Gabrielle Schwab's essential chapter on *The Waves* coming from her book *Subjects Without Selves* deploys the Kristevan theoretical model of *the subject-in-process/on trial* and develops as a way of critiquing the reductiveness of the idea of the death of the subject. Schwab, however, fails to see that it is chiefly through Rhoda that Woolf articulates her views on *the subject-in-process/on trial*, and this oversight causes her to define Rhoda as a character "remain[ing] emotionally imprisoned in herself" who betrays the "psychotic dissolution of the body" (77, 75). Schwab suggests that the narrative of *The Waves* merely "prepares the way for later, less dichotomous presentations of subjectivity," as if ignoring the fact that these preoccupations are already present in Woolf's 1931 work, and finally ends her analysis on a dubious note asking whether Rhoda could be seen as "the intrusion of the real" (92). In *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*, Makiko Minow-Pinkney, whose critique also relies on the Kristevan model of subjectivity, argues that Rhoda is "incapable of establishing the thetic subject" and remains

fearfully suspended between the “denial of unity” and “the agony of the fragmented self” (163, 169). Minow-Pinkney’s largely mistaken underlying idea of the fragmentariness as an essential trait of the text’s temporality and the fractured self of Rhoda is the major weakness and limitation of this otherwise important analysis. Another critical examination of *The Waves*, coming from Judy Little’s Kristevan/Bakhtinian study titled *The Experimental Self*, attempts to characterize Rhoda in a more positive and productive way as a figure who defines herself in creative and transformative appositional relation to others, rather than being in opposition to them, and remains in “an ambivalent relation to the symbolic order” (66). Roxanne J. Fand’s Bakhtinian reading of Rhoda included in her book *The Dialogic Self* proposes a more promising and complex notion of the self oscillating between unity and diversity suggesting that Rhoda is “a nomadic character” whose high level of self-awareness helps her develop a consciously ironic stance toward the worldly order and ultimately renounce the world in the spirit of Nietzschean ‘will-to-power’ (60). In Fand’s view, however, Rhoda’s “discourse of violence and will to power” are “the underside of her pathetic helplessness,” which gives her analysis of Rhoda chiefly negative inflections (90). Few of the existing analyses demonstrate sensitivity to the critical role Rhoda plays in the narrative. Instead, in spite of their commitment to the deconstructive strategy of reading, they often stop at the disappointingly reductive literal interpretation of Rhoda’s death, reading it as her failure, rather than a refusal, to develop a sense of unified selfhood through entering the social sphere. Preoccupied as these analyses undoubtedly are with Woolf’s efforts to challenge the unitary notion of selfhood, they still appear to hold on to the traditionally sanctioned notion of the Cartesian self, and contradict the deconstructive goal of their projects by failing to see Rhoda as a key figure in Woolf’s oeuvre in general, and by mistaking Rhoda’s tacit transgression for resignation and inability to integrate into society.

I would like to challenge the ways in which Rhoda’s conflicted figure has been viewed in the text’s available interpretations; her significance largely reduced by her apparently marginal status relative to other characters of *The Waves* and, more directly, by her suicide. In contrast to the majority of readings that offer chiefly negative interpretations of Rhoda emphasizing failure as her indelible trait, and writing her off as a dysfunctional psychotic character, I would like to approach Rhoda as a complex figure of uncertainty and at the same time Woolf’s vehicle for articulating a profound recognition of the necessity to challenge the dualistic thinking underlying the rigidly defined contours of the Transcendental self. In the following pages, Rhoda will be examined as a character through which Woolf radically destabilizes the boundaries of the ego through exposing

and renouncing the conception of unitary selfhood. In my interpretation, I will rely on Worthington's concept of narrativization of the self, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's anti-dualistic notion of *the flesh of the world* developed in his unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible*, Shannon Sullivan's feminist revision of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project as well as her deployment of the concept of transactionality (via John Dewey), and finally Zygmunt Bauman's insightful reflections on the modern-day uncertainty coming from his 2006 work *Liquid Fear*, all of which provide crucial insights into Woolf's extraordinary commitment to narrativization of female identity and to the feminist agenda in general. In the following analysis, Rhoda will be examined primarily as a liminal figure that embodies Woolf's uncertainty regarding the boundaries of the 'Transcendental Ego' presupposed on the Cartesian dualism of mind and body.

As Judy Little aptly observes in passing in her study *The Experimental Self*, the complex character of Rhoda is "a radical and experimental voice" expressive of the Woolfian discourses that "do not fit into a scheme of binary difference" (68, 37). Indeed, whereas the female characters in *The Waves* are constantly questioning their positions in gendered reality, they do so predominantly within strictly defined boundaries of the social roles available to them; Jinny questions the social constructions of femininity, whereas Susan finds little reconciliation between her individual freedom and motherhood. Rhoda, on the other hand, noticeably surpasses Jinny and Susan in trying to articulate her uncertainty about these two socially acceptable models of femininity, portrayed by Woolf as inscribed in essentialist realizations of female identity. Unlike Jinny and Susan, Rhoda not only refuses to subscribe to either of these two orders traditionally constitutive of female identity, but also becomes painfully aware of the fact that no in-between position in the biologically determined essentialist binary (i.e. mother versus beloved) regulating the normative conceptualization of femininity is available to her. At the same time, however, as a character who most of the time perceives the world and others from the distance of self-imposed detachment, Rhoda is granted a considerable, if not striking, degree of authority and insight. In the following sections of this essay, I will closely examine her position in the social space relative to the other characters, as well as her own perception of that position, with a particular emphasis on the dynamics between the interiority of the mind and the body, and finally, by extension, the dynamics between the socially structured inside and its outside; the dualisms that Rhoda insistently questions throughout the narrative.

In order to put the complexities of Rhoda's conflicted position concerning the mind versus body dualism in perspective, one might want to turn at this juncture to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception

and his notion of *flesh* formulated in his unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty describes *the flesh of the world* as a non-dualistic form of being that he refers to as a “less heavy, more transparent body” presupposed on the balance between the psychical and physical dimension of our coexistence in the world, and constitutive of the sustaining tissue of the world (153). Along the same lines, in the Woolfian interworld of selves *the flesh of the world* is woven out of the characters’ mutual transactions⁴ occurring on the plane where the psychical and the corporeal are interrelated: “But when we sit together, close,” as Bernard says in the narrative, “we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory” (16). For Merleau-Ponty, the notion of *flesh* is presupposed on the pre-personal anonymity that ensures the common ground for our intersubjective processes. For Woolf, similarly, the characters are enmeshed in the invisible yet almost palpable sustaining tissue in and through which they interlive with one another, and which makes their own presence possible and recognizable to themselves and others. Nonetheless, while they all share the feeling of belonging to the common interworld of selves, Rhoda, like the solitary chirping bird spotted by the bedroom window at the beginning of the narrative of *The Waves*, resolutely chooses not to sing “in chorus” despite her acute awareness of belonging to *the flesh of the world* (10). Instead, she creates her own imagined reality in which she nominates herself the captain of her little fleet of white petals in a brown basin:

I have a short time alone . . . I have a short space of freedom. And I will now rock the brown basin from side to side so that my ships may ride the waves. Some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs. One sails alone. That is my ship . . . They have scattered, they have foundered, all except my ship which mounts the wave and sweeps before the gale and reaches the islands where the parrots chatter and the creepers . . . (19)

The way in which little Rhoda envisions the future of her petal fleet early in *The Waves*, clearly an allegorical enactment of her life among the other characters, is significant not only because it adumbrates the different and often interconnected trajectories of her friends’ life-stories, but also

⁴ I borrow the concept of “transaction” from Sullivan’s 2001 study, in which she deploys the term, via American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, to account for “the dynamic, co-constitutive relationship of organisms and their environments . . . [and to reflect] a rejection of sharp dualisms between subject and object, and self and world, as well as a rejection of the atomistic, compartmentalized conceptions of the subject and self that often accompany such dualisms” (1).

because of the imaginative power with which she emphatically depicts her solitary ship's exotic voyages, privileging her brave future over the precarious fates of others. This early image of Rhoda dreaming of becoming the captain of the ship, later frequently evoked by others, is followed by moments during which she dreamily ventures past "the ordinary scene" towards dangerous seas, and even the distant land of India, where her beloved Percival goes and accidentally dies (197). Rhoda's occasional surges of self-confidence, while always largely conditioned upon her detachment from her friends and shot through with the awareness that "[riding] rough waters [she] shall sink with no one to save [her]" clearly point to her subversive nature (160). Her recurring dreams of adventures and leadership, however, can only remain impossible fantasies created in the safety of her self-imposed solitude to be immediately thwarted by the confines of gendered social reality, where such brave feats are reserved for men. While Rhoda rejects the conventional femininity and "prettiness" that underpin the socially constructed notion of womanhood, she also realizes that she will continue to be perceived as a young woman inhabiting gendered social spaces, which she sums up with a blunt observation: "I'm also a girl, here in this room" (160, 107).

Once Rhoda becomes aware of the social, spatial and temporal boundaries of her ego, she will continue her narrativization of identity, to use Worthington's phrasing, almost exclusively through depersonalization, repeatedly rejecting the Transcendental Ego that in Woolf's text emerges unmistakably as a phallic imperialist self, and that the characters of *The Waves* simultaneously insistently question and identify with, which can be seen in their almost worshipful attachment to Percival. As Helen Wussow notes in her 1998 book on Woolf and D.H. Lawrence *The Nightmare of History*, Percival is the one who embodies "the self-centred imperialism" that the author of *The Waves* mockingly exposes (111). It is through one of Rhoda's powerful soliloquies that Woolf shows the characters' desire to identify with the unitary self such as Percival's: "I am nobody. I have no face. This great company, all dressed in brown serge, has robbed me of my identity . . . I will seek out a face, a composed, a monumental face, and will endow it with omniscience, and wear it under my dress like a talisman . . ." (33). Percival's tragic demise in India deeply affects Rhoda, not only because of her love for him, but rather because his death paradoxically makes her feel all the more self-conscious and vulnerable by forcing her into a collective experience of mourning. Importantly, it also amplifies the contrast between her fearful vulnerability and low self-esteem and his grandeur that remains unquestioned by others, except by Woolf herself, and is continuously expressed by the other characters before and after he dies. The fact of Rhoda and Percival's mutual affection notwithstanding, the contrast between her

fragility and his towering figure is indeed striking. However, it is also worth observing that there exists another interesting affinity between those two in how they both aspire to authority; Percival claims it in the outside world (it is significant that we only know of him through other people's voices, but we never hear him speak) while Rhoda strives to achieve it both externally and internally. For all her withdrawal and introversion, she makes her presence intensely felt throughout the narrative, and there is an uncanny sense of urgency every time we read Rhoda's soliloquies. Her every social appearance is always commented on by others and she is frequently described as a "wild" mercurial figure "one never could catch"; someone who tried to see past the familiar horizon beyond which the others' gaze did not venture (247). Simultaneously, desperately trying to stabilize her sense of selfhood in the face of severely limited ambitions, Rhoda feels that her fleeting uncertain image can be fixed only momentarily, and insofar as it is contrasted with and mediated through others' stable identities:

That is my face . . . in the looking-glass behind Susan's shoulder—that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide it, for I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. The things they lift are heavy. They say Yes, they say No; whereas *I shift and change* and am seen through in a second. (43, my emphasis)

Unlike her friends, whose selves are securely stabilized by the social roles they choose to adopt, Rhoda is torn between her latent desire to preserve the autonomy of her dynamic and changeable instable identity and the simultaneous fear of identity dissolution, which keeps pushing her back towards some safe anchorage in the fabric of social reality:

'If I could believe . . . that I should grow old in pursuit and change, I should be rid of my fear. . . . I have no end in view. I do not know how to run minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass that you call life. Because you have an end in view—one person, is it, to sit beside, an idea is it, your beauty is it? . . . But since I wish above all things to have lodgment, I pretend . . . to have an end in view . . . I wait for you to speak like you. I am drawn here across London to a particular spot, to a particular place, not to see you or you or you, but to light my fire at the general blaze of you who live wholly, indivisibly and without caring in the moment. (130–31)

Acutely aware of the constructed and dualistic nature of subjectivity, whose underlying primacy of mind over body becomes the main source of her anxiety and uncertainty throughout the narrative, she is constantly

driven by the fear of the impermanence and vulnerability of the body. Not surprisingly, therefore, she finds relief during moments of “the disembodied mood” surrounding her and others, and often articulates a wholesale disavowal of corporeality (228). Unlike the other characters who remain attached to the vicissitudes of ordinary experience, and are in different ways constrained by their bodies and language, Rhoda’s troubled introspection, and significantly also extrospection, since she is conspicuously and obsessively preoccupied with the inside and outside reality, cannot be readily dismissed as failures to either fit in or transact with others. To understand Rhoda’s fear, we have to see her as someone who inhabits a world defined by dualistic thinking, a reality that compartmentalizes her world and her identity into subject and object positions, male and female gender, as well as disconnected realities of mind and body, where the former component of each binary is clearly privileged. Rhoda is the only character in *The Waves* who, extremely sensitive to the firmly rooted belief in the dualistic conception of selfhood with its socially enforced irreconcilable split into mind and body, confronts a possibility of the non-dualistic nature of identity envisioned as a continuous dynamic Möbian-like relationality occurring between the activity of the mind and the activity of the body. Throughout the narrative of *The Waves*, Rhoda gradually and fearfully comes to understand what it means for her to step both inside and outside of “the loop” of social performativity. Her solitary and intensely intro-/extrospective quest is informed by a desire for and a simultaneous fear of fluidity of identity and experience, as well as their transgressive nature. She dreams of existence as an immanent plane devoid of “hard contacts and collisions,” and reflects: “[m]onth by month things are losing their hardness; even my body now lets the light through; my spine is soft like wax near the flame of the candle” (45). Rhoda’s uncannily strong affinity with the imagery of water and fluidity is always shot through with anxiety and uncertainty coming from a constant clashing of the need for the reassuring solidity and clearly distinguishable palpable contours of identity on the one hand, and a simultaneous confrontation of their fluid permeable boundaries and the outside reality on the other. Characteristically, Rhoda’s relief at the feeling of “the walls of the mind becom[ing] transparent” communicates not only the mind’s coming into contact with external reality, but also its capability to discern and evaluate life’s socially constructed colonizing structure: “Wren’s palace, like the quartet played to the dry and stranded people in the stalls, makes an oblong. A square is stood upon the oblong and we say, ‘This is our dwelling-place. The structure is now visible. Very little is left outside’” (228). The insight gained by this moment of heightened perception is that the interiority of the mind is overcome through her senses and therefore also through her body towards

the outside. It is only through an ongoing transactionality between herself and others, between the inside and outside, that she can experience social spaces and boundaries between emerging shapes, objects, bodies, and thoughts, and come closer to a profound realization of how both the mind *and* body equally participate in her perception of reality and constitute her subjectivity. Of all the characters in *The Waves*, Rhoda is particularly sensitive and vulnerable to how the materiality of the outside physical reality, the physical boundaries of the body, and the interiority of the mind are violently drawn into relation, which is something that she simultaneously desires and fears. One of the central images of the narrative is the scene in which Rhoda's fear is exacerbated by the fear of fluidity that threatens a complete dissolution of identity:

“There is the puddle,” said Rhoda, “and I cannot cross it. I hear the rush of the great grindstone within an inch of my head. Its wind roars in my face. All palpable forms of life have failed me. Unless I can stretch and *touch* something hard, I shall be blown down the eternal corridors for ever. What then can I *touch*? What brick, what stone? And so draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body safely? (158–59, my emphasis)

In this powerful scene, Rhoda is paralyzed by the horror of the physical and material ‘palpable’ reality slipping away from her grasp, but also the horror prompted by a recognition that her sense of identity depends on the physical contact with the “palpable forms of life.” She feels disembodied and unable to identify with her own body, which turns out to be frightfully incapacitating. At the same time, she is also overcome by the abysmal fear of the suddenly unfamiliar outside reality, whose only certainties are the liquid reality of the puddle and instability of the brittle objects within her reach (brick and stone) that further threaten Rhoda's precarious position. Her identity can be stabilized by the return to the body, as the last line of the quoted passage clearly demonstrates. The puddle, which in her perception grows to enormous proportions, becomes a contentious site of ambivalence concerning a desire to regain control over the materiality of the body and the simultaneous horror of questioning her own corporeality and thereby losing grasp of the physical and the material, another symbol of Rhoda's fear. Another crucial element related to corporeality that is present in the puddle scene is the sense of touch, which transpires in Rhoda's repeated references to it. The body might be another source of uncertainty for her, but she simultaneously, if subconsciously, firmly relies upon its properties. She knows that she needs to *touch* the objects in her vicinity to be saved from falling into “the enormous gulf” that the puddle appears to her to be. This key passage also points to the significance of spatial and

temporal boundaries that deeply affect Rhoda's ways of perceiving herself, others, and the surrounding reality.

In order to look more broadly at Rhoda's perspective on the intertwined planes of social spatiality and temporality we need to return to her school-age activity of figure-drawing, which betrays both her fear of containment and a simultaneous terror of inhabiting the outside of socially constructed time and space: "Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join—so—and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, 'Oh, save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!'" (22). Rhoda's peculiar manner of describing various social spaces and situations, always intensely abstract and based on sharp spatial contrasts between geometric figures and their shapes, with a strong emphasis on their contours and the boundaries between them, brings into focus her, and the narrative's, major dilemma of the dualistic nature of reality and subjectivity. The apparently irreconcilable conflict between inside and outside and the drama of disembodied identity are played out through Rhoda, and it is Rhoda's external and internal struggle that brings the problem of the amputated corporeality into focus in *The Waves*. It also calls for a reconsideration of Woolf's well-known emphasis on impersonality and intersubjectivity and Rhoda's critical role in effecting a difference in how these concepts could be approached.

At this juncture, I would like to return briefly to Merleau-Ponty's idea of the flesh, and an interesting and important intersection that I see between his and Woolf's preoccupation with the common interworld of selves. For the philosopher, what lies at the foundation of the transgressive notion of *the flesh* is of course the idea that it is primarily the body, and not the mind, the primacy of which Merleau-Ponty's late project tries to overcome, that underlies our mutual transactions occurring in the tissue of anonymous existence. As Shannon Sullivan explains in her analysis of Merleau-Ponty's late work, "anonymous existence is that unnamed and perhaps unnameable level of bodily existence that is prepersonal . . . Complementary to the characterization of anonymous existence as prepersonal is Merleau-Ponty's description of it as impersonal . . . because the other's 'living body has the same structure as mine'" (69–70). Nevertheless, Sullivan hastens to revise the Merleau-Pontian perspective arguing that "[b]odies cannot be appealed to as some sort of foundational 'given' that easily solves the problem of communicating across their differences" (71). In other words, intersubjectivity becomes problematic when presupposed exclusively on the idea of anonymous existence, neutrality of the body, and impersonality. Needless to say, it is precisely the neutral perspective on the body that becomes one of the targets of Sullivan's pragmatist feminist critique. What is brought to

the foreground in her rereading of Merleau-Ponty is, among other things, the specificity and particularities of gender. Along these lines, I would like to argue that in Woolf's feminist project, the conflicted figure of Rhoda makes a much needed fissure in the impersonal intersubjective continuum of selves whose differences are overcome through their arrival at a realization of their own mortal nature and the idea of the eternal return poignantly emphasized in the narrative's conclusion. Torn between the contradictory desires of embracing the common consciousness of the Transcendental Ego and testing the boundaries of identity and the limits of difference, Rhoda finally renounces her corporeality and gender identity, and with them also her life, not so much because she is ultimately convinced that the fact of embracing these aspects of subjectivity would make little difference in the general scheme of things, or even that their acceptance would push her deeper into already heavily gendered social reality, but because the level of awareness that she arrives at is too radical to be readily and immediately embraced, and because it opens up a precarious territory that seems to her too dangerous and overwhelming.

Finally, through the conflicted figure of Rhoda, Woolf also creates a female character whose transgressive identity prefigures the modern-day state of anxiety that according to social theorist Zygmunt Bauman characterizes post-modernity. In his 2006 compelling study of "liquid fear," Bauman writes:

Fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen. 'Fear' is the name we give to our *uncertainty*. . . (2)

Characteristic of post-modernity rather than Woolf's modernity, Bauman's paradoxical conceptualization of "liquid fear" as simultaneously escaping clear definition and easily traced to a number of present-day dangers nonetheless emerges as a fundamental trait of Rhoda's uncertainty. Even though Woolf deliberately does not give the readers easy explanations of Rhoda's fears or any explicit key to her conflicted nature, it is not hard to deduce that the major horror she faces is having her identity pre-defined, reified, and finally dissolved in the grey faceless crowd:

Life, how I have dreaded you . . . oh, human beings, how I have hated you! How you have nudged, how you have interrupted, how hideous you have looked in Oxford Street, how squalid sitting opposite each other staring in the Tube! Now as I climb this mountain, from the top of which I shall see Africa, my mind is printed with brown-paper parcels

and your faces. I have been stained by you and corrupted. You smelt so unpleasant, too, lining up outside door to buy tickets. All were dressed in indeterminate shades of grey and brown, never even a blue feather pinned to a hat. None had the courage to be one thing rather than another. What dissolution of the soul you demanded in order to get through one day, what lies, bowings, scrapings, fluency and servility! (203–04)

Terrified of being engulfed by the anonymous crowd, the usually self-effacing Rhoda occasionally longs for individuality and difference. And here lies the greatest difficulty of approaching Woolf's views on impersonality and intersubjectivity; Rhoda embodies the feminist dilemma of how to sustain a sense of non-unitary identity without subscribing to its pre-defined sources and without having it stabilized or reified by others. What saves Rhoda's autonomy and at the same time endows her with a considerable degree of authority is her insistently self-conscious and questioning introverted stance along with her strategic approach to reality. As she says at one point, "But it is only that I have taught my body to do a certain trick. Inwardly I am not taught" (222).

As Bernard observes, Rhoda chooses "intense abstraction" because she fears others and the ways in which they "shatter the sense of being which is so extreme in solitude" (133). Indeed, Rhoda is frequently perceived as a kind of 'absent presence'; while the other characters often remark that Rhoda is always clumsily "lagging behind" the rest, she is quite literally "not with them" throughout most of the narrative, but rather occupies an unidentified space beyond all of them, and is often seen as "looking past" or "through" others (40, 12). Rhoda's "strange communications when she looks past [others]" suggest a different kind of knowledge that none of the characters are privy to (98). Contrary to what most critics have said about Rhoda's self-destructive fear and its culmination in the "suicidally solipsistic flight" from socially constructed existence, her radical withdrawal does not need to be construed literally as a cowardly instance of escapism, but rather figuratively, as a conscious gesture of a self-aware individual who withdraws in order to identify a different mental space that, in this case, allows for reconsideration and transformation of the traditionally conceived selfhood (McGavran 67). In *Liquid Fear*, Bauman speaks about such indispensable 'distancing' turning to Adorno's idea of the intellectual who withdraws into "inviolable isolation":

Keeping a distance, paradoxically, is an act of engagement—in the only form which engagement on the side of unfulfilled or betrayed hopes may sensibly take: "The detached observer is as much entangled as the active participant; the only advantage of the former is insight into his entanglement, and the infinitesimal freedom that lies in knowledge as such." (173)

Along similar lines, Rhoda's withdrawal can perhaps be seen as an act of engagement and a way of acquiring knowledge of the sources and consequences of her fear and anxiety. Rhoda's largely unaccounted-for suicide that Woolf merely hints at through the voices of other characters, or rather, to use Annette Oxindine's more sensitive word, her "disappearance," needs to be reconsidered as an act of transgression of the confining social order that is exposed in *The Waves* through her powerful insights (Oxindine 203). Rhoda is an outsider, an "authentic," as Bernard once referred to her, who "exist[s] most completely in solitude" (116). She is also the one who "ha[s] no end in view"; her uncertainty, connected with remaining fearfully and painfully, yet not without a reason, "unattached, without anchorage anywhere, unconsolidated," indeed becomes the only attainable freedom that the difficult knowledge of the boundaries of selfhood entails (122). Relinquishing the 'Transcendental Ego, 'the damned egotistical self' of which Woolf was so weary, Rhoda, like artists Lily Briscoe from Woolf's 1927 *To the Lighthouse* or Miss La Trobe from her final 1941 work *Between the Acts*, re-emerges as a transgressive voice of the feminist intellectual who ushers in change, invites contradiction and ambiguity, and whose powerful discourse subverts the neutral anonymity of *the flesh of the world* deconstructing it, which, as Moi aptly describes Woolf's textual practice, indeed "leav[es] the critic no single unified position but a multiplicity of perspectives to grapple with" (3). Desperately interrogating her precarious position in the social order, Rhoda paradoxically remains a fragile yet powerful figure of uncertainty through which Woolf voices a desire for difference, and whose withdrawal should be read as a radical rejection of unitary subjectivity presupposed on the mind-body dualism. "Let Rhoda speak," therefore, "whose face I see reflected mistily in the looking-glass opposite; Rhoda [who was] interrupted when she rocked her petals in a brown basin . . . She is not giddy when she looks down. She looks far away over our heads, beyond India" (138).

WORKS CITED

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Fear*. Cambridge: Polity, 2006.
- Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. by Mabelle L. Andison. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2007.
- Fand, Roxanne J. *The Dialogic Self: Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1999.
- Little, Judy. *The Experimental Self: Dialogic Subjectivity in Woolf, Pym, and Brooke-Rose*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996.
- Lucenti, Lisa Marie. "Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: To Defer that 'Appalling Moment.'" *Criticism* 40.1 (1998): 75–98.

Matz, Jesse. *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

McGavran, James Holt, Jr. "Shelley, Virginia Woolf, and *The Waves*: A Balcony of One's Own." *South Atlantic Review* 48.4 (1983): 58–73.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics*. London: Routledge, 1985.

Oxindine, Annette. "Rhoda Submerged: Lesbian Suicide in *The Waves*." *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*. Ed. Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer. New York: New York University Press, 1997. 203–21.

Schwab, Gabrielle. *Subjects Without Selves: Transitional Texts in Modern Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Sullivan, Shannon. *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Vandivere, Julie. "Waves and Fragments: Linguistic Construction as Subject Formation in Virginia Woolf." *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.2 (1996): 221–33.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Anne Oliver Bell with Andrew Mc Neillie. 5 vols. New York: Harcourt, 1977–84.

---. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. 6 vols. New York: Harcourt, 1977–82.

---. *The Waves*. New York: Harcourt, 1931.

Worthington, Kim L. *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.

Wussow, Helen. *The Nightmare of History: The Fictions of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence*. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1998.

Adam Sumera

University of Łódź

Woman and Authority in Ian McEwan's "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" and Its Film Adaptation

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes Ian McEwan's short story "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" (published in 1975) and its film adaptation made in Poland by director Mariusz Grzegorzek in 1993. In many works McEwan shows women in more positive light than men. This short story, however, deals with a mother's total domination of her son's life. The text is in the form of first-person narration of the son but it is the figure of the mother that is of utmost importance.

The protagonist describes his life from his childhood. His mother wanted him to remain a baby as long as possible, depriving him of free will and leaving him totally dependent on her. Her attitude changed when she found a partner. The protagonist, now seventeen, had rapidly to grow up from a baby into an adult. Childhood and total passivity remain for him ideals to be pursued, and a cramped cupboard becomes his favourite environment. The influence of his upbringing remains with him for ever. After analyzing the short story the paper explores parallels to other works by McEwan and other writers. The importance of the use of the indeterminate article in the title is discussed. Attention is given to the issue of defamiliarization. And the ambivalent attitude of the protagonist towards his mother is examined.

The second part of the paper deals with the film adaptation. Grzegorzek has imaginatively developed the short story into a full-blown feature film. It preserves most of the important elements of the short story, at the same time providing new material largely in keeping with the original's tone. The director not only extrapolates, inventing new scenes to fill in the short story's unspoken gaps but also skilfully changes the narrator's comments into scenes, and this is not purely a change from telling into showing. The paper discusses the imagery of the movie, especially Oedipal motifs, references to Christ, and the impression

of blood-red lips. It stresses the stronger role of the teacher from the home (Smith in the text) and his influence on the only independent action of the protagonist—the revenge on Pus-face. It is also important that the film omits any verbal expression of the protagonist's hatred towards his mother.

ABSTRACT

124

McEwan's "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" is a short story published in his very first book, the collection *First Love, Last Rites*, in 1975.¹ The story is only a dozen pages long but it was the basis for a full-blown feature film *Rozmowa z człowiekiem z szafy* (Conversation with a Cupboard Man), made in Poland by director Mariusz Grzegorzek in 1993. The movie was received favourably, winning several prizes at international film festivals, including the award for best first work in Venice in 1993. It creatively develops McEwan's motifs and thus deserves to be discussed together with the short story that inspired it.

In McEwan women are often shown in a more positive light than their male partners. At the same time they can be more passive, too. We see this in his earliest short stories. In "Homemade," Connie, the ten-year-old sister of the protagonist, is a victim of her brother's incestuous desire but were it not for her knowledge of what posture to take and how to use their bodies, the whole thing would have ended in nothing; used by him, she remains somehow superior in her know-how. In "Pornography" (from the other short story collection, *In Between the Sheets*, 1978), two women are quickly seduced by O'Byrne and try hard to please him until they find out about his unfaithfulness; only then do they become active and take cruel revenge on him. A similar pattern can be traced in his novels. In *The Child in Time*, Julie's passive way of coping with the loss of their child is at least as good as the active one preferred by Stephen; in the other couple in the story, Thelma is not only Charles's wife, but in some respects she has also to mother him. In *The Innocent* Maria introduces Leonard into the world of sexuality and thus leads him from innocence to maturity. As Jack Slay, Jr. states, "[m]uch of McEwan's literature of shock [i.e. his early output] portrays the brutalization and mistreatment of women by a patriarchal so-

¹ The story appeared originally in the 1972 Spring-Summer issue of *Transatlantic Review* (cf. Slay 20).

ciety; as he begins to mature as a writer, his approach to the relationships between men and women becomes increasingly more feminist" (7). A list of McEwan's works that follow this pattern could go on. "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" can be treated not as misogyny but an attempt to explore new territory.

The story is presented in first-person narration, and it is the nameless narrator who is the main character. However, it is the female character, his mother, who plays the primary role and who stands behind almost all his actions.

The narrator's father died before he was born. His mother's aim in life was to have children. As she would not consider another marriage he remained her only child and "had to be all the children she had ever wanted" (75). For this reason, she tried to make him remain her small baby as long as possible. She did not pay attention to his physical growth. He was not sent to school, he slept in a cot, and when he grew too big for it she "bought a crib bed from a hospital auction" (75). She wanted to keep him "living [his] first two years over and over again" (76), tying a bib round his neck and feeding him. He did not even think about protesting against this as he did not know any other kind of life and, as he says, "how could I run away when I would be shitting myself with terror before I got fifty yards down the street?" (76).

And then came suddenly change. His mother, still attractive at thirty-eight, met a man who fascinated her. "Overnight she just swapped obsessions and all the sex she'd missed out on caught up with her" (77). She wanted to ask the man home but then she would have to show him her seventeen-year-old son who behaved like a small baby. Thus the boy had to grow up very quickly: "That's why in two months I had a lifetime's growing up to do" (77). One day his mother marries her lover and tells her son that he should call him Father. The boy has a fit; he has had them before but this one is the worst of all. When he regains consciousness:

[I] saw the look on my mother's face, complete disgust it was. You've no idea how much a person can change in such a short time. When I saw that look I realized she was as much a stranger to me as my father. (78)

The narrator moves into the world. First he is sent to an institution, most probably to a home for the mentally handicapped. He says: "there were all kinds of weird people there and that made me feel more sure of myself" (78). He learns to read and write, gets some job qualifications, and, most importantly, is taught by one of the teachers, Mr Smith, how to express himself through dancing and painting. The pictures he paints are worthy of psychiatric analysis. When he is asked to paint his mother:

“I made large red mouths all over the paper—that was her lipstick—and in the mouths I painted it black. That was because I hated her. Though I didn’t really” (79). This double attitude, of hatred and attraction, runs through other parts of his story.

When he is twenty-one he has to start living on his own. He goes to London and finds a job—washing up dishes in a hotel restaurant. There he becomes the object of persecution of the physically repellent, mentally disgusting chief cook. Because of numerous awful scabs on the cook’s face the narrator calls him “Pus-face”. The Cupboard Man² is instructed to clean the main oven, and has to get inside it, but is then locked in. This is the cook’s idea of a joke. The young man spends five hours in the oven. On the following day he is told to get in again but this time the cook turns on the heat. When the boy finally gets out he has serious burns on his feet and back. The next day he comes to the restaurant kitchen intent on revenge. He throws four pints of boiling oil into the cook’s lap, practically castrating him, apt punishment, perhaps, for a man who not only plays cruel jokes but reads “dirty magazines” (82) and chases after women working in the kitchen.

After this the Cupboard Man is too ill to stay in the kitchen, and cannot find other work. He returns home to find that his mother and her new husband have left without leaving a forward address. Then he starts shoplifting. Finally, he is caught red-handed and sent to prison. Strangely enough, the prison turns out not to be so bad:

My cell wasn’t very different from my room in Muswell Hill [the institution in which he stayed till becoming twenty-one]. In fact from the window there was a much better view from my prison room because I was higher up. . . . You could cut pictures out of magazines and stick them on the wall, and I wasn’t allowed to do that in my room in Muswell Hill. (85)

In his opinion, these “three months were the best since I left home” (86). He enjoys the quiet routine of the days: “Each day was like the one before it. I didn’t have to worry about meals and rent. Time stood still for me, like floating on a lake. I began to worry about coming out” (86). He even asks the assistant governor whether he could stay on but “he said it cost sixteen pounds a week to keep a man inside, and that there were plenty of others waiting to come in. They didn’t have room for us all” (86).

² Naming a character is useful for critics; that very spelling has been already used in criticism and that is why it is repeated here. However, it should be observed that as in the edition of *First Love, Last Rites* used in this paper the titles of all short stories are written without capitalization, McEwan did not mean to capitalize that “name.” In that edition the story is called “Conversation with a cupboard man.”

When released, he finds menial work in a factory which he does not mind "because it was so noisy that you didn't have to speak to anyone" (86). Gradually he stops going to work and starts spending more and more time in a wardrobe containing no clothes but only cushions and blankets. At the moment of narration he has not been to his workplace for three months. He says: "I hate going outside. I prefer it in my cupboard" (89).

In the chronology of the story his fascination with a closed space seems to have surfaced for the first time when he reflects on his being locked in the oven:

I thought about that oven a lot. I made up daydreams about being made to stay inside an oven. That sounds incredible, especially after what I did to Pus-face. It was what I felt, though, and I couldn't help that. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that when I went to clean the oven the second time I was secretly wanting to be shut in. I was sort of hoping it without knowing it, do you see what I mean? I wanted to be frustrated. I wanted to be where I couldn't get out. That was at the bottom of my mind. (83)

He compares it with his time in prison as follows:

You might be thinking that what I said about being locked in an oven was the same thing as being locked in a cell. No, it wasn't the pain-pleasure of feeling frustrated. It was a deeper pleasure of feeling safe. In fact I remember now wishing sometimes I had less freedom. (86)

But the motif of the oven recurs: "Ever since that oven, I want to be contained. I want to be small" (86). That statement can be clearly understood as his wishing to return to his early childhood, or even to the womb, and is expressed in the sentences opening the penultimate paragraph:

I don't want to be free. That's why I envy these babies I see in the street being bundled and carried about by their mothers. I want to be one of them. Why can't it be me? Why do I have to walk around, go to work, cook my meals and do all the hundred things you have to do each day to keep alive? I want to climb in the pram. (87)

The Cupboard Man is the first of a whole series of McEwan characters who try to regress to childhood (cf. Ryan 8). Similar attempts at regaining the lost happiness of the early phase of one's life can be found for example in *The Cement Garden* (Tom, and partly Jack), *The Child in Time* (Charles Drake), or the television play *Jack Flea's Birthday Celebration*. David Malcolm comes up with another qualification, seeing him as one

of the series of “the alienated, the losers, the isolated and marginalized figures” (33), appearing in many McEwan short stories.

A mother’s disastrous influence on her son’s life is nothing new in literature. One of the best known examples might be *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence, in which the mother dominates the life of her sons, compensating for her disappointment with her husband; however, the novel ends on an optimistic note: Paul Morel decides finally to throw away the despotism of his dead mother. Another instance is Angus Wilson’s short story “Mother’s Sense of Fun” (from the collection *The Wrong Set*) which might be read as a pastiche of *Sons and Lovers*, but going a step further—the death of the protagonist’s mother changes nothing in his life; what she has bred in him will remain in his psyche till his death and direct all his actions. Incidentally, Angus Wilson was one of McEwan’s tutors during his course of creative writing at the University of East Anglia (a course in which he was the very first student, and in this first year the only one); it was during that course that “Conversation with a Cupboard Man” was written. McEwan described the reaction of his tutors to that story in an interview with William Leith: “Angus [Wilson] liked the nastiness. Malcolm [Bradbury] was pleased with the literary pastiche” (qtd. in Byrnes 64). In another interview McEwan expands on his use of pastiche:

I very much admired *The Collector*. I still do. I think it’s Fowles’s best book. In “Conversation with a Cupboard Man” I wanted to do the kind of voice of the man in *The Collector*: that kind of wheedling, self-pitying lower middle-class voice. (Hamilton qtd. in Childs 11)

McEwan presents the story in the form of the narrator talking to a social worker. The presence of the other person can be gathered only because the narrator addresses him in his speech. From the very beginning McEwan hooks the attention of the reader by presenting the story as a puzzle:

You ask me what I did when I saw this girl. Well, I’ll tell you. You see the cupboard there, it takes up most of the room. I ran all the way back there, climbed inside and tossed myself off. Don’t think I thought about the girl while I did it. No, I couldn’t bear that. I went back in my mind till I was three feet high. That made it come quicker. (75)

Masturbation here is a paradoxically asexual act, and throughout the story sexuality seems of little real importance for the main character. What really attracts his attention is the lost happiness of his early childhood. The cupboard is so alluring because it reproduces the claustrophobic conditions of the womb.

The story is characterized by defamiliarization of the topic. Cowley states that according to McEwan the aim of the artist is to “deanesthetize

the familiar'—by which he means that the world around us, the world to which we have come to consciousness from babyhood, has a wonder with which we have become too familiar" (Cowley qtd. in Malcolm 41). The creation of a deranged character makes it possible to present problems already treated in literature in an original way.

An interesting feature of the title is the use of the indefinite article, making the main character a representative of an imaginary group of people—Cupboard Men. His experiences might seem to have a wider basis than just the life of an individual. Kiernan Ryan puts it this way: "It is the hidden emotional history of many men, grotesquely caricatured as the confession of a madman" (Ryan 8). Although the word "madman" seems to be too strong in the case of the Cupboard Man, his mind has certainly been seriously disturbed. The use of "a" in the title seems to overrule the words of the narrator: "There can't be many like me" (87).

The attitude of the narrator towards his mother is of a mixed nature. On the one hand, he is very critical of her: "She was twisted up, you know, that's where I got it from" (75), "She was insane" (76). He calls her a "bitch" (76). But at the same time he says of his childhood: "I'll tell you a funny thing. I wasn't unhappy, you know. She was all right really" (76). When he recalls the time she read him stories, or helped him make a toy theatre out of a fruit box he says: "She was a good woman really, my mother. Just twisted, that's all" (76).

Things changed considerably when the mother found a man. "She went mad for this fellow, as if she wasn't mad already" (77). Her attitude towards her child suddenly changed—she wanted him to grow up and perform all those functions she had so far denied him. When this does not happen quickly enough she decides to present him as "mentally subnormal" (77) to her lover. The man does not like the boy: "because he was big and successful he hated me at first sight. . . . First time he just nodded when my mother introduced me to him and after he never said a word to me" (77). The attitude is reciprocated: "I hated him because he had taken my mother" (77). The Cupboard Man states that after the fit he suffered following their wedding he saw disgust in his mother's face and realized how much she had changed, becoming a stranger to him. But after he has lost his job at the restaurant he decides to return home:

I began to think back to the old days when I was with my mother. I wished I was back there. The old cotton-wool life when everything was done for me, warm and safe. It sounds pretty stupid, I know, but I started thinking that perhaps my mother had got tired of that man she had married and that if I went back we could carry on the old life. (82)

This turns out to be impossible, as his mother and her husband have disappeared. Thus what remains for the main character is to try and return to an environment reminding him of the old safety. The wardrobe. To enhance the effect of this “womb” he adds to it a reminder of his childhood days:

The other day I stole a blanket from a pram. I don't know why, I suppose I had to make contact with their world, to feel I was not completely irrelevant to it. . . . I keep that blanket I stole in the cupboard. I want to fill it with dozens like it. (87)

When talking about his attitude towards his mother it seems appropriate to return to the scene of painting in the home. His words “That was because I hated her. Though I didn't really” (79) might suggest that the red colour used for painting her lips might not have been used only to render her lipstick, as the narrator suggested, but might stand for his love (the black inside expressing his hatred).

The mother's irresponsible attitude of first monopolizing her child, blocking all his contacts with the outside world and keeping him in an artificial state of prolonged infancy, then rejecting him and leaving him on his own, totally unprepared to cope with the world, is additionally strengthened in the short story by means of being presented in the form of a confession of the victim of her egoism.

* * *

Mariusz Grzegorzek's film adaptation is very rarely mentioned in McEwan criticism in English. McEwan himself knows it. In an interview with Jerzy Jarniewicz he mentioned that he had received a copy of the film from the director himself. However, he limited his comment to the statement that it was a very good film, strange and depressing but then the short story itself was depressing—and he then talked about the packet in which the film arrived: a letter with a wax stamp, tied with strings, truly a sculpture (22). Among critics, only C. Byrnes appears to mention the film (64) but even she says little.³

A film lives in a different sphere of contexts, and film critics have a different set of references from literary critics. Grzegorzek's film has been compared to works by Ingmar Bergman, especially those touching the results of overprotective motherly love. Some critics have seen a similarity of the main character to Kaspar Hauser from Werner Herzog's

³ Byrnes erroneously changes the title of the movie, using the first noun in plural (“Rozmowy”) but then she makes the same mistake for the short story itself, calling it “Conversations with a Cupboard Man.”

movie—a mysterious character raised in isolation from the world, then suddenly left in the middle of throbbing city life (cf. *kjz*).⁴ It can also be treated as expressing the views of the director himself. In an article in the Polish monthly *Kino*, Mariusz Grzegorzek wrote: “I feel bad. The art as I feel and understand it, is treated today as a misunderstanding, it has lost its impact. I would like to save—for myself and others—this intensive emotion, this way of looking at the world, which gave me the strength to live” (Grzegorzek 13, translation mine).

Grzegorzek's movie is an interesting development of McEwan's short story and it is a pity that there has been little comparison of both works. It preserves most of the important elements of the short story, at the same time providing new material largely in keeping with the original. It is not only that the director has to extrapolate, inventing new scenes to fill in untold gaps in the story (for example, the scenes showing the problems with education authorities who want to make the boy attend a school). Grzegorzek skilfully changes the narrator's comments into scenes, and this is not purely a change from telling to showing. One of the most important elements is the rendering of the attitude towards the mother. The short story is marked by a mixed attitude of the narrator towards his mother – one of hatred and love. In the film, Karol does not pronounce a single negative word against his mother. Neither in direct speech nor in the voice-over fragments expressing his thoughts do we hear that he hates her. What remains from the book are his comments that she is strange, very strange, and somehow twisted. He also says that he misses his mother and longs for her. However, the viewers can make their own judgements on the basis of the mother's actions.

The film makes the mother even more important than she is in the short story. She is continually present on screen in the first half, until the boy is sent to the home, and in the second half she still appears in his dreams.

The narrator of the short story describes himself as “thin and bloodless” (77). The choice of Rafał Olbrychski for this role is a bull's-eye—he fits this description perfectly. This impression is enhanced by his posture, expressing his total lack of self-confidence. The contrast between the two characters, mother and son, is striking.

The film opens with an extreme close-up of a picture of Christ, starting with his exposed heart. Then the camera tracks back to show the whole painting. This has a double importance. On the one hand, it introduces the character of the rooms in the film—both the home flat of Karol (this is the name of the Cupboard Man in the film) and the room he rents later have

⁴ Grzegorzek himself names Bergman and Herzog among those artists who influenced him during his studies (12).

many religious pictures on the walls. On the other hand, several scenes showing the adult Karol are shot in a way that likens him to Christ in a *pietà*. One more scene should be mentioned in this context: after the new “father” has been introduced to the boy and he falls into a fit we are shown a close-up of a picture of the Holy Virgin; then canted framing is used,⁵ the angle becoming more and more oblique, so that Mary appears to bow her head in compassion.

The action of the film starts dramatically. After a short scene with the voice-over in which Karol says that he feels fine, that he does not need any change, that he prefers to stay here, in his cupboard, we move to a morgue. On seeing the dead body of her husband, Karol’s mother has contractions and is clearly going to give birth to Karol. Thus from the very beginning Karol is shown as a replacement for her dead partner.

Grzegorzek has added two scenes intended to express the mother’s attitude to Karol. The first shows her feeding the baby Karol with gruel; in the middle of the plate is a strawberry that, according to her words, is meant for the kid as a reward at the end of the meal. She treats the child with tenderness, giving him spoonful after a spoonful until he tries to grasp the fruit. Whereupon she shouts at him and slaps him violently. The other scene is connected with a visit by a postwoman, who gives Karol, now eight years old, a sweet. When she is gone, the mother takes the sweet away from him and says that it must surely be poisoned. She puts it into her mouth and in a second starts shouting with pain and wriggling in convulsions. After she has feigned suffering sufficiently long to have given him a lesson, she says: “Don’t be afraid, Karol. Mummy will recover soon.” Both scenes show her as an egoist willing to impose her will on the child and make him a blind follower of her orders. She tries hard to deprive him of free will and initiative, and she succeeds.

Both in the short story and the film, the Cupboard Man’s stay in the home forms an important counterpoint to his mother’s influence. Grzegorzek develops the role of Smith (as the film is set in Poland, Smith becomes Kowalski, its Polish equivalent, a common surname, and here too the Cupboard Man says that it does not sound much of a name); he teaches the boy to read, to listen to sounds, to move his body, and, what is most important, to be tough. “You have to learn to live alone. You must be tough. Don’t let anybody hurt you.” This advice is new item, absent in the short story. Thanks to it, the young man’s reaction during the conflict in the restaurant kitchen is a logical consequence of Smith’s teaching: for once in his life he manages to take the initiative and per-

⁵ See Bordwell and Thompson for more information on this type of framing (237).

form an action instead of just following others' orders. But his energy is quickly spent and he returns to his cupboard. Although Smith's influence has helped him to become active for a while, it is his mother's influence that wins in the end and he retreats into his passivity. This is more deeply felt in the film as it omits the boy's shoplifting and then his imprisonment. His final inactivity (as in the book, he has not left his flat for three months at the time of narration) is clearly contrasted with his single sign of activity.

A powerful distinction between the film and the book is the escape sought by the main character. In both versions he longs to stay in the cupboard. In the short story he seeks the cramped peace of the womblike environment; the oven evokes in him both repulsion and attraction. In the chronology of the story presented in the book, the cupboard appears relatively late, as an attempt to *return* to the good days of infancy. In the film Karol finds escape in the cupboard as soon as his mother starts dating. And what he seems to be attracted by in the movie is not so much the limited space but the peace and quiet, and also the atmosphere of childhood. In his dreams he returns to the world of fairy-tales that his mother used to read him. Several of his dream scenes do much more than just signal his love of fairy-tales; in their complicated vision, in their oneiric quality and sophisticated symbolism they deserve an analysis going beyond the scope of this paper.

The film traces Oedipal strands in the mother's behaviour. She and Karol sleep in a big marital bed. Early in the film she carries her baby while looking at photographs of her late husband, and we hear extradiegetic music, a fragment of a song that must have been her and the husband's favourite. When, later, the same song is played on the radio, she takes Karol in her arms and dances with him.

An important stimulus for her change is a love scene on television that they watch together: a couple are kissing passionately. Shortly afterward, she searches through a drawer and finds a long-neglected bundle. Out of it she takes an object that she keeps in her closed fist. A close-up shows her unclenching the fist; she looks at the object with tension. It is a lipstick, blood red. In extreme close-up we watch her apply it to her lips. She dresses up and before going out kisses Karol on the forehead, leaving there a grotesque imprint of her blood-red lips (and this might be part compensation for the missing scene where the boy paints her red mouth with black inside, at the home; part compensation because here there is no black).

The Cupboard Man's voice-over ending the film, his confession that he wants to stay in his cupboard, leaves the viewer in no doubt that all his

actions, the only exception his revenge on Pus-face, have been shaped by his mother.⁶ Grzegorzek's decision to omit all verbal signals of the son's hatred seems to have worked perfectly. The tragic consequences of the mother's domination are thus even more striking.

WORKS CITED

Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Fifth edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.

Byrnes, Christina. *The Work of Ian McEwan: A Psychodynamic Approach*. Nottingham: Paupers' Press, 2004.

Childs, Peter, ed. *The Fiction of Ian McEwan: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Grzegorzek, Mariusz. "Żal tak młodo umierać." *Kino* Nov. 1994: 12–13.

Kezich, Tullio. "Addio, madre crudele: meglio star chiuso dentro l'armadio." *Corriere della Sera* 1 Sept. 1993: 21.

kjz. "Rozmowa z człowiekiem z szafy." *Gazeta Wyborcza* 24 Feb. 1996, "Gazeta Telewizyjna": 4.

McEwan, Ian. "Conversation with a Cupboard Man." *First Love, Last Rites*. London: Pan, 1976.

---. Interview with Jerzy Jarniewicz. "Potrzebujemy nieprawdziwych mitów." *Gazeta Wyborcza* 30 Oct.–1 Nov. 1999: 20, 22.

Malcolm, David. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.

Ryan, Kiernan. *Ian McEwan*. Plymouth: Northcote, 1994.

Slay, Jack Jr. *Ian McEwan*. New York: Twayne, 1996.

⁶ Although it might seem obvious that the story of the film should be interpreted literally, an Italian critic, Tullio Kezich, writing in the Italian press at the time of the Venice film festival in 1993, suggested a political reading. In his interpretation, Karol is Poland seen in her tortured and impossible relations with Mother Russia, and in her contemporary troubles in behaving as an adult nation.

Monika Rogalińska

Academy of International Studies

Inner Strength of Female Characters in *Loitering with Intent* and *The Public Image* by Muriel Spark

ABSTRACT

Women characters in Muriel Spark's novels are diverse, some strong and powerful, some weak and unable to make decisions. And there are characters who develop throughout the novel and learn from their own mistakes. From being passive, they gradually start acting and making their own choices. *Loitering with Intent* and *The Public Image* present women characters who go through metamorphosis, from being dependent on others into living their own lives and freeing themselves from former influences. Such kaleidoscopic change enables them not only to be able to finally make their own decisions but also to overcome many difficult situations threatening their future life.

Fleur Talbot, a heroine in *Loitering with Intent*, finds herself at a point in which she thinks that everything she cares for is lost. Chronically passive and naïve, she cannot imagine another way of being until she understands that she is being cheated, that her life will be ruined if she does not act. Everyone around her seems to be in conspiracy against her; only taking a firm stand and opposing her surrounding world can help. Fleur's life has become totally dependent on her ability to be strong and decisive. She knows that if she remains what she is, her career and prospects for the future will be lost, so she decides to prove her determination and her will to be finally happy. Her transformation into a powerful character saves her dignity and makes her a successful writer.

Annabel, a character in *The Public Image* is the same type of person as Fleur, as she lacks self-confidence and has no support from anybody, even her own husband. Muriel Spark, however, presents her as another example of a heroine who develops as the action progresses, able to evoke strength in herself when her situation seems hopeless. Annabel, at first treated as a puppet in the hands of other people, who use her image for their own benefit, shows that she is capable of anything by the

book's end. When her career and reputation are threatened and her privacy invaded, she decides to leave the country. This requires both effort and sacrifice, as she has to leave behind everything she has worked for all her life, but this is the necessary price for her freedom.

The ability of both female characters to show so much determination reveals an inherent inner strength, and their weakness and vulnerability as just superficial. When the situation requires it, both Annabel and Fleur are ready to fight for their rights, for their freedom and self esteem, and they discover that they are indeed capable of changing their lives.

ABSTRACT

136

There are certain women in Muriel Spark's stories who appear weak and vulnerable, with dreams but no power to realize them, with hopes but no means to counter the obstacles to fulfilment. But this impression can change as the action progresses. These women are capable of finding an inner strength, mustering the nerve to push against the barriers that stand between themselves and their goals.

One such character is Fleur Talbot in *Loitering with Intent*. Valerie Shaw says, "The book is full of ambiguities which Fleur sees but refuses to find disturbing or in any sense disabling" (Shaw 64). This is perhaps the reason for her passivity and weakness. She does not perceive the problems in her life with clear vision; instead, being a writer and an artist, she tries to distance herself from the surrounding world and live in her own shell, as if afraid to make any decision or move. She is a young, educated girl; but she completely lacks confidence, this lack issuing, among other things, from the fact that she is unemployed, driven by dreams that may never be realized, and with no concrete prospects for the future.

From the very beginning of the book, Fleur is presented as having never-ending problems with her landlord, which she could end easily if only she took the right action. She rents a single room, for which she pays double, and she is constantly reminded that she should be paying even more. Instead of reacting assertively, arguing about the rent or threatening to move out, she says nothing and meekly avoids conversations with the landlord.

Fleur also has problems with her emotions and love life, and this is another factor that entwines her life in stultifying complication. When she is confronted by Dottie, a girl whose husband she sleeps from time to time with, she explains to her:

Yes, Dottie, I love him off and on, when he doesn't interfere with my poetry and so forth. In fact, I've started a novel which requires a lot of poetic concentration, because, you see, I conceive everything poetically. So perhaps it will be more off than on with Leslie. (Spark, *Loitering* 21)

She seems bereft of any deeper feelings, even dissociated, impelling Dottie to say that she has an “unnatural attitude” and that her “head rules her heart” (Spark, *Loitering* 21). Nevertheless, when Leslie calls her his mistress, she denies it, saying she is his girlfriend, which suggests that she is not blithely ignorant about this situation but that she simply refuses to take responsibility for a more serious relationship. Fleur also claims Dottie is her friend, perhaps fearful of having no one to talk to, or, worse, having an outright foe. However, this kind of friendship, just like her relationship with the married man, is unhealthy and causes many problems. Dottie is not really the person to wish Fleur well. She is envious of her, and more often hates than likes her, a situation Fleur's apparent passivity is incapable of changing.

After being unemployed for some time, Fleur starts a new job with the Autobiographical Association, a group of writers wanting to publish their autobiographies in seventy years' time, after their death. Sir Quentin, the Association's leader, willingly employs Fleur, who seems to be just the kind of person the organization needs. She speaks little, is hard-working and works for next to nothing. It is now that she starts writing her first novel *Warrender Chase*. From the very beginning, the manuscript evokes strong feelings in the people to whom she reads it. They either like it or hate it; there is nothing in between. Dottie, when Fleur first reads it to her, is confused about the plot, does not know whose side she is supposed to be on, and therefore does not like it at all. The fact that Fleur has had the courage to read the novel for the first time to Dottie and is then criticized evokes such strong feelings that she “. . . tore up the pages of the novel and stuffed them into the wastepaper basket, burst out crying and threw her [Dottie] out roughly and noisily” (Spark, *Loitering* 53). The reader may thus suspect that the book will be a success when published, because only memorable works become bestsellers. Fleur's true friends, on the other hand, have a very positive attitude towards the book. Lady Edwina, her employer's elderly, eccentric mother and Solly, her old friend, are the only people who seem to understand the girl and acknowledge her real talent.

Fleur, no matter how much she is complimented on her writing skills and her talent, denies her own potential and believes in her failure. Lady Edwina, who believes Fleur will become a famous author, remarks while visiting Fleur's home that her room is similar to those of other successful writers before they became famous. Fleur objects:

Now I hastened to assure her that this wasn't likely. It rather frightened me to think of myself in a successful light, it detracted in my mind from the quality of my already voluminous writings from amongst which eight poems only had been published in little reviews. (Spark, *Loitering* 37)

At the same time, while editing the biographies of the members of the Association, and adding to them certain details, Fleur and the members themselves recognize that the works are much more readable, if not exactly interesting. When Sir Quentin realizes that the improved versions are better than the originals, he tells her to change all the works. Again, instead of talking to him about the problem, mindful that it takes time and effort to rewrite others' biographies, she keeps silent and does the job. Joseph Hynes states that "Fleur's intention has been harmless—that of an editor or of an author in search of some telling details" (174). But what she later finds is that "Sir Quentin subsequently builds on her versions with an eye to creating eventually 'lives' for his members that will enable him to blackmail them" (Hynes 174–75). This is the point when her indifference vanishes. She tries desperately to think of a way out of this situation, but it appears intractable. She says:

As you know I had already suspected that Sir Quentin was engaged in some form of racket, with maybe an eye to blackmail. At the same time I didn't see where the blackmail came in. He was not losing money on the project; on the other hand he was apparently quite rich and the potential victims of the Association were more marked in character by their once-elevated social position than for the outstanding wealth which tempts the crude blackmailer. Some of them had actually fallen on hard times. I noticed by the correspondence that the four members who had not shown up at the meeting were already trying to wriggle out of it, and I too had decided that as soon as my vague uneasiness and my suspicions about Sir Quentin's motives should crystallize into anything concrete I would simply leave. (Spark, *Loitering* 44–45)

Unable to act before, Fleur now finds an aim, namely, to stay in the Association and keep an eye on what is happening. Moreover, knowing that Sir Quentin is up to something nefarious, she decides to stay not only out of curiosity, to see what will happen next, but to protect herself and other members from this calculating man. Thus, in her determination to foil Sir Quentin, Fleur discovers her own innate strength.

The first thing that she uncovers is that members of the Association are given drugs to make their writings "frank." She soon works out that Sir Quentin's real interest is blackmail, something that she had once considered before. And she discovers that Sir Quentin has been reading the

manuscript of her book secretly, stealing parts of it and adding them to the members' works. Fleur says:

I turned over one file after another, that, although nothing had been added in the form of memoirs, sheets of notes, some typed, some in Sir Quentin's hand had been inserted, familiar passages; they were lifted more or less directly from my *Warrender Chase*. (104)

This stimulates her anger and a desire to put an end to Sir Quentin's game. Velma Burgeois Richmond observes that "initially evil appears to be too incredible to seem real, but then its truth is recognized. Fleur first suspects, and then knows, that Sir Quentin is a lunatic. She confronts him and insists that the manipulation stop" (Richmond 158). Unfortunately, she is ranged against too many people, and it seems that her attempt to save members from abuse and blackmail will be thwarted. And the goal of getting her book published appears just as great a struggle.

But from the moment Fleur finishes her novel, everything changes. She now treats it as a mother treats her own child. The readers can finally see Fleur as a warrior, a woman of power, who will fight for her rights, even if the situation seems hopeless. Fleur's will has consolidated, and so has her determination to reveal the truth, though this now appears nearly impossible to achieve, as Sir Quentin has decided to steal the manuscript, incorporate most of it in the autobiographies of the members, and publish them as their own work. But she will not countenance defeat. She uses all available means to obtain what she wants and cares for, ultimately paying back her trespassers in kind, turning against them their own methods of deceit, trickery and manipulation.

At this point of the book, one may easily agree with Valerie Shaw that Fleur "... is every bit as much of a manipulator, and as secretive, as Sir Quentin ..." (Shaw 65), because she appears to be a very different person now than at the book's start, acting robustly to save her manuscript and uncover the truth. Aided by her only real friend, Lady Edwina, her loneliness fades away, and she hatches a perfect plan to get back what is rightfully hers. Fleur achieves her goals: finding her manuscript, revealing that it was Sir Quentin, not she, who plagiarized the manuscript, and proving that the novel *Warrender Chase* is her own work, not the members'.

From a silent, confused girl, timidly disbelieving her own potential, Fleur burgeons into a powerful woman, a published writer, who is at last not afraid to confront her landlord, nor to refuse to have a dinner with his family. The new order she has established in her own life echoes the ending in *Warrender Chase*. Now, endowed with the almost God-like qualities of predicting the future in her book, she can "go on her way rejoicing" (Spark, *Loitering* 158).

The Public Image finishes in the same way. Annabel, a beautiful actress, can be free and happy only after she has put her own strength to the test and fought for her rights. Unfortunately, and echoing Fleur's case, she needs the right stimulus to discover the potential in herself, to abandon the image of herself both as a helpless wife trying to satisfy her husband Frederick and as an inept, docile actress. Adam Sumera writes that in *The Public Image*, "Muriel Spark presents a world full of immorality, a world in which lies and manipulation are the usual thing" (64). In this world, survival depends on either redoubtable inner strength or a measure of that world's own dishonesty and corruption. Small wonder, then, that Annabel—naïve and unwordly—cannot find her way. Judy Sproxtton notices that:

140

Annabel Christopher is ostensibly the victim of the film world in which she works; but a close reading of this book shows that the forces which undermine her are jealousy and deceit. Her own ignorance of the existence of these forces makes her vulnerable to them (130–31).

She clearly cannot accept the fact that her husband, whom she trusts, could ever deceive her or be envious of her career. She seems to have put her husband's enjoyment first all her life. He ridicules her in front of his friends, calling her stupid and "insignificant" (Spark, *The Public Image* 11), and she merely accepts it with a smile. Frederick, also an actor, has a sense of superiority over his wife and cannot stand her shallowness:

She did not need to be clever, she only had to exist; she did not need to perform, she only had to be there in front of the cameras. She said so to Frederick, as if amazed that she had not thought of it before. He was exasperated, seeing shallowness everywhere. (Spark, *The Public Image* 11)

What Frederick truly cannot stand is his wife's success. She starts to earn much more than him, and real fame beckons, even though, in his opinion, she has not earned it. He says, "You can't act. You're just lucky to get parts" (11), with which Annabel agrees. So at the heart of this marriage is a husband's burning indignation that he has been unfairly—worse, unwillingly—bested by his wife. And her submission to him creates in his mind only a sharper picture of life's injustice. Even more painful, though, becomes the thought that his wife may not be as stupid as he imagined. In fact, she copes well with the publicity, with discussion of contracts and answering to mail. Undeniably, "her new professional life had indeed sharpened her wits" (Spark, *The Public Image* 13). Unconsciously, Frederick might be aware that his wife's weakness and helplessness are just figments

of his imagination, or more, his desire. Riven with complexes, he tries to maintain his belief in his superiority and her lack of talent and education. But when reality encroaches deeper into this belief, he feels threatened, his ego begins to splinter, and he seeks new ways to assert himself. To prove his masculinity, he starts seeing other women. He is attracted to very young girls and young actresses, sleeps with them, and repeatedly considers leaving Annabel for one of them. But as her career flourishes and his declines, he chooses to stay close to her money. So dispirited that he does not even try for auditions, Frederick increasingly fetches up at home, where he spends much of his time doing nothing. Ironically, Annabel creates a new kind of role for him when they start to promote themselves as the perfect couple. Now he too is photographed and interviewed. But behind this is the acidic knowledge that this is happening only because of his wife's success. Frederick, behaving like a spoilt child, can envision happiness only in triumph over Annabel in all walks of life, and he is to be disappointed.

The only place the marriage is truly ideal is on the covers of glossy magazines. Peter Kemp says that "the marriage central to the book is an appalling travesty, a union held together by hate rather than love" (118). Frederick stops sleeping at home, appearing there only from time to time, and Annabel realizes that his friend Billy now knows more about him than she does. The situation worsens. Annabel wants to keep her public image perfect and Frederick cares only for his wife's money. Annabel, passive since the beginning of the book, again holds that their marriage might not be a perfect one but that everything will be all right in the end, that the current malaise is temporary. She also seems somewhat hypocritical, caring more about their image than reality as a couple. She is capable of viewing their relationship with cool disinterest, creating in her mind a picture of what it should look like, then comparing this perfection with the awkward reality. In fact, this is the problem that disturbs her most, not the fact that they do not love each other anymore. She cannot be blamed for the lack of feeling in her life, but rather for having no reasons to stay with Frederick yet doing so, and this leads to a catastrophe.

The novel's climax comes when Frederick gives a party at their flat, without informing Annabel. He does not even come to it himself, just tells the guests that he will arrive soon. When she hears knocking on the door, Annabel, alone with her baby, opens it and is nonplussed. To refuse entry to the guests would be rude, especially if they have been invited by her husband, so, mindful of her public image, she lets them in. "It was impossible to explain, afterwards, why she had not sent them all packing. She was not sure, herself, how it was that the whole event happened beyond her control" (Spark, *The Public Image* 47). What happens after the

party will be Annabel's biggest challenge. At the very time that Frederick's invited guests are milling around the flat, Frederick himself commits suicide. And in retribution against his overly-successful wife, he leaves notes to his friends and family, goodbye letters in which he accuses her of, among other things, infidelity, neglect, drinking, drug abuse and attending orgies. Anna Walczuk states that:

Frederick's suicide, apparently caused by his feelings of resentment, malice and a sense of estrangement, gets transformed into the death of a martyr who, with an unshaken fidelity and loyalty to his wife, resists the advances of women enamoured with him, and eventually dies falling off the scaffolding while being chased by them (256–57).

142

Now Annabel has to act herself; there is nobody to rely on. Her husband's friend Billy, sure she cannot cope by herself, explains to her director, "You must remember she's only a woman. She isn't as tough as you think" (Spark, *The Public Image* 118). Then, taking copies of the letters, he blackmails her. Adam Sumera justifiably calls this character "a parasite" and adds that "he sponges on them in the usual way of a scrounger until he finally shows his true face in blackmailing Annabel" (65). This is a moment when Annabel has to accept reality, whether she likes it or not, and the terrible situation in which she finds herself is inextricably linked to her idealised image. She realizes that she has been deceived by both Frederick and Billy, and that there is nobody she can trust for help out of this world of lies and blackmail. Though there is nonetheless a positive—if dark—side to this debacle: "at the moment of his death, Frederick loses control over the scenario he invented for the exploitation by mass media; while Annabel, alive, can further manipulate it . . ." (Walczuk 257).

Now on her own, Annabel tries to control the situation, and at first things go well. She discovers that she can defend herself and find a way to keep her good name. But the letters and Billy's blackmail are too much for her. Her lawyer advises her to pay Billy off to prevent the letters' release to the press.

Jennifer Lynn Randisi claims that, by the end of her novel, Muriel Spark, "transforms the dead object Annabel had become into a woman capable of creating a new life for herself" (65). Annabel finally proves able to pluck up courage and stand up for her rights, which are freedom and peace of mind. Norman Page says that:

Annabel takes up the challenge and for the first time acts like a free individual: in a final reversal she breaks through the web of pretence

and deceit and leaves the country with the baby that has all along been her only link with genuine human feeling, 'the only reality of her life.' (66-67)

She shows the letters herself in court, no longer afraid of spoiling her public image, then packs her possessions and goes to Greece. For her, this is an act of great courage, not some easy escape. She could have paid the money and lived in fear; instead, she chose freedom and a normal life in a better world, properly apprehending her own strength and independence for the first time in her life.

Loitering with Intent and *The Public Image* seem to be completely different, the former resembling a crime story, in which a heroine tracks down a malefactor and solves a riddle, the latter presenting the struggle between the values of an inner self and a public image. But what binds them together is the image of a lost girl surrounded by a world that can suffocate her dreams and her free will. In both books a seemingly passive woman becomes a heroine, a person ready to sacrifice everything to fight for the ideas she has discovered and shaped while life threatens to nullify her. In Fleur's case, the passion for change springs from her passion for her book, which is like a newborn baby to her, and from her knowledge of the injustice Sir Quentin intends visiting on herself and others. Annabel, on the other hand, has a flesh-and-blood baby; this is her real inspiration in her fight for freedom, along with a determination to put the world of lies and duplicity behind her. They are both discoverers of a latent power, and with this power they push through an enveloping bleakness into their true selves, and happiness.

WORKS CITED

Hynes, Joseph. *The Art of the Real*. London: Associated University Press, 1988.

Kemp, Peter. *Muriel Spark*. London: St Ann's, 1974.

Page, Norman. *Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1990.

Richmond, Velma Burgeois. *Muriel Spark*. New York: Ungar, 1984.

Randisi, Jennifer Lynn. *On Her Way Rejoicing: The Fiction of Muriel Spark*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991.

Shaw, Valerie. "Fun and Games with Life-Stories", *Muriel Spark: An Odd Capacity for Vision*, Ed. Alan N. Bold. London: Vision, 1984.

Spark, Muriel. *Loitering with Intent*. England: Triad Granada, 1982.

---. *The Public Image*. England: Penguin, 1989.

Sproxton, Judy. *The Women of Muriel Spark*. London: Constable, 1992.

Stubbs, Patricia. *Muriel Spark*. Harlow: Longman, 1973.

Sumera, Adam. *Muriel Spark's Novels*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1996.

Walczuk, Anna. "Fiction as Muriel Spark's Comment on the Nature of Reality." *Studies in English Literature and Language*. Ed. Irena Przemecka and Zygmunt Mazur. Kraków: Jagiellonian University, 1995.

Małgorzata Poks

English Teacher Training College,
Sosnowiec

The Poet's "Caressive Sight":
Denise Levertov's
Transactions with Nature

ABSTRACT

The scientific consciousness which broke with the holistic perception of life is credited with "unweaving the rainbow," or disenchanting the world. No longer perceived as sacred, the non-human world of plants and animals became a site of struggle for domination and mastery in implementing humankind's supposedly divine mandate to subdue the earth. The nature poetry of Denise Levertov is an attempt to reverse this trend, reaffirm the sense of wonder inherent in the world around us, and reclaim some "holy presence" for the modern sensibility. Her exploratory poetics witnesses to a sense of relationship existing between all creatures, both human and non-human. This article traces Levertov's "transactions with nature" and her evolving spirituality, inscribing her poetry within the space of alternative—or romantic—modernity, one that dismantles the separation paradigm. My intention throughout was to trace the way to a religiously defined faith of a person raised in the modernist climate of suspicion, but keenly attentive to spiritual implications of beauty and open to the epiphanies of everyday.

ABSTRACT

Denise Levertov believed that all things are orderly and lovely and that the poet's task was to reveal their beauty. The "caressive sight," defined by her as "my poet's sight I was given / that it might stir me to song," is a tool

of poetic exploration and has the power to penetrate to the inner form, or inner truth of all objects (*Selected Poems* 91). For Levertov, as she wrote in “Some Notes on Organic Form,” poetry is “a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive, and is based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man’s creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories. Such a poetry is exploratory” (*New and Selected Essays* 168). Her poetry testifies over and over again that what the eye discovers is *relationship* rather than alienation. The leitmotif of her work is the recognition (and re-cognition) of a deep affinity between all things. Humans, animals, plants, even inanimate nature—this ultimate world of matter that Kantian philosophy declared irreconcilable with the world of the spirit—all belong to a network of relationships, an organic whole that cannot be reduced to a simple sum of parts. In a way, Levertov’s organic poetry can be seen as a literary equivalent of Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy in its recognition that it is events as opposed to isolated objects or occasions that are the genuine building blocks of reality.

As befits a late Romantic, Levertov frequently found the world brutal, confusing, ambivalent, but would nevertheless keep loving it, trusting that “what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth” (*Selected Poems* 6). True to this declaration, she would follow her imagination “much as the [sniffing] dog” who goes “intently haphazard,” wholly engaged in his perceptions.

There’s nothing
the dog disdains on his way,
nevertheless he
keeps moving, changing
pace and approach but
not direction—“every step an arrival . . .” (*Selected Poems* 7)

as she says in an early poem, finding the animal’s unfailing sense of orientation analogous to the way poetic imagination works.

Levertov’s poems on nature are permeated with a sense of wonder and sensuous joy. She delights in describing *encounters* with nature, sometimes wishing human relations were structured on the same I-Thou relationship that she finds inherent in the natural world. In her poem entitled “About Marriage,” for instance, she complains of being locked “in wedlock” when what she desires is “marriage, an encounter,” like her afternoon encounter with three birds of passage. The birds simply acknowledged her presence and “let [her] be near them,” while she “stood / a half hour under the enchantment” (*Selected Poems* 39–40). On another occasion, rejecting

the trope of domination and mastery over nature that plagues the post-Enlightenment frame of mind, the poet refuses to reduce the cat on her knee to a metaphor. "I-Thou, cat, I-Thou," she repeats, in obedience to the "flex and reflex of claws gently . . . sustain[ing] their own tune, / not mine" (*Selected Poems* 4).

Listening for decades to crickets fervently practicing "their religion of ecstasy" (*Selected Poems* 98), seeing in a skein of geese a "hieratic arrow" converging "toward the point of grace" (*Life* 35), discovering in "the sightless trees without braincells . . . a consciousness undefined" (*Life* 35), the poet would frequently experience inexplicable joy simply by "coming into animal presence," as the title of one of her poems puts it. Enacted within the space of encounter, the verse witnesses to Levertov's recognition of creatures *as* creatures, beyond accumulated cultural constructions. This is made clear in the poem's opening fragment, which praises the serpent—usually associated with satanic deceit—as a most guileless of animals. Looking at a white rabbit "twitching his ears in the rain," a llama who "mildly disregards human approval," an "insouciant armadillo" hurrying across a track and feeling unthreatened by her presence, she realizes that her joy comes from finding herself face to face with "holy presence." "Those who were sacred have remained so," declares Levertov, "holiness does not dissolve, it is a presence / of bronze, *only the sight that saw it / faltered and turned from it*" (*Selected Poems* 19). This is a crucial realization. The poet attributes the modernist disenchantment of nature to a *failure of sight*, a human error of epistemological nature. This realization makes the scientific, non-participatory consciousness that has broken with the pre-modern, holistic perception of life a consequence of a *reluctance* to see ("the sight that saw it / faltered and turned from it"); in short: it is a purposeful blindness whose most recent consequence is the ecological disaster.

This theme is addressed explicitly in another Levertov poem on nature entitled "Tragic Error," a manifesto of environmental stewardship. Using the Genesis story of creation as her point of departure, she engages in ideological decreation of the divine charge to, supposedly, "subdue" the earth, a charge that, according to her, was "miswritten, misread" (*Life* 12). Psalm 24, also evoked in the poem, claims that the earth is the Lord's. This would mean that we are—or rather were to have been—the earth's *stewards*, not masters, ever accountable for our deeds to the earth's rightful owner. Instead of subduing, we should have dressed and kept it like Eden's Garden. "*Subdue*," concludes the poet, "was the false, the misplaced word in the story" (*Life* 12). In her reading, humans have committed a tragic error. Instead of alienating ourselves from nature, objectifying and destroying it,

we should have treated it in organic terms, in terms of reciprocity, since—as Levertov believes—the world is our body and we are its consciousness, its “reflective source” uniquely capable of responding to the mute plea of creation for identity; a plea for recognition of each creature’s particularity, a plea for a *name*. “*That* would have been our *dominion*,” declares Levertov,

to be those cells of earth’s body that could
perceive and imagine, could bring the planet
into the haven it is to be known,
(as the eye blesses the hand, perceiving
its form and the work it can do). (*Life* 12)

148

One feels that her poetry is a reparation for this tragic error and an attempt to reclaim the “holy presence” for the modern sensibility as an *abiding* presence, as indestructible as bronze.

This struggle is perhaps most explicit in a series of poems on Mt. Rainier, the monumental but elusive mountain which haunted Levertov since her move to Seattle in 1992 until the end of her life in 1997. Sometimes Mt. Rainier is a clear presence towering over the horizon; at other times it is a mirage, a ghostly apparition. But there are times when it is completely absent, “a remote folk memory,” “*Deus absconditus*” (*Life* 60)—but no less real for its hiddenness. Absence is not the negation of presence, but, in keeping with the logic of contrariness characteristic of Romantic Modernity, absence is another mode of presence—it partakes of the *via negativa* of the mystical experience; it is a purification and a testing of faith. In the dark night of the senses only the “remote . . . memory” preserves traces of realities hidden from the conscious eye.

Yet, it is not only the mountain that hides or is absent. It is often the poet herself who is hidden from it “in veils of inattention, apathy, fatigue,” as she writes in “Witness” (*Life* 70). This poem reconfirms Levertov’s life-long conviction she once expressed by using the words of William Blake as an epigraph to her 1967 poem “The Closed World”: “If the Perceptive Organs close, their Objects seem to close also” (*Selected Poems* 62). Thus, what Levertov suggests over and over again is that beauty, truth, sense, holiness, order, form—everything is still there, it is only our sight that “falter[s] and turn[s] from it.”

Levertov was particularly sensitive to the epiphanies of the prosaic and the transitory. “Hold fast what seem ephemera,” she urges, echoing William Carlos Williams. What appears to be “nothing much” can be “everything; all depends / on how you regard it / On *if* you regard it” (*Life* 74). She understood that the ordinary has an extraordinary potential for epiphany, for triggering moments which not only intensify life, but result in a changed awareness, a clarification of life’s meaning. At times such

clarifications remain on the level of tacit knowledge—felt, visceral, but not rising to the level of articulation. Like the one in "A Reward," a poem whose persona, having experienced a spell of restlessness and desolation, searches in the natural world "for what might lift me back to what I had fallen away from" (*Life* 52). But she feels even more alienated in the silence of the falling night, with all the creatures preparing for the night's sleep, withdrawing from her "into their secrets." On the point of giving up, however, a reward comes: a heron she has not seen for weeks, comes flying in her direction to "[take] up his vigil." "If you ask / why this cleared a fog from my spirit," she confesses, somewhat helplessly, "I have no answer" (*Life* 52). As she suggests elsewhere, the sense of spiritual alleviation must have come from a momentary breakthrough to a "world parallel to our own though overlapping" (*Life* 75), as she phrases it, both identifying and resisting the modernist separation paradigm. The "parallel world" is depicted as "devoid / of our preoccupations, free / from apprehension—though affected, / certainly, by our actions" (*Life* 75). Self-forgetfulness and openness—Levertov prefers to talk of *responsiveness*—to being, a kind of Eckhartian-Heideggerian *Gelassenheit*, is prerequisite for what the author calls "sojourns in the parallel world." Such epiphanic moments are troped as liberation of the poet's "inner child," liberation from bondage to routine and mechanical repetition: "something tethered / in us, hobbled like a donkey on its patch / of gnawed grass and thistles, breaks free," she muses. Of course such moments cannot last, we fall back "into our own sphere (where we must return, indeed, to evolve our destinies)," but we are no longer the same. The sublime experience leaves an indelible mark on our psyche, a residuum of otherness that totally eludes rationalization: "we have changed, a little," concludes the poet (*Life* 76).

Levertov's poem "Sojourns in the Parallel World" seems to have captured the essence of what Charles Taylor calls the epiphany of modernism in his monumental work *Sources of the Self*. The ecstatic moment of total responsiveness to and absorption in "that insouciant life" of nature means that the self's *agon* with the modernistically disenchanting world becomes briefly suspended, superseded by an unrestrained exchange, a sense of reciprocity. A new charm restores harmony between the self, routinely living in a state of anxiety, and the "parallel world" of insouciant nature. The in-scape of the epiphany eludes an immediate conceptual grasp, though. What is needed is repetition. To make sense of the sublime experience, it must be recreated—the experience of connectedness has to be recaptured (even if only imaginatively) and articulated.

The mechanism of such repetition is the theme of "First Love," one of Levertov's last poems. Gazing at a flower, the poet becomes suddenly reminded of two overlapping childhood experiences. First, there is a vague

recollection of her infant self being drawn to another, unknown and unnamed infant: “I had an obscure desire to become connected in some way to this other,” says Levertov,

even to *be* what I faltered after, falling
to hands and knees, crawling
a foot or two, clambering
up to follow further until
arms swooped down to bear me away. (*Selected Poems* 195)

150 Her early dramatic struggle to be connected, which would trope her later endeavours to recover the sense of oneness with all being, was stopped short by her mother’s solicitous care. On that occasion the other had “left no face, had exchanged no gaze with me” (*Selected Poems* 195). In her mature life, however, an obscure recollection of this no-face (that of the unnamed infant) is triggered by the sight of the flower, which itself is reminiscent of still another “face”: the upturned face of a flower seen in childhood, when the poet was “barely / old enough to ask and repeat its name,” a flower “looking completely, openly into my eyes” that her mother called “convolvulus” (*Selected Poems* 196). This time a rapport was established, a name was uttered:

It looked at me, I looked
back, delight
filled me as if
I, not the flower,
were a flower and were brimful of rain.
And there was endlessness. (*Selected Poems* 196)

This encounter transfigures both the speaker and her surroundings. In the exchange of the glance (“face upturned”), a recognition of the other, as well as herself as grounded in the other, takes place. Becoming the other in this transfiguring epiphany of being frees the poet from the tyranny of time and the burden of history. But this experience, too, remains unarticulated (or simply forgotten) until that later epiphany which retrieves the earlier one on a new level: “This flower,” muses the ageing poet: “suddenly / there was *Before I saw it*, the vague / past, and *Now. Forever*” (*Selected Poems* 195). She is evidently still groping for words to express the inscape of an experience too sublime for words.

Perhaps through a lifetime what I’ve desired
has always been to return
to that endless giving and receiving, the wholeness

of that attention,
that once-in-a-lifetime
secret communion. (*Selected Poems* 196)

This return is not easy since it happens as a *gift*, it cannot be willed. "Repetition is a gift of deliverance," says philosopher Edward F. Mooney commenting on Kierkegaard's category of repetition, "we are less the clever constructors of repetition than its patient recipients." On those rare occasions when repetition does take place, though, the perceptive organs open again, the inner child breaks free, life is experienced as intrinsically good and the world of contingency and flux becomes a home again, even if only for a moment.

"Days pass when I forget this mystery," confesses Levertov in "Primary Wonder," another poem from her posthumous 1998 collection entitled *Sands of the Well*. Forgetfulness about being, entanglement in everyday preoccupations and conflicting desires are characteristic of the sphere where we "evolve our destinies." This obviously implies expulsion from that endlessness experienced in the epiphanic moment in which eternity intersects time; the fall into temporality is a fall from grace. But repetition is a means of redemption and a restoration of grace; it is a second charm. Whenever "the throng's clamor / recedes," continues Levertov, "once more the quiet mystery / is present to me": "the mystery that there is anything, anything at all, / let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything, / rather than void" (*Selected Poems* 192).

In the context of the above analysis, it is not surprising that the last lines of the poem should read: "and that, O Lord, / Creator, Hallowed One, You still, / hour by hour sustain it" (*Selected Poems* 192). In the 1980s Levertov, the intuitively religious poet, ever sensitive to the sacredness of all beings, defined herself as a Christian, though her Christianity continued to be unorthodox, suspended between belief and doubt. She liked to allude to David Jones's belief in "the artist's impulse gratuitously to set up altars to the unknown god." "Later," she claims, "that unknown began to be defined for me as God, and further, as God revealed in the Incarnation" (*Selected Essays* 241). Since a full-scale treatment of this theme would radically transcend the scope of this essay, quoting the concluding lines of "Primary Wonder," I only wish to point to a certain logic in the development of Levertov's poetic vision, as well as inscribe her "transactions with nature" within the space of Romantic Modernity. It seems to me that the author of *The Life Around Us* interestingly illustrates the thesis that modernist spirituality is more than just an oxymoron.

WORKS CITED

Levertov, Denise. *The Life Around Us*. New York: New Directions, 1997.

---. *New and Selected Essays*. New York: New Directions, 1992.

---. *Selected Poems*. Ed. Paul E. Lacey. New York: New Directions, 2002.

Mooney, Edward F. Rev. of *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition*, by Niles Eriksen. *Kierkegaard Studies Monograph* 5. New York: de Gruyter, 2000. *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* 42. Sept. 2001. Web. 15 Sept. 2007.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of a Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Katarzyna Poloczek

University of Łódź

Women's Power To Be Loud:
The Authority of the Discourse and
Authority of the Text in Mary Dorcey's
Irish Lesbian Poetic Manifesto "Come
Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear"

ABSTRACT

The following article aims to examine Mary Dorcey's poem "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear," included in the 1991 volume *Moving into the Space Cleared by Our Mothers*. Apart from being a well-known and critically acclaimed Irish poet and fiction writer, the author of the poem has been, from its beginnings, actively involved in lesbian rights movement. Dorcey's poem "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear" is to be construed from a perspective of lesbian and feminist discourse, as well as a cultural, sociological and political context in which it was created. While analyzing the poem, the emphasis is being paid to the intertwining of various ideological and subversive assumptions (dominant and the implied ones), their competing for importance and asserting authority over one another, in line with, and sometimes, against the grain of the textual framework. In other words, Dorcey's poem introduces a multilayered framework that draws heavily on various sources: the popular culture idiom, religious discourse (the references to the Virgin Mary and the biblical annunciation imagery), the text even employs, in some parts, crime and legal jargon, but, above all, it relies upon sensuous lesbian experience where desire and respect for the other woman opens the emancipating space allowing for redefining of one's personal and textual location. As a result of such a multifarious interaction, unrepresented and unacknowledged Irish women's standpoints may come to the surface and become articulated, disrupting their enforced muteness that the controlling heteronormative discourse has attempted to ensure. In Dorcey's poem, the operating metaphor of women's silence

(or rather—silencing women), conceived of, at first, as the need to conceal one's sexual (lesbian) identity in fear of social ostracism and contempt of the "neighbours," is further equated with the noiseless, solitary and violent death of the anonymous woman, the finding of whose body was reported on the news. In both cases, the unwanted Irish women's voices of either agony, during the unregistered by anybody misogynist bloodshed that took place inside the flat, or the forbidden sounds of lesbian sexual excitement, need to be (self) censored and stifled, not to disrupt an idealized image of the well-established family and heteronormative patterns. In the light of the aforementioned parallel, empowered by the shared bodily and emotional closeness with her female lover, and already bitterly aware that silence in discourse is synonymous with textual, or even, actual death, the speaker in "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear" comes to claim her own agency and makes her voice heard by others and taken into account.

ABSTRACT

Though, unlike male homosexuality,¹ not legally criminalized in Ireland, in the second half of the twentieth century lesbianism was thought of as a socially contemptible and unmentionable practice that needs not to be legally regulated, but approached on a level of the disapproving community (Connolly and O'Toole 171–95, Moane 431–46). As a logical extension of that widespread opinion,² lesbian sexuality was conceived of as a "disorder," as Moane puts it (442), according to the 1992 Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Moane 442) and attributed only to a sexually deviant minority, whose existence should not be discussed in public. The exclusion of female homosexuality from the penalizing Irish legislation³ does not indicate, however, that in Ireland in the early 1970s and 1980s there was any kind of social allowance for lesbian practices. On the contrary, drawing upon the Irish lesbian activists from the period, Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole in

¹ The Irish law stopped criminalization of male homosexuality in 1993 (Moane 441).

² During the period analyzed, as most critics maintain, the commonplace clichés and stereotypical views concerning lesbians would portray homosexual women as "gone astray" heterosexuals, disappointed with, or rejected by men, or in a patronizing fashion: having to look for tenderness in their sexual relations with other women, not being able to find it elsewhere.

³ The legislation goes back to the British-modelled 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (Moane 441).

their highly informative and comprehensive study, *Documenting Irish Feminisms* (2005), remind that Irish women open about their homosexuality then were threatened with physical and sexual attacks, or even death (173, 186; see also Moane 433, 438). To make matters even worse, around thirty/forty years ago, Irish women's movements had little awareness or deeper understanding of their lesbian sisters' situation (Smyth 261, Connolly and O'Toole 174). Chrystal Hug, in her book *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (1999), captures the essence of this attitude: "Irish lesbians commanded less of our attention since no laws and no papal pronouncements have attacked them" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 173). Mary Dorcey recalling those times admits that: "I went to the Women's Movement (then in its second year). I met wonderful women. I was enchanted by the exhilaration, the self-confidence, energy, wit, anger, vision, but, to my surprise, no one declaring themselves lesbians or speaking about it" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 174). Following this way of argument, Ailbhe Smyth in *Irish Women's Studies Reader* published in 1993 acknowledges that lesbianism in the period referred to above was, even for the Irish feminist agenda, one of the issues "noticeable by their absence" (261). That is why Mary Dorcey, a poet, an acknowledged fiction writer, a feminist and Irish lesbian activist started advocating provocatively in a celebratory way (Moane 439) at the public meetings "if feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 186). It was around this time when the very word "lesbian" was rendered with an affirmative "the woman-identified woman" label (Connolly and O'Toole 187). Accordingly, drawing upon the conference posters of the 1978 first lesbian conference that took place in Ireland (Dublin), Connolly and O'Toole argue that its participants campaigned to "break down the barriers of silence and ignorance surrounding lesbian sexuality" (179).⁴

Very much in the same vein, Dorcey's poem "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear"⁵ expresses an Irish lesbian's creative voice that demands its right to be articulated and heard. In the poem, the titled verb "come," apart from its sexual climactic connotations, refers as well to Althusser's constituting the female subject through an interpellation, hence,

⁴ Geraldine Moane in her article "Lesbian Politics and Community" enumerates some positive examples of the research on that matter that came out in Ireland in the mid-1990s, i.e. the 1995 publication by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Moane 435) and Cathy Corcoran study of the Dublin Lesbian Line, comprising the period 1984–93 (Moane 436) or the Combat Poverty Agency report of 1995 (Moane 437).

⁵ Dorcey's poem could have been inspired by MacNeice's "Autobiography." For a detailed analysis of MacNeice's poem, see Renata Senktas's "Come Back Early, If Only in the Refrain: Louis MacNeice's 'Autobiography' and The Poetics of Recovery" included in *The Playful Air of Light(ness) in Irish Literature and Culture*. Ed. Marta Goszczyńska and Katarzyna Poloczek. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011.

“come” makes an invitation to participate, join and share. Unlike sense or state verbs, “come” means an active involvement, when you come, you make things change and happen; in other words your action produces meaningful changes. “Coming together” would render the idea of women’s solidarity and giving one another support, either as a part of the political activist platform or as a social movement (Connolly and O’Toole 185). What is more, the verb “come” also signifies “coming out” as a lesbian. The first television interview in Ireland with a lesbian woman was broadcast no sooner than in 1980, in *The Late Late Show* (Connolly and O’Toole 186). Joni Crone, the interviewed woman, relates this experience as follows: “‘coming out’ as an Irish lesbian involves undoing much of our conditioning. It means recognizing the external and internal barriers which prevent us taking charge of our lives, and resolving to become autonomous human beings” (qtd. in Connolly and O’Toole 186). With that in mind, the qualifying second part of the conditional utterance “or the Neighbours Will Hear” sounds like a threat setting the rigorous socially approved terms with which the lesbian speaker is expected to comply.

In other words, one has to admit that Dorcey’s poem is composed with a clear line of argument, but this premise, although ready-made and assumed in advance, does not predetermine or infringe upon the authority of the text itself. Boland (236) in her canonical book *The Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (1995) would argue rightly “ideology is unambiguous; poetry is not” and Dorcey’s text constitutes a logical extension of her claim. It is thought-stimulating to trace how the text releases itself from its ideological tenets and works its own subversive meaning quite independently. On the one hand, the reader has an explicit thesis statement: the poem meditates upon the consequences of silencing lesbian and other women’s voices in the Irish society at a certain period. On the other hand, the poem discloses its own textual energy that reveals the mechanisms of generating this silence. The question arises whether, and when, the speaking subject in Dorcey’s poem “Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear” crosses the magical disciplinarian silent border to be confronted with an alternative option of making her voice heard. As a matter of fact, at first, the female voice seems to provide numerous reasons why she ought not to do it, but, at the same time, by “not doing it,” she actually undermines the authority of the subsequent discourses; of the community and neighbours, the church and the media. From a perspective of a contemporary feminist, one may get an impression that some of these above-mentioned social or religious restrictions might even function as her own self-censorship. Nonetheless, one needs to take into account what Dorcey herself admitted in 1995: “The Ireland I live in now is so far removed from the Ireland of twenty years ago it might be a different country. And the Ireland of my childhood remembered from this perspec-

tive seems like another planet" (qtd. in Connolly and O'Toole 170). One might wonder what she would say about the Ireland of 2010. A lot has changed in Ireland since then but as Moane reminds

... rapid social change does not necessarily imply marked psychological change. In the case of homosexuality, for example, it is apparent that fear and prejudice is alive and well in Irish psyches and society, despite important legislative changes, unprecedented inclusion of lesbians and gay men in progressive social agendas, and increasing depiction of lesbians and gay men in art and culture. (431)

Nonetheless, Dorsey's "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear" shows how much the female voice in the poem, and Irish lesbian women of the late 1970s and 1980s, needed not only the aforementioned changes but also their own personal defiance and loud coming (out). The opening of the poem establishes a relation where the reader is being asked to engage in the debate and identify with the speaking voice. The fact that the lovemaking act occurs with a switched on television set, to distract the neighbours' attention from the sounds of lesbian lover's ecstasy, undermines its intimacy. In such a context, a mindful and caring concentration on the other woman's pleasure and shared sexual satisfaction is interfered with by the disturbing accidental broadcast noise. The television babble trivializes the sensuous union between lovers and turns their passion into a nearly mechanical and paltry activity. What the need for resorting to such desperate measures implies is that sex is perceived as shameful and filthy, hence, people involved in this contemptible act should conceal their "joy undisguised" from the world to "spare it the embarrassment." Any act of joyful, especially homosexual, lovemaking is a supposedly potential challenge to the reproductive ideology of the established heterosexual model, and, as such, it could cause social turmoil. The other part of alliterated expression "lord" ("landlady lord") evokes religious connotations and restrictions put on unmarried and same sex lovers. It is, however, from the first stanza the issue of credibility of the speaker appears: does one believe that keeping quiet is being done really in a merciful act of avoiding other's discomfort or rather that of securing one's own textual position? Even at this point the reader might be tempted to infer that the latter seems much more feasible. The ferment that might result from the aforementioned facts coming to light could be more damaging for the lesbian speaker than for the prejudiced community. One might, then, presume with a certain degree of likelihood that the speaking voice tries to rationalize her own quietness and ascribe a higher socially acceptable meaning to it.

Have you ever made love
with the t.v. on

—to spare the neighbours
 landlady lord—
 the embarrassment;
 the joy undisguised
 of two people;
 especially women
 (imagine the uproar!)
 coming together? (Dorcey 64)

158

The subsequent part pursues ever further that issue: the speaker is depicted as agitated and sore: something upsetting must have happened during this “aching winter,” “the worst of all.” Consequently, in-between the lines the reader might sense the female voice’s increasing irritation with trying to conform to the constricting social norms (“narrow beds” and “small minds”). What is more, the female speaker feels exasperated by the casual and temporary arrangement of her own life (alliterated “rented rooms”). Furthermore, what seems to trouble her is the real, or imagined by her, exclusion from the society. Being situated beyond “walled . . . other people’s / decencies” ostracizes and pushes the female speaker to the marginalized position. On the account of that assumption, the speaker gives vent to her own hostility, and assumes the “morally superior” position, looking down on the community’s heteronormative “decencies” on show. Accordingly, she mocks their daily routines in an alliterated “broadcast at breakfast,” indicating ironically how useful television might be, not only in silencing lesbian sexual ecstasy, but also in disclosing the emptiness of the ordinary daily schedule of the righteous citizens. The phrase “the daily ration / of obscenity” might on a literal level refer to pornographic television contents, but obscenity could also signify the falsity of one’s hypocritical existence: hiding one’s sexual needs and fantasies. Ironically enough, the speaker fails (or refuses) to acknowledge that it is precisely the two-facedness that both the neighbours (pretending not to know) and lesbian lovers (claiming to spare others’ embarrassment) share. Apparently, they both have more in common than they are willing to accept.

Come quietly
 or the neighbours will hear.

That year was the worst
 an aching winter of it—
 small minds and towns
 rented rooms and narrow beds,
 walled in by other people’s
 decencies

and at every sitting down
to table,
broadcast at breakfast
dinner and tea
the daily ration
of obscenity.
Have you ever
made love with the t.v. on?

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 64–65)

In the fragment below, the clock seems to go back: after “an aching winter,” instead of invigorating spring, the speaker recedes (maybe rapidly progresses into?) to a fire-lit, intimately cosy and warm autumn (“leaves falling,” “autumn cloths spread for tea”) ambience. The phrase: “leaves falling” appears to be followed by the pause, only later, one is allowed a further insight into Dorcey’s version of the paradise lost, though this time it is rather the paradise regained. The setting of the scene in Eden “wet gardens” quite plainly refers to female bodily fluids:

On a dark evening
autumn cloths spread for tea,
fires lit.
In the wet gardens
leaves falling (Dorcey 65)

Unlike Winterson, Dorcey does not coin her own discourse “written on the body,” her imagery and idiom might seem quite straightforward and, thus, be perceived, euphemistically, as not too challenging. Mary Dorcey is a fiction writer and one recognizes immediately this sparsely adjectival and verb-based, sometimes nearly prose-idiom in her poetry. As a poet, Dorcey paints the scene visually but her ostentatious linguistic economy might be deceptively misleading, although definitely the sound-oriented audience with a good ear will be more satisfied with Dorcey’s poetic style. It results from the fact that Dorcey, in a clear way, draws here upon the Irish oral tradition of bardic poetry composed to be recited aloud in a community and not to be read alone silently (sic!). The more “Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear” relies upon various sound and onomatopoeic effects the more the text’s own authority to break the silence and be heard aloud is asserted. That is why, as stated before, Dorcey tends to focus on the tone and resonance of poetic words, operating on alliteration (“fell the long fall”), phrase repetitions and reverberation of the similar phrases:

“wanting and waiting.” Not that frequently, Dorcey does play with words though, as in the phrase “fallen to grace.” In the aforementioned expression, rudimentary idiom is employed to render the subtle textual rebelliousness: despite the biblical connotations and gravity laws, the speaker does not fall “from” grace but “towards” it.

on a dark evening
 at last alone
 a space, hungry with wanting
 waiting, a fire catching
 we fell—
 skin in firelight burning
 fell the long fall
 to grace, to the floor.
 On a dark evening
 night coming softly in the wet gardens.

Come quietly
 or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 65)

The following scene takes place inside the flat, when the idyllic wet gardens are juxtaposed with the broadcast television din. This time, the noise arises on another level of the textual puzzle: in the background, the speaker records the Angelus prayer (which enables the reader to specify the timing).

Mouth at my breast
 hands ringing in my flesh
 when the Angelus rang
 from the t.v. screen.
 The angel of the lord
 declared unto Mary
 and she conceived of the Holy Ghost
 the earth, the sun and the seas. (Dorcey 65)

The church televised message introduces a new dimension to the argument: that of religious discourse. With the television prayer, the annunciation scene enters the sensuous lesbian narrative as if through the back-door. It chimes with the speaker being fisted (“hands ringing in my flesh”) and coincides with her nipples being caressed (“mouth at my breast”). The words of the prayer enter her body in an almost tangible way. Bearing that in mind, it might be plausible to decode the meaning/s of the word “ring,” repeated both in the context of being touched and the bells summoning for the prayer. The phrase “the angel of the lord / declared unto

Mary” underlines that the annunciation was a bodily intervention act, not “declaring to” but “declaring unto,” almost being penetrated with words, or the Word. The ambiguous phrase “she conceived of the Holy Ghost” requires a deeper consideration: one might even interpret it as giving birth to the Holy Ghost, however, “conceive” decoded as “becoming pregnant” is not followed by any preposition, unlike “conceive of,” construed as thinking, contemplating or having an idea, imagining; only then, the bodily act of conception is turned into a mental and imaginary one. Kristeva comments upon the idea of the corporeality of the Virgin Mary in philosophical and church discourse:

We are entitled only to the ear of the virginal body, the tears, and the breast. With the female sexual organ changed into an innocent shell, holder of sound, there arises a possible tendency to eroticize hearing, voice, or even understanding. By the same token, however, sexuality is brought down to the level of innuendo. Feminine sexual experience is thus rooted in the universality of the sound . . . A woman will only have the choice to live her life either *hyperabstractly* (“immediate universal,” Hegel said) in order thus to earn divine grace and homologation with symbolic order; or merely *different*, other, fallen (“immediately particular,” Hegel said) . . . not be able to accede to the complexity of . . . heterogeneity . . . (“never singular,” Hegel said). (320; original emphasis)

However in Dorcey’s poem, Mary, impregnated by the Holy Ghost, gives birth to “the earth, the sun and the seas.” The act of giving birth becomes equated with the creation of the world, it gains a cosmic and global importance. That is why drawing upon Gabriel’s greeting, the speaker honours the Virgin Mary’s female creative power with the words of respect. The female voice identifies with her, assuming the position of the welcoming and obedient receiver, who seems to yield to other’s desiring authority, declaring “be it done unto me according / to thy word.”

Hail Mary Holy Mary.
Be it done unto me according
to thy word (Dorcey 66)

What follows from the acceptance of this bodily entry is the language imitating orgasm, indicative of increasing sexual (and textual) *jouissance*. The speaker ecstatically restates the paraphrased words:

Hail Mary, and oh—
the sweetness of your breath—
the breath of your sweetness.

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 66)

Drawing upon the biblical discourse, the female voice takes into herself the incarnated word. Thus, sensuality becomes an essential component of the spiritual act: the bedrock, or the foundation of the body/flesh and its “hands skin mouth thighs.” Alliterated “fields flooded” evoke the connotations of bodily fluids, though not blood (“blood uncoursed”). The enraptured speaker quotes in exaltation the angel’s greeting words: “Blessed art thou / and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” as the blessing of female corporeality and women’s sexuality; the word “fruit” in relation to the fecundity symbolizes the palatable taste of the forbidden lesbian passion. When women’s bodies open, “earth opens stars collide.”

162

And the word was made flesh
and dwelt amongst us.
Hands skin mouth thighs
in the bedrock of flesh
sounding,
fields flooded
blood uncoursed.
Blessed art thou
and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb.
Bitter and sweet
earth opens stars collide. (Dorcey 66)

The following fragment might point to the sweet fruit of Mary’s womb as being conceived entirely without men’s participation, it was a procreation without sexual intercourse and without any men—but not without pleasure. To some extent, in “the necessary, / daily litany,” the aforementioned act seems reminiscent of lesbian lovemaking.

Blessed and sweet,
the fruit
among women
Hail Mary Holy Mary

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 66)

It is however, worth emphasizing that the symbolism of the Virgin Mary is the one that “defies death” (Kristeva 324). Consequently, Kristeva argues that “the fulfillment, under the name of Mary, of a totality made of woman

and God is finally accomplished through the avoidance of death. The Virgin Mary . . . has no tomb, she doesn't die and hence has no need to rise from the dead" (315). Furthermore, in the narrative, the television news items mark the passage of time and respond, as Kristeva points out, to the masculine fascination with death cult. Hence the phrase: "the deadly tide" seems to relate to the anonymous woman's tragedy mentioned in the further passage.

When the six o'clock news
struck.
Into the fissures
of mind and bone
the deadly tide
seeping.
The necessary,
daily litany.
Come quietly or the neighbours
will hear. (Dorcey 67)

A different level of the narrative would come into view with the item overheard in the evening news, reporting the tragic account of the girl's dead body being found. Connolly and O'Toole remind that in the 1970s the rate of violence against women in Ireland was extremely high. Drawing upon the research published in 1993 *Bringing it Out in the Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*, Connolly and O'Toole claim that the level of violence against women in the examined areas of Ireland (the north) at that period could oscillate between 10% up to 25% (98). Connolly and O'Toole (102) give an invaluable insight into the mass scale of that problem in Ireland, arguing that:

Up till the early 1970s the family law statutes in Ireland dated from the Victorian period, when women were afforded little legal recognition within marriage in general. Domestic violence was a completely hidden crime—few spoke about it, from the women who experienced it, to the public and to political representatives. If a woman was subjected to domestic violence, in effect there was nowhere to go and no laws to protect her.

In Dorcey's poem, no longer hidden, the battered woman's corpse was brought into public view, and discarded, as if on purpose, in a public place. Joan McKiernan and Monica McWilliams warn that "by seeing such abuse as 'private' we affirm it as a problem that is individual, that involves only a particular male-female relationship, and for which there is no social responsibility to remedy" (327). Following that line of thinking, although the setting for women-targeted violence could be either a domestic place or an outer (public) location (as in the poem: "dancehall schoolyard bed-

room **bar**”), nonetheless, the problem of violence against women should be always regarded as a “public issue,” not a private matter (McKiernan and McWilliams 327). As if addressing that claim, the female speaker enlists the real or potential body’s locations: “park **bench** **backstreet** **barn**” in an act of cataloguing them, the particular stops being the specified and becomes the general. In most names from that list, the plosive “b” sound occurs, even in the words “**stab**” and “**abdomen**.” The recurrent phrase “come quietly or the neighbours will hear,” is unfinished, as if interrupted, because of the lack of breath.

She was found
 on a park bench backstreet barn
 dancehall schoolyard bedroom bar—
 found with multiple stab wounds to
 thighs breast and abdomen.
 Come quietly come quietly
 or the neighbours . . .
 hands tied behind her back,
 no sign of
 (mouth bound)
 no sign of
 sexual assault.

Come softly
 or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 67)

The passage below reintroduces the lovemaking scene but, to establish the relation with a previous part, it commences as well with alliterated plosives “your **breasts** and **belly**,” a sound imitating the woman’s body opening and closing, the letters’ roundness reminds of the curves of the female body. However, the prevalence of plosives in the narrative has also a more profound and metaphoric dimension, in linguistic discourse, the other designation for “plosive” is “mute.” The lesbian sexual act proceeds with tactile closeness and consenting, mutually desired and approved by both women, bonding in “**your** thighs, **your** hands behind my back.” Two female bodies mingle in one organism: “my breath in **yours**.” Two levels of narrative intertwine as well: the dead girl’s textual presence materializes in an almost discernible way between the lovemaking couple. The silence that the women attempted to evoke overwhelms them with reproach. Their silence becomes synonymous with the silence of the murdered girl: like the quiet lesbian lovers, the murdered girl also did not want to disturb her neighbours’ peace. In that fragment, the phrase: “come quietly or the neighbours” is shortened to a half-line.

Your breasts and belly,
your thighs,
your hands behind my back
my breath in yours.
No one heard her scream.
Your eyes wide.
Come quietly or the neighbours . . .
She was found
at the dockside riverbank,
in the upstairs flat
his flat
wearing a loose . . .
Your mouth at my ear. (Dorcey 68)

The nameless victim in Dorcey's poem was killed in her apartment. "*His flat*" marks another potential whereabouts the girl's body might have been found, but she was murdered, like most women, in her own home. Joan McKiernan and Monica McWilliams further elaborate that view arguing that "abuse which occurs in the context of people's own homes is deeply threatening. It challenges our most fundamental assumptions about the nature of intimate relations and the safety" (327). Connolly and O'Toole explain though "the reasons why violence in the home occurs are always complex. Feminist theory and activism challenged the dominant explanations for the high incidence of violence in the home in the 1970s and created an additional perspective based on an understanding of gender inequality" (101). Drawing upon the recent studies conducted in the US, Elizabeth Kandel Englander (2007) gives an alarming number of approximately 30% of American women being subjected to "sexual coercion," and 25%–35% to "a completed or attempted rape" (34). She further argues that only 14% of US murders examined in between 1976 and 2002 were committed by people whom the victims did not know, but even this small rate would refer rather to men being killed in most cases by strangers, as females (according to 2002 statistics in America) "were more likely to be killed by an intimate" (22).⁶ The above-mentioned numbers indicate clearly that the feminist assumptions from as early as the 1970s and 1980s about the gender dimension of violence have proved to be more than accurate.

hands tied behind her back,
no sign of
(mouth bound)

⁶ In her research, Kandel Englander indicates that American men "were 10 times more likely to commit homicide, relative to females" (22).

no sign of
sexual assault. (Dorcey 67)

The police report-like statement: “no sign of sexual assault” does not mean that violence was not motivated by it, just that no evidence of semen was found. In this case, the authority of the text challenges the authority of the dominant discourse: the speaker reveals the subsequent details that suggest that the murdered woman, though she may not have been raped, was attacked in an intimate context: “wearing a loose...,” “a loose negligée / in her own flat, / stripped to the waist.” Finally the female voice questions the official narrative by qualifying the phrases in the brackets. In this ultimately abusive act, sexual enslaving of the woman (“hands tied behind her back”) was applied to assert male domination and arouse the man’s excitement through the girl’s pain and humiliation and finally her death. The girl’s silence in the discourse was rendered through the symbolic expression “(mouth bound).”

166

Come quietly
or the neighbours will hear.
Blood on the walls
and sheets,
a loose negligée
in her own flat,
stripped to the waist.
Come quietly, come quietly.
No one heard her scream—
come softly or the neighbours . . . (Dorcey 68)

Throughout the poem, the motif of silence emerges like remorse: nobody heard the girl’s screams and moans; neighbours with their television on did not pay any attention to what might be going on behind the wall of silence. As a result, the anonymous quiet girl died quietly, sadly enough she truly succeeded in sparing others embarrassment while hearing her loud screams of agony and violent dying. Looked at from that perspective, death, like sex, becomes a shameful experience, isolating one from the rest of the society. “Blood on our thighs” might refer to the menstruation or the blood of the female sufferer. “My hands behind your back” echoes the previous line in the act of sexual reciprocity so sadly contrasted with the loneliness of the dying girl. “Come quietly, come,” shortened breath and shortened phrase.

Did you ever make love
with the t.v. on?

—the neighbours heard nothing—
she was always—
no one would have thought—
always a quiet girl.
Stripped to the bone
blood on our thighs
my hands behind your back
come quietly, come,
legs tangled with the sheet
mouth to mouth
voices flung. (Dorcey 68–69)

The end of the poem completes the circular composition of the narrative: with only a small change of qualifier: “come softly,” with the word for word echoed phrase: “landlady lord.” Nonetheless, something did change, the dead girl’s presence was intertwined into the text to compensate for the life being taken away from her so abruptly and violently. The speaker assumes her part of the responsibility for that tragedy: “**her** cries in **our** ears,” “**her** blood on **our** hands.” One might wonder why the female voice experiences pangs of conscience, feels as if being an accomplice, at least an enabler to the oppressor. The conclusive couplet leaves no doubt about it: by giving the silent consent to “come quietly,” one contributes indirectly to silencing the truth about women’s experience. What ought to be articulated loud, gets suppressed and hushed.

Come softly
or the neighbours will hear.

Did you ever make love
with the t.v. on?
to spare the neighbours
landlady lord
her cries in our ears
we came . . .
no one heard her scream
her blood on our hands.
Yes—
coming, (Dorcey 69)

The final fragment rejects the philosophy of “or the neighbours will hear.” The speaker makes her decision about “not quietly— / **beyond bearing;**” followed by parallel patterns: “in the face of the living / in the teeth of the dying.” The phrase “forgetting the uproar” shows the speaker’s change in the way of thinking: not allowing other people’s beliefs to constrain her

own life any more. But the last act of anarchic liberation is . . . switching off the television set. One does not need to isolate behind the broadcast noise and hide from the community because sometimes the emotional, and maybe even physical survival might depend upon others' reaction, or its lack.

Not quietly—
 beyond bearing;
 in the face of the living
 in the teeth of the dying
 forgetting the uproar
 the outrage—
 (imagine—
 the joy
 undisguised
 of two women
 —especially
 women—)
 two women
 together—
 at last alone
 night falling in the wet gardens
 on a dark evening
 with the t.v.
 off. (Dorcey 69–70)

Coming (out) loud, both women realize that they are “autonomous human beings, independent persons with a right to life, a right to love, a right to control our own bodies, a right to live free from harassment in our work and our homes, a right to choose who we love, how we love” (qtd. in Connolly and O’Toole 186). The vision of “**wet** gardens” as the fluid, sexual Paradise replaces the alienating confinement of the austere rented room. The Irish lesbian women have made their voice heard, as silence equals death, both in the discourse and in life, in terms of the textual exclusion or the signifying erasure and/or the lack of satisfying and dignified existence.

Die quietly—
 die quietly—
 or the neighbours will hear. (Dorcey 70)

WORKS CITED

Boland, Evan. *The Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*. New York: Norton, 1995. London: Vintage, 1996.

Byrne, Anne, and Madeline Leonard, eds. *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997.

Connolly, Linda, and Tina O'Toole. *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave*. Dublin: Woodfield, 2005.

Dorcey, Mary. "Come Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear." *Moving into the Space Cleared by Our Mothers*. 1991. Galway: Salmon, 1995. 64–70.

Kandel Englander, Elizabeth. *Understanding Violence*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007.

Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater." *The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. 308–31.

McKiernan, Joan, and Monica McWilliams. "Women, Religion and Violence in the Family." *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeline Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997. 327–41.

---. *Bringing It Out in the Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: HMSO, 1993.

Moane, Geraldine. "Lesbian Politics and Community." *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*. Ed. Anne Byrne and Madeline Leonard. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997. 431–46.

Smyth, Ailbhe, ed. *Irish Women's Studies Reader*. Dublin: Attic, 1993.

---. "The Women's Movement in the Republic of Ireland 1970–1990." *Irish Women's Studies Reader*. Ed. Ailbhe Smyth. Dublin: Attic, 1993. 245–69.

Alex Ramon

Kingston University

Writing About a Woman Writer's Writing: On Gender Identification(s) and Being a Male Critic of Carol Shields's Work

ABSTRACT

This essay takes as its starting point my experience as a male critic of Carol Shields's work. Throughout the researching and writing of my PhD on Shields, I have noted with curiosity the surprise registered by many people upon discovering that a male critic would choose to write about the work of a female author. This reaction, confirmed by other male academics working on female authors, raises a number of interesting questions. What does it mean for a male critic to write about the work of a female author? Why is this still considered surprising, unusual, even strange? Is this view symptomatic of the kind of disturbing devaluation of women's fiction (and of women's experience generally) that Shields herself explores so candidly in her final novel *Unless* (2002)? I suggest that the anti-feminist backlash (outlined by Faludi [1991]), and the profitable establishment of popular literary genres such as "Chick Lit" and "Lad Lit," have led to a retrogressive "hardening" of gender roles within popular culture, one which endorses a simplistic relationship between author and audience, presuming that texts "by" women must necessarily be "for" women only. Situated within the context of Shields's own professed ambivalence about her status as a "women's writer," and drawing on the theories of Emma Wilson, the essay attempts to broaden out into a wider reflection upon issues of gender and identification within contemporary literary culture. Shields's work, I argue, subverts assumptions about gendered reading patterns, encouraging through its polyphony and its use of dual narrators a mobile and flexible reading experience which allows the reader to inhabit a range of perspectives and to read productively across gender binaries.

ABSTRACT

The act of reading may constitute a performance [or series of performances] where the reader assumes the position with which she [*sic*] chooses to identify. . . . If we read from multiple subject-positions the very act of reading becomes a force for dislocating our belief in stable subjects and essential meanings. (Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* 35)

Readers do not only work on texts, but texts work on readers, and this involves a complex double dialectic of two bodies inscribed in language. (Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* 18)

In September 2008 I attended the biannual conference on Iris Murdoch's work which was held at Kingston University in London. On the final day of the conference, during one of the coffee breaks, I was talking to a male colleague who had recently completed a PhD on Murdoch's fiction and philosophy. We were approached by one of the other conference delegates, who introduced us to her sister, a Murdoch admirer who was attending the final day of the conference. Before being introduced, however, our colleague's sister greeted us with the following remark: "I didn't expect that there would be any men at this conference!" When we asked why, she pointed out that Murdoch was of course a female writer whose work, for that reason, must surely be of limited interest or appeal to men.

The suggestion that the work of a world-renowned female novelist and philosopher would hold little interest for male critics may seem a particularly extreme example of gender biases within the sphere of literary culture. But it is not, I would argue, an entirely unrepresentative view. Indeed, ruminating on this incident afterwards, I became aware of the ways in which it resonated with various other comments made to me during my own PhD work on Carol Shields, and the surprise registered by some people that a male researcher would choose to study the work of a female author.

"How unusual for a man to write about Carol Shields!" "Why would you choose Shields?" Variations on these kinds of statements formed a refrain throughout my years of PhD study. My initial response to such comments tended to be a rather defensive one: I would refer to Shields's use of male protagonists and narrators, her avowed frustration with her categorization as a "women's writer," and the insights that I felt her work offered into human experience, beyond gender. Nonetheless, it did sometimes appear that I was being put into the position of having to defend or justify my choice of Shields as a subject for PhD study, and that this related specifically to the issue of gender difference. The idea of a male researcher writing about the work of a female author clearly appeared to some people to be unusual, note-worthy, even strange. This essay, then, attempts to place my experience as a male critic of Shields within the context of a wider

reflection upon issues of gender and identification in contemporary literary culture, and a discussion of gendered reading patterns as they are (de-) constructed within Shields's work itself.

Essentialist definitions of masculinity and femininity, definitions regarding male and female "subject-matter" and the kind of work that men and women "naturally" respond to, have begun to reassert themselves strongly in contemporary discourse. Limited perceptions of how and what men and women read seem symptomatic of a wider cultural turn in which, for example, texts by female authors have been increasingly categorized as texts for female readers only.

A number of reasons might be identified for these trends. In particular, I would argue that the rise of profitable popular literary genres such as "Lad Lit" and "Chick Lit" has contributed to creating a gender segregation within literary culture, dividing men and women into two distinct consumer groups and reviving mainstream media debates about issues such as the inability of female authors to construct convincing male characters, and male authors' alleged incapacity to write (and lack of desire to read) romantic fiction.¹

Further, the perceived schism between male and female readers and writers can also be viewed as a manifestation of the anti-feminist backlash, the implications of which were outlined so perceptively by Susan Faludi in the early 1990s. As Faludi explains, one of the characteristics of the backlash has been its denigration and patronization of "feminized" men (58–60); the male reader of female-authored texts might easily find himself placed within this category. The disavowal of texts that might be classified, in colloquial British parlance, as "girly" may help to explain the continued tendency of male students to avoid Women's Writing courses, while male scepticism about women's cultural production has also been documented in other arenas. A survey of music consumption undertaken by Women's Studies researcher Victoria Rutherford, for example, discovered that only one male out of twenty-three named any women artists among his top-ten favourite musicians (O'Brien 454).²

It is my contention, then, that a confluence of factors has worked to discourage male readers from responding to female-authored or female-focused texts and that this is part of a retrogressive hardening of gender

¹ The contemporary re-classification of 19th century novels by Austen and the Brontës as "Chick Lit" is explored in Ferris and Young 47–70. Ray Connolly and Liz Hunt debate the (in)ability of men to write romantic fiction in "Can Men Write Romance?" *The Telegraph* (14 September 2006) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3655276/Can-men-write-romantic-novels.html>

² A complimentary study of the amount of male critics writing on female authors would be valuable, but is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present analysis.

roles in popular culture. For the male reader or consumer, to confess to appreciating work by or “targeted at” women is to risk to be seen to be “doing your gender wrong,” in Judith Butler’s excellent phrase (255). In Butler’s terms, the successful performance of masculinity within contemporary culture would seem to involve the rejection or denigration of women’s cultural production, precisely the kind of devaluation of women’s work that Shields herself explores in her final novel *Unless* (2002) with its indictment of female exclusion from the cultural sphere and its critique of abiding masculinist biases in canons of significant writers and thinkers.³ The implications of this are disturbing, for, as Gloria Steinem reminds us, “the false division of human nature into ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ is the root of all other divisions into subject and object, active and passive—the beginning of hierarchy” (270).

In her essay “The Worth of Women’s Work,” featured in the first *Dropped Threads* volume (2001), Nina Lee Colwill offers a complimentary perspective on these issues. “To study women and work,” Colwill argues, “is to confront a belief shared by every culture in every country on the planet: the assumption that men, the things men do, and all things masculine are more valuable than women, the things women do and all things feminine” (340). Colwill’s comments arguably veer into essentialism here, and, following Steinem, we may find her categories of masculinity and femininity somewhat strict. But her essay is particularly insightful in its analysis of how these cultural biases continue to manifest themselves:

For women to do . . . men’s work is for women to better themselves—a fine accomplishment in an achieving society. But praise is not as loud for the men who become nurses or take on the family’s housework and childcare. To emulate one’s superiors . . . is to increase one’s status. To emulate one’s inferiors smacks of perversion. (341)

Colwill’s argument may be applied to the sphere of literary criticism. Writing about women’s writing seems to require justification for the male critic, but for the female critic writing about male authors it appears that fewer questions are asked.⁴ A highly problematic attitude to the relative “worth” of male and female literary production seems evident here. To paraphrase Colwill, for female critics to write about work by men is to raise their status; for male critics to write about women’s work is to lower theirs.

³ See, for example, Wendy Roy’s essay “*Unless* the World Changes: Carol Shields on Women’s Silencing in Contemporary Culture,” *Carol Shields: The Arts of a Writing Life*, ed. Neil K. Besner (Winnipeg: Prairie Fire, 2003) 125–31.

⁴ Female critics of my acquaintance working on Richardson, Ballard and Hare report that they are rarely, if ever, asked why they have chosen to write about a male author.

In Shields's case, her categorization as a "woman's writer" was something that she tended to view ambivalently. "I don't think of [the] reader as being a particular sex," she told Marjorie Anderson in 1995, noting that her decision to write her second novel *Happenstance* (1980) from a male perspective was, in part, a way of challenging the reductive classification of her first two novels *Small Ceremonies* (1976) and *The Box Garden* (1977) as "women's fiction" (Shields qtd. in Anderson 141). As late as 2002, however, the Canadian critic Stephen Henighan offers the following definition of the typical Shields reader: "a conservative upper-middle-class woman" (183). Overlooking the gender and class prejudices underpinning this assessment,⁵ Henighan's generalized statement stands as a further endorsement of a simplistic relationship between author and audience, articulating a presumption that texts "by" women must necessarily be "for" women alone.

In such a cultural climate, fiction and theory which encourages readers to negotiate between male and female perspectives, thereby challenging the notion of fixed gender positions and their attendant hierarchies, retains a particularly subversive potential, and the latter sections of this essay will explore the ways in which Shields's fiction may be seen to accomplish this. As Kobena Mercer has argued, the "mantra of 'race, class, gender'" may lead to reductive literalist assumptions about consumption and identity, for example, the notion that black readers can only "identify" with black characters, male readers with male characters, and so on (193). Mercer suggests, in contrast, that "the complexity of what actually happens 'between' the contingent spaces [of such categories] . . . is something only now coming into view theoretically" (193). I would concur that as popular discourse on identity categories grows increasingly divisive, we require both literary and theoretical texts that provide a counter-narrative, allowing male and female readers more room for movement between gender and other identity positions. To this end, a number of literary critics have engaged with issues of readership and identification, recognizing the question of who we identify with when reading as a complex one that often transgresses, rather than merely reaffirms, prescribed social roles. In *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter* (1996), Emma Wilson develops a theoretical paradigm to examine such concepts, arguing for the potential for change in the reader's identity through the act of reading. Ranging across texts by Duras, Proust, Tournier and Cixous, Wilson explores what she terms "the *formative* power

⁵ A dismissive attitude to female writers and female readers is evident throughout Henighan's *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing*, in particular in his discussions of work by Shields (181–85), Jane Urquhart (185–87) and Barbara Gowdy (198–200), as I have argued elsewhere (Ramon 4–9; 19).

of the reading encounter," the ways in which a literary text "may offer the reader new images of him or herself . . . with which to identify and new scenarios for the performance of an identity category" (6; emphasis added). The reader's self, Wilson argues, may be continually reviewed and revised when engaged in the reading of a literary text:

[T]he reading encounter may then be said to be formative: the reader not only recognizes in the text what she or he knows to be true of him or herself . . . she or he may also be able to perceive aspects of the self which were previously occluded and unknown. It is the encounter with and the liberation of these aspects of the self which . . . work to transform the reader, allowing him or her to be effectively changed by the work of the texts. (30)

Wilson's work here complexifies conventional conceptions of the reader-text relationship, challenging the notion that readers automatically identify with characters who are superficially "like" them and placing the emphasis instead upon fluidity and (ex-)change. Issues of cross-gender and trans-sex identification are a central concern of her study which places considerable emphasis upon the potential of the reading encounter to challenge "the foundational illusions of identity and the illusory polarities of male and female, masculine and feminine, straight and gay" (195).

Wilson's view of the capacity of fiction to challenge and change the reader's sense of self has been articulated in different yet interrelated formulations by a number of contemporary novelists, including Shields. "If writing . . . and reading [novels] have any redeeming social value," Margaret Atwood suggests, "it's probably that they force you to imagine what it's like to be someone else" (430). "When I have read a long novel," Jane Smiley concurs, "when I have entered systematically into a sensibility that is not mine . . . there is a possibility that at the end . . . I will be a degree more able to see the world as another sees it" (175). Atwood's and Smiley's view of the transformative potential of fiction was shared by Shields for whom issues of cross-gender readership and identification remained central.

"Why [do] people read fiction at all?" Shields wondered in a 2001 interview, going on to provide her own answer. "Because our own lives aren't big enough, wide enough, varied enough for us. Through fiction we expand our existence, which is always going to be confining" (Shields qtd. in Garner 2001). Over ten years earlier, Shields had articulated a similar viewpoint, this time from the perspective of the writer:

One of the rewards, compensations perhaps, of being a writer is the freedom to leave one's own skin and see with another's eyes. Old eyes,

young eyes, male eyes . . . Surely there is always some refreshment in taking a different perspective. The world is made new. (Shields qtd. in De Roo 43)

“By becoming something other than ourselves,” Shields suggests, “[we may achieve] an angle of vision that renews our image of the world” (“Ticking Clock” 88).

Like Wilson, Shields does not necessarily present such “dissident identifications” (Wilson 195) as unproblematic, or as easily achieved. Indeed, her essay “The Same Ticking Clock” rigorously examines the challenges inherent for both writer and reader in moving beyond “the tight little outlines of our official résumés” (88). Nonetheless, Shields’s remarks share with Wilson’s work a sense of the subversive potential of reading against gender (and other) binaries. As Diana Fuss has argued: “[t]he act of reading may constitute a performance [or series of performances] where the reader assumes the position with which she [*sic*] chooses to identify . . . If we read from multiple subject-positions the very act of reading becomes a force for dislocating our belief in stable subjects and essential meanings” (35). For Fuss, as for Wilson, the recognition of identity categories as fictional serves to “undo hegemonic relations between male and female, homosexual and heterosexual” (35), thereby disrupting totalizing fantasies of stable subject formation and fixed identity.

Certainly my own experience of reading and writing about Shields’s work remains one of pleasurable and challenging engagement with a multiplicity of voices and perspectives: male and female, young, middle-aged and elderly, first- and third- person. The capacity of fiction to “expand our existence,” its potential to enable both reader and writer to “become something other than [themselves],” is not only a central concern of her interviews and her literary criticism; it is also enacted within her work. Innovative in their use of perspective, Shields’s short stories including “Various Miracles,” “Home,” “Dressing Up for the Carnival,” “Keys” and “Soup du Jour” seem constructed specifically to allow the reader to adopt as many identifications as possible, moving through an array of subject positions and focalizations within a limited textual space.⁶ The choric qualities of the Shieldsian short story actively encourage fluid reader identifications, as they encompass the experiences of a diversity of protagonists and make the mutability of personal identity one of their abiding thematic motifs. In Lorna Irvine’s terms:

⁶ Simone Vauthier has sensitively explored the implications of point-of-view in Shields in two essays: “On Carol Shields’s ‘Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass.’” *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 11.2 (1989): 63–74; and “‘They Say Miracles Are Past’ but They Are Wrong.” *Prairie Fire* 16.1 (1995): 84–104.

Shields does not want her readers to settle into a relaxing fictional environment, but prefers to unsettle them, persistently using perspectives and voices that abruptly jump back and forth between internal and external spaces and between past, present and even future tenses. . . . Readers of Shields's fiction need considerable flexibility; their position as narratees is repeatedly thrown into question. (144)

Within a fragmentary yet fluid collage structure, Shields's stories often construct moments of brief epiphany in which characters "see [themselves] freshly," achieving a transcendence of their daily routine through performance and "disguise" (*Collected Stories* 398, 409). Tobias Hill, indeed, interprets "Dressing Up for the Carnival" as a story "about drag" (Hill 2000), noting in particular the text's final reference to "X, an anonymous middle-aged citizen who, sometimes, in the privacy of his own bedroom, in the embrace of happiness, waltzes about in his wife's lace-trimmed night gown" (*Collected Stories* 403). As the protagonists of the story survive the day by "putting on costumes" (397) that alert them to new possibilities of identity and experience so Shields's fiction invites its readers to cross-dress, to don and discard the attire of a wide variety of characters, and perhaps emerge changed by these brief encounters. Thus Coral Ann Howells reads "Dressing Up for the Carnival" in the context of Shields's comments about the value of the subjunctive mood: that "world of dreams, possibilities and parallel realities" to which Shields believes it is part of fiction's function to alert us (Shields qtd. in Howells 145).

In terms of gender and Shields's wider literary output, the dual structure of the *Happenstance* novels (1980 and 1983), of *Swann* (1987), *A Celibate Season* (1991) and *The Republic of Love* (1992), exemplifies the author's commitment to giving male and female perspectives equal significance within her work. The splitting of these texts between the narratives of Brenda and Jack, Sarah and Jimroy, Rose and Cruzzi, Jock and Chas, and Tom and Fay, serves as an invitation to the reader to read productively across and against gender binaries, allowing him or her to respond to male and female characters on entirely equivalent terms. While fully alert to the historical differences in male and female relationships to issues of culture and power, Shields's fiction interrogates an essentialist approach to gender difference. Challenging patriarchal myths of male heroism and agency versus female passivity, the lives of her male characters are shown by such narrative structures to be equally contingent, equally prone to the vagaries of accident, chance and "ordinary good and bad luck" (*Larry's Party* 249), as those of her female characters. As such, the "play . . . with distance and closeness, with report and question, with writerly versus readerly construction" (146) that Irvine identifies as central to Shields's narrative methods is revealed to be intimately connected to her text's subversive

“play” with gender positions. At the level of both form and content, the division of these texts between gender perspectives may also work to unsettle the reader’s sense of identity, perhaps alerting them to what the narrator of *Larry’s Party* terms “the wayward chips of self” (240) that emerge to challenge prescribed social roles.

The potential of fiction to disclose alternative modes of being to the receptive reader is also explored at the diegetic level in Shields’s work, which consistently presents both the reading encounter and the writing act as liberating and transformative processes. “Print is her way of entering and escaping the world,” Shields writes of the unnamed actress at the end of “Various Miracles,” a reader of “South American novels, Russian folk tales, Persian poetry [and] the advertisements on the subway” (*Collected Stories* 28). This character, finding page 46 of a lost manuscript in a doorway, reads it and discovers her own immediate experience described on the page. This notion of the text itself as just such a liminal space—a threshold that offers both entrance and escape—resonates throughout Shields’s production, in which reader and writer figures and biographical subjects from Susanna Moodie to Jane Austen experience transcendence through textual engagement. One thinks, in particular, of Daisy’s invigorating metamorphosis into “Mrs. Green Thumb” via the writing of her gardening column in *The Stone Diaries* (197–228) and the character’s imaginative excursions into the lives of both male and female “others” throughout the novel. But for our purposes the most significant *reading* encounter occurs elsewhere in *The Stone Diaries*, namely in Magnus Flett’s obsessive engagement with, and eventual memorization of, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.⁷ In Magnus’s text-fixated response to his wife Clarentine’s abandonment, Shields stages an encounter between a male reader and a female-authored literary texts that proves influential and transformative:

[Magnus] read slowly since, truth be told, he’d never before in his life read the whole of a book, not cover to cover. It pleased him to think he could puzzle out most of the words, turning the pages over one by one, paying attention . . . *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë . . . was his favorite: there were turnings in the story that filled the back of his throat with smarting, sweet pains, and in those moments he felt his wife only a dozen heartbeats away, so close he could almost reach out and stroke the silkiness of her inner thighs. It astonished him, how these books

⁷ The wider implications of the intertextual relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *The Stone Diaries* have been explored by Diane Osland in “*The Stone Diaries, Jane Eyre, and the Burden of Romance*.” See *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and the Possibilities of Fiction*, eds. Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003) 84–112.

were stuffed full of people. Each one was like a little world, populated and furnished. And the way those book people talked! Some of the phrases were like poetry, nothing like the way folks really spoke, but nevertheless he pronounced them aloud to himself and committed them to memory, so that if by chance his wife should decide to come home, he would be ready. (100)

The question of who Magnus identifies with when reading *Jane Eyre* is not one that *The Stone Diaries* directly addresses; indeed the narrative of his encounter with the text may be entirely based around Daisy's imaginative construction of the event.⁸ What is significant, however, is that Magnus's engagement with Brontë's novel—and the other “ladies' books” discovered in Clarentine's sewing basket (*Stone* 99–100)—provides him with a language with which to articulate and respond to “feminine” desire: the reading encounter here is, in Wilson's terms, embodied, sensual and experiential, serving to displace and replace the real. “He made [the book] his,” Shields stated in interview. “It was a whole other dimension, another world to live in besides the one he was stuck in” (Shields qtd. in Denoon 12). Via this paradigmatic example of what a “female” text might productively “do” for a male reader Shields self-consciously confronts issues of gender and readership within her own work. “Turning the pages . . . paying attention,” Shields's readers, like Magnus Flett, find themselves fully immersed in that “other dimension” that fiction provides.

CONCLUSION

The suggestion that we need male critics to read, write about and teach the work of female authors, just as urgently as we need female critics to be reading, writing about and teaching work by men, may seem a commonplace in 2011. However, I would argue that it is an idea that requires reiterating as a counter-position to the gender segregations which are increasingly prevalent in literary culture and in popular culture more widely. While the notion of gender metamorphosis, on the part of reader or author, may never be entirely unproblematic, it remains both necessary and subversive at a time when such reading and writing practices appear to be under threat, and limiting definitions of masculinity and femininity reas-

⁸ Debate about the extent of Daisy's agency as narrator of *The Stone Diaries* has been considerable. See, for example, Winifred M. Mellor's “‘The Simple Container of Our Existence’: Narrative Ambiguity in Carol Shields's *The Stone Diaries*,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 20.2 (1995): 96–110, and Wendy Roy's “Autobiography As Critical Practice in *The Stone Diaries*,” *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and the Possibilities of Fiction*, eds. Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003) 113–46.

serting themselves. As Steinem wryly notes: “[d]igging out that ‘masculine/feminine’ paradigm undermines all birth-based hierarchies, and alters our view of human nature, the natural world, and the cosmos itself. Just a few little things like that” (270). It is my suggestion that a committed practice of reading and writing across gender binaries may contribute in a small way to the kinds of processes that Steinem outlines here.

Shields’s endeavour to offer participatory and potentially transformative reading experiences in relation to gender roles is well summarized by Warren Cariou in his discussion of the conclusion of *Larry’s Party*, Shields’s most celebrated attempt at rendering male experience in her fiction. At the end of the novel, Cariou suggests,

[the] dinner party . . . announces a change in [Larry’s] approach to gender roles . . . because it reveals Larry to be for the first time an active participant in those roles. Larry is not the uncommunicative couch potato that his own father was, nor is he the free-wheeling tomcat of the masculine postmodern novel, nor the reactive backlasher of concern to feminists, nor the predator, nor the buffoon. He has become instead a man for whom there is as yet no available template, a man who is not effeminate but who also understands and deeply appreciates what the women in his life have meant to him . . . By placing himself in the social role of a Mrs. Dalloway figure, Larry unknowingly creates the maze of gender anew for himself. (92)

Shields’s construction of male characters for whom there is “as yet no available template” remains an undervalued aspect of her work, representing as it does a significant challenge to traditional conceptions of masculinity, and, by extension, to conventional assumptions about gendered reading patterns. The richly imagined protagonists that populate Shields’s texts allow her fiction to consistently “create the maze of gender anew” for readers, critics and characters, male and female alike.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Marjorie. “Interview with Carol Shields.” *Prairie Fire* 16.1 (1995): 139–50.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose*. Toronto: Anansi, 1982.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Cariou, Warren. “*Larry’s Party*: Man in the Maze.” *Carol Shields: The Arts of a Writing Life*. Ed. Neil K. Besner. Winnipeg: Prairie Fire, 2003. 87–96.

Colwill, Nina Lee. "The Worth of Women's Work." *Dropped Threads: What We Aren't Told*. Ed. Carol Shields and Marjorie Anderson. Toronto: Vintage, 2001. 339-41.

Denoon, Anne. "Playing with Convention." *Books in Canada* 22.9 (1993): 8-12.

De Roo, Harvey. "A Little Like Flying: An Interview with Carol Shields." *West Coast Review* 23.3 (1988): 38-56.

Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1991.

Ferris, Suzanne and Mallory Young, eds. *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Garner, Marion. "Length Matters: Carol Shields on the Short Story." *Read Magazine* (2000). 29 July 2003 <www.randomhouse.ca/readmag/previous_issues/carol_shields.htm>.

Henighan, Stephen. *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing*. Ontario: Porcupine's Quill, 2002.

Hill, Tobias. Rev. of *Dressing Up for the Carnival*. *The Observer* 13 February 2000. 20 May 2003 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/feb/13/fiction.carolshields>>.

Howells, Coral Ann. "In the Subjunctive Mood: Carol Shields's *Dressing Up for the Carnival*." *Yearbook of English Studies* 31 (2001): 144-54.

Irvine, Lorna. "A Knowable Country: Embodied Omniscience in Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love* and *Larry's Party*." *Carol Shields and the Extra-Ordinary*. Ed. Marta Dvořík and Manina Jones. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. 139-56.

Mercer, Korben. "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary." *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Ed. Rachel Adams and David Savran. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. 188-200.

O'Brien, Lucy. *She Bop II*. London: Continuum, 2002.

Ramon, Alex. *Liminal Spaces: The Double Art of Carol Shields*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008.

Shields, Carol. "Arriving Late, Starting Over." *How Stories Mean*. Ed. John Metcalf and J.R. (Tim) Struthers. Ontario: Porcupine's Quill, 1993. 244-51.

---. *Larry's Party*. London: Fourth Estate, 1997.

---. "The Same Ticking Clock." *How Stories Mean*. Ed. John Metcalf and J. R. (Tim) Struthers. Ontario: Porcupine's Quill, 1993. 88-89.

---. *The Stone Diaries*. London: Fourth Estate, 1993.

Smiley, Jane. *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*. London: Faber, 2005.

- Steinem, Gloria. *Moving Beyond Words*. New York: Simon, 1994.
- Wilson, Emma. *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
- Wright, Elizabeth. *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice*. London: Methuen, 1984.

Tomasz Fisiak

University of Łódź

Feminist Auto/biography as a Means of
Empowering Women:
A Case Study of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*
and Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water*

ABSTRACT

Feminism, as a political, social and cultural movement, pays much attention to the importance of text. Text is the carrier of important thoughts, truths, ideas. It becomes a means of empowering women, a support in their fight for free expression, equality, intellectual emancipation. By “text” one should understand not only official documents, manifestos or articles. The term also refers to a wide range of literary products—poetry, novels, diaries. The language of literature enables female authors to omit obstacles and constraints imposed by the phallogocentric world, a world dominated by masculine propaganda. Through writing, female authors have an opportunity to liberate their creative potential and regain the territory for unlimited expression. In order to produce a truly powerful text, they resort to a variety of writing styles and techniques. Here the notions of a situated knowledge and context sensitivity prove useful. There are three methodologies working within situated knowledge, namely, the politics of location, self-reflexivity and feminist auto/biography. All of them regard text as a fundamental tool to signify one's authority, yet feminist auto/biography, a concept widely discussed by the British theorist Liz Stanley, appears to be the most empowering mode of writing. It challenges the overused genre of auto/biography and reconstructs its role within feminist epistemologies, thus creating a favourable environment for text production. The works by Sylvia Plath and Janet Frame can be analyzed from the point of view of auto/biographical empowerment, even though their auto/biographical potential is mainly instinctive. Nevertheless, they help to comprehend the strength of the auto/biographical.

The aim of this article is to “investigate” two novels by these authors, *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and *Faces in the Water* by Janet Frame,

and their compatibility with Stanley's concept. The paper attempts to answer several questions. Are these novels actual feminist auto/biographies or rather fictional auto/biographies with feminist undertones? What kind of narrative strategy is used to achieve the effect of authority over the text? Last but not least, what is the function of auto/biographical narration in the case of these two novels? The article also explores the idea of writing as a means of regaining control over one's life (with references to the authors' biographies and parallels between their lives and lives of their fictive alter egos).

ABSTRACT

184

FROM "FEMALE WRITING" TO "FEMALE AUTO/BIOGRAPHY"

Contemporary feminism pays much attention to the text as a carrier of new ideas, thoughts and practices. Text enables free and unrestrained expression of the author's truths and beliefs. Text knows hardly any boundaries—it can be almost infinitely deformed, changed, deconstructed. But text may not only contain the meanings which are solidly fixed within a particular field of knowledge. Today's feminism, especially its postmodern branch, develops the idea of a situated knowledge, in which the context of the author and her research, be it social, cultural or philosophical, is hugely important (vide texts by Ruth Frankenberg, Ien Ang, Avtar Brah or Marjorie L. Devault, whose research is always situated in a particular environment). The three methodologies working within situated knowledge, namely, the politics of location, self-reflexivity, and, most of all, feminist auto/biography, regard text as vital in expressing one's authority. Even though traditional discourse still favours the male point of view and tends to situate female writing outside the phallogocentric vision of the world, female authors do their best to reclaim authority over the text. The notion of a feminist auto/biography especially comes in handy in this context as it challenges the overused genre of auto/biography and redefines it within feminist epistemologies. And the range of its functions is wide. Valérie Baisnée indicates that it has become a place in which the female subject not only records personal growth but also tackles certain crucial political issues linked to the position of women in society, and adds that "the autobiography, situated at the border between public and private discourse, and in which the present perspective mixes with that of the past, enables

a registration of . . . changes at both individual and social levels” (12). In a natural way it becomes an influential tool for mastering memories and imagination. The power of auto/biography lies also in its compatibility with two concepts—the notion of *écriture féminine*, the term used for the first time by the French literary theorist Hélène Cixous in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, and the idea of *parler femme*, invented by Belgian feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray.

The concepts of auto/biography and *écriture féminine* seem to share many similarities. Both discuss the importance of body. Both advocate free traversing within generic conventions and transgressing socially imposed borders. Each of them acknowledges the inevitability of fragmentation of the self whilst rejecting the idea of its nature as unitary. Verena Andermatt Conley points out that Cixous’s writings continuously affirm “that I is always more than one, that life is full of springs and that all is enigma, to be discovered, and *that* is the very ‘essence’ of life” (xxii). Last but not least, feminist auto/biography and *écriture féminine* revalorize the role of women and their own authority over the written word in general.

Still, it is necessary to pose some essential questions first. Is there a feminist auto/biography as such? Could a distinct example of this genre be consciously produced? It is difficult to answer these inquiries as no clear definition of this concept can be provided, because the whole issue of self in auto/biography, not to mention the undertones of the word “feminist,” is quite complex. In her influential *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography*, Liz Stanley tries to explain the term and name some characteristic features of this particular literary genre. Obviously, one should be aware of the distinction between biography, i.e., writing about somebody else’s life, and autobiography, standing for writing about the life of oneself (hence Stanley merges these two into a unitary concept of auto/biography, thus underlining its fluidity and indeterminacy). Both of these, however, need to meet certain criteria to be analyzed in the context of feminism. Liz Stanley is perfectly aware of this. Moreover, she brings caveats to any definition of auto/biography, such as the selective nature of memory, the conventionality of the form, the usage of fictive devices blurring the perspectives on described events, or the problem of self as subject matter. She also raises another important question, namely, what exactly makes a feminist auto/biography. “[I]s the fact that a text is feminist authored or about a feminist subject sufficient to define it as feminist auto/biography? Is the form or structure of what is written . . . not just the subject who forms the bones of its content, actually different from any other auto/biography?” (Stanley 247). And even though Stanley does not provide her readers with easy answers, she lists several features that could be found in a feminist auto/biography. These include challenging

conventional forms, playfulness, and rejection of a linear mode of presenting events. A good feminist auto/biography ought not only to recreate the genre in an exciting and unconventional way, but also to transgress the boundaries within different genres and relate more to the readers. Nevertheless, it would also be impossible to talk about a distinct feminist auto/biography without four fundamental elements: anti-realism, anti-spotlight stances, contingency, and location in a particular ideological context (that is, within feminist ideological practices). The inclusion of these “regulations” may result in the creation of a noteworthy feminist auto/biography (therefore Liz Stanley refers to Kate Millet’s *Sita* and *Flying* as the illustrations of unconventionality of auto/biographical writing). Stanley also does not fail to underline the importance of the text itself, not only in the dimension of the female authorship or presence of a female protagonist.

Auto/biographies, both written and spoken, are intertextual, but within this there is a primacy of everyday life and its concrete material events, persons, conversations. ‘Bio,’ the narration of the material events of everyday life, is the crucial element in theorizing and understanding both ‘auto’ and ‘graph,’ albeit, regarding written (but not spoken) auto/biography, that the only way readers have of relating to this is through ‘graph,’ as through the writing (Stanley 246).

The potential author of a distinct feminist auto/biography is expected to refer to “graph” as the carrier of a wide range of meanings. But “graph,” the physical side of the writing process, may also aid in maintaining control over the final product of the creation process. It is especially precious in the case of female authors who treat the actual, physically existing text as a means to regain power over their lives.

SYLVIA PLATH ON THE TERRITORY OF TEXTUAL AUTHORITY

Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* can be considered a suitable example illustrating Stanley’s theories. At the same time it would be rather risky to call this novel a strict feminist auto/biography (the way Stanley comprehends it) as the production of a feminist text was not the author’s aim. Thus it might be safer to view *The Bell Jar* as a fictional auto/biography, containing, however, several feminist traces. The novel becomes an original piece of writing where elements of the author’s life are transformed into a convincing story (after Federman 100).

In Plath’s case, autobiographical elements could already be found in her poetry; “Lady Lazarus” or “Daddy” express her suicidal tendencies, her complicated emotional life, and allude directly to her strong feeling of guilt caused by her Austrian origins (after Connie Ann Kirk’s biography

of Plath). However, it is crucial to analyze Plath's poetry in the context of challenging textual forms and exertion of authority over the production of a written form. Eileen M. Aird emphasizes how her poems, especially those from the *Ariel* period, envisage a "Paradise of autonomy and recognized identity, an image of completeness" (201), thus corresponding with the concept of unity of text and body. For Plath, a poem is not a mere textual structure consisting of subjects, verbs, objects, and predicates, but rather a live being, whose existence goes far beyond obvious references and metaphors. The text is a value in itself, a treasure to cherish, a product resisting separation from its author (such an approach is adequately reflected in "In Plaster"). Christina Britzolakis notes that "the language of Plath's later poems undoubtedly draws upon the 'flashy' naturalistic idiom of contemporary American speech," adding that "this change of stylistic register cannot be seen merely in terms of liberation from a tradition-bound academicism," but rather from a viewpoint of "making it new, of renewing and paring down the language of poetry" (136). Yet even the power of the text and the language cannot escape control, for this unlimited freedom may result in an eventual conflict between the form and the content.

The poems help us to comprehend a complicated Plath-text relationship. However, the author's traumas and feelings are even more prominent in *The Bell Jar*.¹ Plath describes here the life and various experiences of Esther Greenwood, yet most of the events taking place in the novel may be traced back to episodes from Plath's own life. Esther, the author's fictional incarnation, fights with heavy depression, tries to kill herself several times, and finally enters a mental hospital where she undergoes shock treatment. The reader not only observes the slow process of Esther's emotional and mental collapse, punctuated by her suicide attempts, but also accompanies her during her painful and initially fruitless therapy. All of this can be found in Plath's actual biography.²

What is then so challenging about this novel? Which elements of a feminist auto/biography does it contain? Does Sylvia Plath (or her fictional alter ego) succeed in reclaiming control over the body of her text (and through this, her physical body, as well)? The whole text is the reflection of the many traumatic experiences of the female protagonist—the

¹ Even though this particular novel achieved a cult status, thanks to its successful construction of a protagonist, not to mention the excellent use of technique and style, Plath "did not feel it was an adequate book [and] was agitated by the reviews" (Ames 172).

² In 1953 Plath was hospitalized for depression and treated with electroshock therapy. Lois Ames, in the bibliographical note to *The Bell Jar*, quotes a fragment of her diary describing this period as "[a] time of darkness, despair, disillusion—so black only as the inferno of the human mind can be—symbolic death, and numb shock—then the painful agony of slow rebirth and psychic regeneration" (208).

difficult fight with depression, the suicide attempts, and finally, the loss of a friend who successfully took her life. Esther loses control over her self on different levels—her body and mind cease to cooperate, therefore the text gains authority as the most reliable witness of her pain. It also helps her to re-establish herself and rebuild her self-esteem until she can eventually say: “I [am] my own woman” (Plath 182). Esther becomes estranged from her physical body, but regains control over the body of the text. Obviously, Esther’s capabilities never go beyond fictive experiences, as she succeeds in describing her existence, simultaneously encountering many obstacles in the attempt to portray similar experiences of her fictional alter ego, the heroine of her unfinished novel. Her strength appears to lie more in the auto/biographical than in the fictional.

The Bell Jar meets many of the criteria established by Stanley. Plath’s work challenges the conventions of a typical auto/biography. The author discards a linear way of presenting the events—memories of the past intertwine with recent occurrences without causing unintelligible chaos. She also includes elements of meta-writing. The female protagonist, a young writer, creates the personage of Elaine (mentioned in the previous paragraph), very reminiscent of herself:

Elaine sat on the breezeway in an old yellow nightgown of her mother’s waiting for something to happen. It was a sweltering morning in July, and drops of sweat crawled down her back one by one, like slow insects. Inertia oozed like molasses through [her] limbs (Plath 99).

Sylvia Plath writes about Esther writing about Elaine, and all three follow a similar emotional pattern. Writing in the auto/biographical mode is the first step in achieving authorship over the text and enables the author to use fictive devices, but in such a way as not to obliterate the whole image of one’s experience. By means of creating the character of Esther Greenwood Sylvia Plath transgresses the role of a mere author or biographer. She translates real-life experience into fiction and still remains credible to the readers, thus forming a very strong bond with them (which is compatible with Stanley’s ideal of a reader-friendly auto/biographical writing). What is more, Plath uses the auto/biographical form to tame the demons of overwhelming reality. The paper takes on a therapeutic role, becoming a sponge absorbing problems. It is also a continuation of the body, an integral part of her existence. Plath pays much attention to the human body (ugly bodies, sick bodies, bodies of newly born babies) and the body takes the role of a reflection of the text, which undergoes a striking transformation—from a chaotic structure into a more coherent creation. Juxtaposing the imagery of babies with the production of the text seems very reminiscent of

Cixous's comparison between writing and birth giving. Cixous underlines how much text production relates to female physicality. Plath recreates this image to describe the struggle in daily routines. On the whole, in *The Bell Jar* life and fiction mingle together and remain in a state of constant flux. Giving Esther a chance to restore harmony in life, Sylvia Plath attempts to transplant the character's decision into real life. Yet this process cannot be continued infinitely—Esther reflects Plath's life, but Elaine is unable to take that role any further.

The auto/biography appears within the constraints of another auto/biography. Moreover, the recurrent motif of a bell jar, descending and engulfing the main heroine, refers to Plath's life itself and is a clever, compelling metaphor. The novel ends with the optimistic vision of Esther escaping the title trap, which stands in stark contrast to the events that followed afterwards—Plath's gassing herself soon after the publication of the novel.³ Susan R. Van Deyne makes a valid point about this particular clash between life and prose: “[b]ecause the poems and novel that have made Plath's name come to almost all her readers as posthumous events, her work has inevitably been read through the irrevocable, ineradicable and finally enigmatic fact of Plath's suicide. The challenge for her biographers has been to puzzle out the relationship not merely of her life to her art, but of her art to her death” (3). Nevertheless, taking the conflicting real/fictional events aside, it seems the text has the capacity to prevent the bell jar's descent, especially for someone to whom “the world itself is the bad dream” (Plath 193).

The Bell Jar also goes beyond normal generic literary divisions. The novel derives from both biography (observing life from a distance) and autobiography (the usage of first person narration), but it also comprises newspaper headlines, imagined dialogues, and flashbacks. It is riveting and engaging for those readers who build an emotional bond with Esther and support her in her uphill battle with depression. Last but not least, it abolishes the assumption that the form of a diary utilizes its author's creativity best.

What about the feminist context then? Why is *The Bell Jar* not really a feminist auto/biography? Is the female authorship or female protagonist sufficient to classify it as such? The novel certainly contains several elements that could be viewed as feminist. Esther spurns the roles that society wants to impose on her. She rejects the “feminine mystique,” refusing

³ Her suicide was the result of many factors—disenchantment with the man she loved (Ted Hughes), financial insecurity, health problems, and harsh weather conditions at that time in London. Philip J. Baker describes Plath as a person with “mood disturbance” and suicidal tendencies (195).

to become simply a good mother or a wife. Instead, she demands the right to express herself freely as a writer (as a result, she does not take a course in shorthand because it would demean her and limit her potential). In this respect Esther challenges social and cultural conventions, choosing a challenging form to describe her existence (the narration she uses reflecting the fragmentation of her mind). Moreover, *The Bell Jar* definitely meets the basic tenets of a feminist auto/biography espoused by Stanley—it is anti-realist in its disruption of a linear method of presenting events. It is contingent, as it textually recognizes the fragility of facts and arguments. It is also anti-spotlight, as it refracts attention from a single unique subject (Esther's life is in the centre, but it is often interpreted through the lives of others). At the same time, it is not possible to claim that the novel is composed by textually located feminist practices. When Plath wrote the novel the second wave of feminism was at the early stage of development, hence it is hard to estimate its influence on the author. Even though Sylvia Plath's writing obviously predates the discussion about the impact of the distinct feminist auto/biography, her writing (not to mention the life narrative of her fictional impersonation) goes in the direction of the feminist auto/biography model. This is a tangible proof that the auto/biographical effect of empowering the female author may appear in the least expected circumstances.

In the case of Esther Greenwood, the text's value should not be exposed to any limitations. This may explain why Plath's heroine feels trapped in the suffocating atmosphere of *Ladies' Day*—"the big women's magazine that features lush double-page spreads of Technicolor meals, with a different theme and locale each month" (Plath 21). Imposing thematic restraints on the text itself degrades the creative potential of the author; therefore, it is essential to free oneself from all possible constraints in order to voice one's message.

The choice of techniques used to introduce the notion of exerting authority over the body of the text is also significant. The usage of the auto/biographical mode is just one of the main components to gain autonomy through writing. This notion is compatible with Cixous's statement that a "[w]oman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (347). To liberate one's voice, the author creates a distinct written self (fictive or not) that gains control over the matter of the text. The author of the text naturally wields power over her production and amplifies this potential through introducing powerful characters who also possess such control. Plath does this skilfully, holds the reins of the narrative through her literary alter ego, Esther Greenwood, a being functioning on manifold levels—a separate fictional being and a character "constructed through the perception and recollection of

others” (Evans 84). Even though Esther seems to crumble under the pressure of strong personalities around her (her mother, her boyfriend, other men she meets), she manages to preserve some space for her special needs. The strong relation to the text is one of the decisive factors. Esther tells the story of her apprenticeship in the beauty magazine, difficulties in complying with the standards manufactured for women, and, eventually, her mental collapse caused by the discrepancy between her vision of happiness and the harshness of post-war life. The reader is provided with a minute account of these occurrences and her emotional life.⁴ Despite being at times somewhat detached from her experiences, Esther keeps a firm grasp over her story, which helps her survive confrontation with an unfriendly world. Mary Evans points out that Esther “assume[s] a capacity for action which is apparently free of the control of others” (86). The narrator proves that she can free herself not only from the constraints imposed by “significant others . . . peer groups, institutions, [and] . . . a normative culture” (Evans 83), but also from the pressure of the text. She fails to write her own novel, but her life narrative resists outside influences and flows steadily unobstructed. Esther wants to become a real self, not just a product of others’ expectations. In order to achieve this, she has to classify herself within the matter of her narrative. At this point, she makes an important transition—keeping command over the text enables her to reaffirm control over her body and mind. She liberates herself through writing as it aids her in finally declaring “I am, I am, I am” (Plath 199).

FACING THE AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL IN JANET FRAME’S NOVEL

A discussion of auto/biography as both an empowering technique of writing and a tool to regain one’s own territory within the male-dominated world of literary practices can be extended to other authors. A similar approach to written forms of expression can be found in novels by New Zealand author Janet Frame. Frame, who wrote a series of strictly auto/biographical books (*To the Is-land*, *An Angel at my Table*, and *The Envoy from Mirror City*), also wrote a few novels in semi-auto/biographical tone, deeply rooted in real-life events and personal traumatic experience.⁵ In the 1940s Frame was diagnosed with schizophrenia; however, years later, psychiatrists in London confirmed that this diagnosis was incorrect (Ross 425). Philip J. Baker refers to her mental illness in terms of psy-

⁴ Her partnership with her boyfriend, Buddy Willard, collapses. Moreover, Esther is unable to build a relation with other men (with a young sailor or with Irwin, the first man she sleeps with) or friendship with other girls (she cannot communicate with fellow trainees at *Ladies’ Day*).

⁵ Janet Frame’s two sisters drowned and her brother suffered from epilepsy (Ross 425).

chosis and a deep sense of isolation (244). Nonetheless, since adolescence she spent many years in various New Zealand psychiatric institutions. As a result of these events, she grew up with a strong feeling of separation and marginalization. “[H]er need for [isolation] seems initially to have grown out of negative personal experience, it is encouraged by her reading and by her ambition to become a writer. It is, moreover, reinforced by the local cultural and literary climate. Isolation, both on geographical and on a social level, is frequently thematized in the New Zealand literature”⁶ (Oettli-van Delden 74). *Faces in the Water* explores this dissociation, and offers a graphic depiction of a long chain of mental collapses, nervous breakdowns, and long stays in mental institutes. But the novel goes far beyond a record of the traumas of everyday existence in hospital and transfer from one ward to another. It is also a successful attempt to “investigate” the body of a text, to invoke its potential to tame the demons that were born by overbearing therapy, electric shock treatment and threat of lobotomy. At some point the text becomes a means of reconciliation with suffering. Confinement in the asylum leaves a deep scar in the protagonist’s mind, who neither pretends it never happened, nor distances herself from these events.

In *Faces in the Water* Janet Frame, just like Plath in *The Bell Jar*, constructs her fictive alter ego. Istina Mavet recalls events from the Cliffshaven and Treecroft institutes. She does not avoid shocking details and her narrative is tense; fear of lobotomy, the peculiar behaviour of the sick, antipathy between stern nurses and distrustful patients—these elements strengthen the narration and endow it with drama. Istina exists on the borderline between sanity and madness. She takes the concurrent roles of a suffering subject and a careful observer who writes to keep firm grasp of reality. Yet at the same time she confesses in her final words:

I looked away from [other patients] and tried not to think of them and repeated to myself what one of the nurses had told me, ‘when you leave hospital you must forget all you have ever seen, put it out of your mind completely as if it never happened, and go and live a normal life in the outside world.’ And by what have I written in this document you will see, won’t you, that I have obeyed her? (Frame 253–54).

⁶ The sense of isolation is also present in *The Bell Jar*. Esther’s suffering stems from the strong feeling of not belonging and being unable to maintain any closer personal relations. It is amplified by her inexperience—she is unable to write her own novel due to lack of basic knowledge about life: “How could I write about life when I’d never had a love affair or a baby or even seen anybody die?” (Plath 99).

Istina implies that her narrative, tangible proof of her physical and mental experiences, is also a burden. She has an ambiguous attitude towards her own narrative—it paradoxically releases and relieves her innermost thoughts and feelings whilst simultaneously amassing a heavy load for her shoulders. This ambiguity makes Frame's novel even more intriguing. The author uses certain technical devices to hold the attention of the reader, and in this respect her novel follows the grain of Liz Stanley's auto/biography (even though it departs from it in particular ways, too). Despite the relative linearity of narration, Janet Frame resorts to several other techniques to challenge her reader, like her uncompromising approach to punctuation (she often refrains from using any punctuation signs at all) or very long sentences. The words that end *Faces in the Water* are crucial if one wants to comprehend the complexity of this narrative. The text surpasses "the restoration of reason and . . . [underlines] the loss of the compound personality that is alive in the madhouse and is characterized by prodigious empathy with the world" (Delrez 23).

The narrative transgresses the reminiscent or therapeutic function. "This could be seen as simply furthering the historical readings of women's writing as emotional and somehow uncontrolled rather than the intellectual response of the artist" (Unsworth 26). Through writing, Frame (and at the same time Istina) defends her subjectivity. "Frame presents a world in which interpretation of events and therefore the reality of individuals is entirely dependent on point of view and consequently cannot be seen as objective" (Unsworth 28). Istina Mavet, just like Esther Greenwood, longs for a development of her own voice and handles the text as a tool to shape and liberate it. "[She] . . . tries to find her subject position by comparing herself to others, by anxiously seeking signs of acceptance or rejection in the behaviour of the people around her. She cannot take her stand because she is completely dependent on the reactions of others" (Reif-Hülser 191). In Frame's novel Monika Reif-Hülser observes "a passionate desire to be seen, to be heard, to be recognized [T]he possibility [not only] to recapture or to negate, but also to love and to understand and thus transcend isolation" (181). Istina admits:

I will write about the season of peril. I was put in hospital because a great gap opened in the ice floe between myself and the other people whom I watched, with their world, drifting away through a violet-coloured sea where hammer-head sharks in tropical ease swam side by side with the seals and the polar bears. I was alone on the ice (Frame 10).

Istina appears to write to reconstruct her identity (she worked as a teacher, but mental instability shattered her classroom persona) and to

bridge the gap that had grown between herself and others. Text becomes a means to overcome isolation, discordance, friendlessness.

But through writing Istina also resists the incessant implications of her madness. Text offers her a possibility to underline that her stay at the hospital for “loonies” (as she calls it herself) was a serious mistake and an abuse of power. Still, there exists a strong bond between her narrative and lack of sanity.

There is an aspect of madness which is seldom mentioned in fiction because it would damage the romantic popular idea of the insane as a person whose speech appeals as immediately poetic; but it is seldom the easy Opheliana recited like the pages of a seed catalog or the outpourings of Crazy Janes who provide, in fiction, an outlet for poetic abandon (Frame 12).

194

Istina, despite her combat with depression, possesses a capability to produce text, going beyond down-to-earth presentations of illness, and enriching her narrative with intertextual references to literary classics, eg. the works of William Shakespeare. The textual power of other texts translates directly onto Istina’s textual being. Close contact with literature helps her write her own narrative, and it also fills in the void between herself and “normal people.” Hence the feeling of desperation when one day she is denied an opportunity to look at fresh volumes brought to the hospital library.

There I had been standing . . . when suddenly a library had appeared just outside the window and a tweedy fairy godmother had not denied my request to look inside. But the villain arrived and turned me away because I had not the status necessary for people who view shelves of books. I was a patient and could not be trusted; I was a child and would not grasp the content, the essential meaning, of the books (Frame 241).

Here Istina touches upon another crucial element of daily reality in a hospital, namely, treating patients not as independent entities but as infantile beings with no intellectual capacity. The written words, both in the form of a book and one’s own narrative support Istina’s struggle to overcome the stigmatization, develop her own territory, and escape a simplified classification of her as a mad woman.⁷

Frame’s/Istina’s narrative relates to Helen Cixous’s observations and advice. In her influential treatise *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous says

⁷ There is a Gothic quality to Istina’s situation. She resembles a Gothic damsel in distress who has to withstand the pressures of the unfriendly collective villain, embodied by the hospital employers and society (who try to prove she is insane without looking further into her real mental condition).

that “[a] feminine text cannot fail to be more subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written, it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments—there’s no other way. There’s no room for her if she’s not a he? If she’s a her/she, it’s in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter” (357). To Istina Mavet writing is also more than subversive—it goes beyond an ideological masculinity and abolishes the “institution” of male writing. It is more than a woman’s attempt to free her forces through the process of narrative creation. It is writing to remain sane, to endure the reification she undergoes due to her mental instability. “The carefully constructed image of Janet as a writer is in fact used by Frame to conceal the Implicit Author. In the guise of Janet she attempts to present an acceptable public image of herself as someone who was unjustly certified as insane, but who managed to overcome this social victimization through writing” (Oettli-van Dalden 89–90).

Faces in the Water may be intriguing from a textual standpoint, but it also encountered criticism of certain aspects of its construction, for example the accumulation of facts describing the daily existence of patients (vide reviews by Joan Stevens). Simone Oettli-van Dalden refers also to the conflict between the external and internal worlds presented by Frame, resulting in a “blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction” (90). Yet, it would be unfair and patronizing to analyze this novel simply as a disjointed collection of haphazardly placed trivia and overlook its intertextuality and technical mastery. In this fictional auto/biography Frame presents a fascinating cultural construct and locates her protagonist in a challenging textual context. Once again the auto/biographical is used instinctively, but the result is inspiring and productive.

AUTO/BIOGRAPHY AS A TOOL TO RECLAIM ONE’S AUTHORITY OVER THE TEXT

To conclude, it is possible to write a distinct fictional auto/biography that resists classification as a feminist auto/biography, yet still possesses some of its qualities; one which empowers and endows its author with means to control the text production process and freely express strength. Stanley states that “whether these possibilities come to fruition as actualities depends upon how willing—not how able—feminist auto/biographers and writers about auto/biography are to put into practice feminist principles and precepts, and how concerned readers are to demand that they do” (Stanley 255). Writing may become a tool to bridge the gap or break the silence in which women, both as gendered beings and authors, are situated. Writing may actually contribute to making the female voice heard

(Jones 83). The production of a text may involve a feeling of pleasure, *jouissance*. It may also serve as a way to escape the overpowerment of the phallogocentric world (or maybe even phallogocentric as the world keeps revolving around the male aspect of writing), the world dominated and determined by men's laws. Last but not least, success lies where the author is able to overcome "[the] 'anxiety of authorship'—a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a precursor [in the male-oriented world of literature], the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (Gilbert and Gubar 23). *The Bell Jar* and *Faces in the Water* as texts push the boundaries of female writing, and their protagonists resist fixed identity categories. Maybe this is not enough to acquire the label of feminist texts, but definitely sufficient to merit acclaim.

WORKS CITED

Aird, Eileen M. "Poem for a Birthday' to *Three Women*: Development in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath." *Sylvia Plath. The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Linda Wagner-Martin. London: Routledge, 1998. 191–203.

Ames, Lois. "Notes Toward a Biography." *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*. Ed. Charles Newman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971. 155–73.

Baisnée, Valérie. *Gendered Resistance: The Autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir, Maya Angelou, Janet Frame and Marguerite Duras*. Amsterdam: Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft—Rodopi, 1997.

Barker, Philip J. *Assessment in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing: In Search of the Whole Person*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes, 2004.

Britzolakis, Christina. *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning*. Oxford: Oxford English Monographs, 2002.

Conley, Verena Andermatt. *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 347–62.

Delrez, Mark. *Manifold Utopia: The Novels of Janet Frame*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.

Evans, Mary. "Extending Autobiography: A Discussion of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*. Ed. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. London: Routledge, 2000. 76–88.

Federman, Raymond. *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*. State University of New York Press, 1993.

Frame, Janet. *Faces in the Water*. London: Women's, 2000.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 21–32.

Holland, Peter. *King Lear and Its Afterlife*. Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine." *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Gayle Green and Coppelia Khan. London: Routledge, 1985. 80–118.

Kirk, Connie Ann. *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*. Westport: Greenwood, 2004.

Marcus, Laura. "Feminist Aesthetics and the New Realism." *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. London: Routledge, 1992. 11–25.

Oettli-van Delden, Simone. *Surfaces of Strangeness: Janet Frame and the Rhetoric of Madness*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003.

Peel, Robin. *Writing Back: Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics*. Rosemont Publishing, 2002.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. Toronto: Bantam, 1973.

Reif-Hülser, Monika. "'Glass Beads of Fantasy': Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* or: The Enigma of Identity." *REAL Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature vol. 12*. Ed. Jürgen Schlaeger. Berlin: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1996. 179–202.

Ross, Robert L. *Colonial and Postcolonial Fiction: An Anthology*. New York: Garland, 1999.

Stanley, Liz. *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

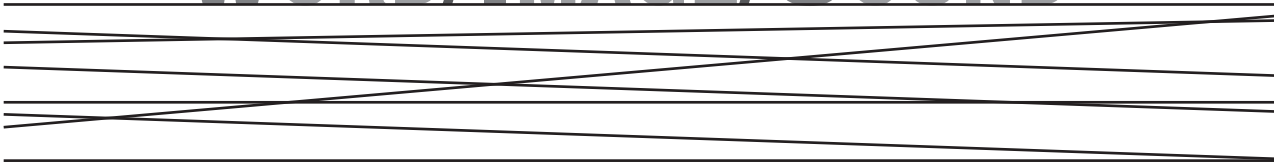
Unsworth, Jane. "A Reflection on Theories of Autobiography with Reference to the Work of Janet Frame." *The Uses of Autobiography*. Ed. Julia Swindells. London: Taylor and Francis, 1995. 13–24.

Van Dyne, Susan R. "The Problem of Biography." *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Jo Gill. Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 3–20.

Whitford, Margaret. *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Yalom, Marilyn. "Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, and Related Poems." *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Diane Wood Middlebrook and Marilyn Yalom. Stanford: University of Michigan Press, 1995. 167–82.

WORD/IMAGE/SOUND



Paul Tiessen

Wilfrid Laurier University

Memoir and the Re-reading of Fiction: Rudy Wiebe's *of this earth* and *Peace Shall Destroy Many*

ABSTRACT

Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe's award-winning memoir, *of this earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest* (2006), invites readers into a warm subjective realm in which a meditative Wiebe (b. 1934) recounts his growing-up years from birth to age thirteen. As self-reflexive "rememberer," Wiebe explores the sensate freshness of a boy's ways of seeing, touching, and, not least, hearing the world. The young Wiebe lives with his parents and siblings and neighbours in an emotionally warm Christian community of 1920s immigrants to Canada who have fled from the Soviet Union in the wake of the 1917 Revolution and who struggle for economic survival in a remote corner of rural Saskatchewan during the 1930s and 1940s. But Wiebe's memoir of childhood is not only autobiography and social history; it is also a linguistic text that subtly invites readers to look beyond its textual boundaries to his earlier work. In particular, it has the effect of carrying alert readers back to the setting—at least physically and geographically if not altogether socially and culturally—of Wiebe's first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962). That early novel was a caustic work notoriously controversial especially among Mennonite readers in Canada when it appeared almost a half-century ago. The 2006 memoir—with intertextual allusion—invites readers to recall especially one layer of that early novel barely noticed by readers, a layer eclipsed and partially hidden by the dominant narrative. Specifically, it invites readers to see the virtually sinless and prelapsarian world of the idealistic young Hal Wiens whose idyllic life in the fictional spaces of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* goes unnoticed because it is so very much in the shadow of the doubts and tensions that inform the much larger world of his spiritually troubled older brother, nineteen-year old Thom Wiens. The memoir pushes readers into re-thinking the reception of that novel, and into finding anew beneath its severe and satiric treatment of the aus-

tere adult world the linguistic and spiritual joy of life given shape in the playful perceptions of the young Hal. The memoir becomes a stimulus for a transformational re-reading of the novel. This essay explores the two works in light of each other and of conventions that govern the two respective genres. It attempts, also, to account for the reading strategies that Wiebe's 2006 memoir proposes to readers of his first novel, and for key influences informing the two respective works.

ABSTRACT

202

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.
 (T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding")

"That was so long ago, it is almost no longer so," is the English version of the "Mennonite proverb" that Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe (b. 1934) uses as one of the two epigraphs to his award-winning 2006 memoir, *of this earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest*. The epigraph is rooted in the Low German of Wiebe's people, people who in the late 1700s moved from the Vistula Delta (where they had moved 200 years before from the Netherlands) to Russia and (as in the case of his parents) to Canada between 1923 and 1930: "Daut wia soo lang tridj, daut es meist nijch meea soo." His second epigraph is from "Conversation #2," taken from Robert Kroetsch's *The Snowbird Poems*: "What do you do for a living, I asked. / I remember, she replied."¹

¹ In a Foreword to his novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe provides a one-page description of the historic origins of the Mennonites in the novel, who stem from early Anabaptists: "The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were the extreme evangelical wing of the Reformation movement. The name 'Mennonite' was early attached to them, after Menno Simons, their sole early theological leader to survive persecution. . . . They were driven from Switzerland to America, from Holland and northern Germany to Prussia, then Russia, finally to North and South America. Wherever they went they carried peculiar customs, a peculiar language, a peculiar faith in the literal meaning of the Bible. . . . The Mennonites portrayed in this book . . . could belong to any one of several groups that came to Canada from Russia in the 1920s." These are also the Mennonites of *of this earth*.

In 2007 Wiebe won the \$25,000 Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction for *of this earth*. During his career Wiebe, who has received many honours, has twice won the Canadian Governor General's Award for Fiction: in 1973 for his novel *The Temptations of*

With these epigraphs drawing attention to remembering and narrating, Wiebe invites the reader to move forward into the warm subjective interiority of his memoir, where he recounts his growing-up years, from birth to age thirteen. It is a memoir suffused in fantasy-like beauty and delicate softness, with the adult “rememberer” (re-)constructing the sensate freshness of a child’s ways of seeing, touching, and, not least, hearing. It is, at the same time, a memoir of a Christian community of a sort that is ideal for a growing child: safe, sensitive, generous, supportive, hard-working, spiritually and socially stimulating, emotionally warm and accepting.

Surprisingly, however, and without overt warning of any kind, with these epigraphs Wiebe, in taking us forward, simultaneously invites us to look back. Through gestures of intertextuality within the memoir, he nudges us into considering one of his literary worlds that has largely bypassed readers’ attention, most crucially the world of the child in his first

Big Bear; in 1994 for his novel *A Discovery of Strangers*. This year (2009) Wiebe, who lives in Edmonton, Alberta, received the \$30,000 Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Distinguished Artist Award. Wiebe is a Member of the Order of Canada.

My essay is based on my presentation to a special session on Canadian Mennonite Literature organized by the Christianity and Literary Study Group and held at the annual meetings of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English in May 2009 at Carleton University in Ottawa. It echoes some of the concerns about subjectivity, identity, and naming in my earlier essay, “The Naming of Rudy Wiebe,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7 (1989): 115–22 (which was published also in *Short Fiction in the New Literatures in English*. Ed. Jacqueline Bardolph. Nice: 1989. 133–39). It is a companion essay to my recently-published “[T]here are certain things Mennonite children are kept from seeing’: Sexuality, Seeing, and Saying in Rudy Wiebe’s *of this earth* and *Peace Shall Destroy Many*,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008): 133–42. There I explore, in part, Thom’s yearning for a discourse concerning matters of sex and romance: “Words about sex in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* emerge, when they emerge at all, only indirectly, in fits and starts, sometimes furtively and slyly, sometimes obscenely and vulgarly. Any tender words about sex, about sexual attraction, are sought in vain by the protagonist, Thom Wiens, for the language of tender expression remains an inexpressible fantasy. When Thom wants to speak with his pal about a girl he finds attractive, ‘to merely talk about her in an uninhibited manner as about anyone else,’ he finds that the social presuppositions of his world do not admit the structuring or expression of that kind of talk: ‘If people would just mention things about her,’ he thinks to himself, his mind on the beautiful Annamarie Lepp; ‘but single Mennonite men did not talk at length about girls to one another.’ Though ‘longing desperately’ to speak of girls, the two male friends, automatically censoring what they say, turn quickly to ‘talking casually about the harvest.’ In this first of his major works beginning to write a Mennonite history of sex as a word, a word that cannot be spoken, Wiebe represents the word with a dash, the dash—cold, stiff, detached—providing a chasm representing that which cannot be said. There is, here, no revelling in a liberated sense of the spirit or the senses.”

For a detailed study of Wiebe’s language, especially his interest in “monoglossic” and “heteroglossic” discourses, see Penny van Toorn, *Rudy Wiebe and the Historicity of the Word* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995).

novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. It has bypassed readers' attention because it is a world that he hinted at yet simultaneously held in abeyance forty-four years earlier, in that 1962 novel. I am thinking of the barely-glimpsed world, in that novel, of young Hal Wiens. The virtually sinless and prelapsarian world of the memoir is a large version of the wondrous world of the idealistic young Hal, but Hal's world is sharply constrained, his voice pinched back. Further, Hal's is a world that is overwhelmingly eclipsed by the severe world of the novel's troubled protagonist, Hal's nineteen-year old brother, Thom Wiens. Thus, we get to know Hal's world fully, as it were, only in the memoir.

The memoir provides us with ingredients and signposts that implicitly or explicitly direct us to that 1962 novel, the meanings of which Wiebe in essence urges us to understand anew. In its entering into conversation with the novel, the memoir gives us the sense that a vital if barely-noticeable subjectivity teems beneath the jagged surfaces of the sternly programmatic bulk and thrust of that austere early novel, a novel concerning the blind language of power and control in a small religious community in a remote corner of Saskatchewan. There, most of our attention is taken up by bitter and confrontational moments along its spiritually stark vistas where cacophonous confusion and conflict of various adult voices prevail.²

Whether we let the epigraphs deliver us forward into the 2006 memoir or, in effect, back to selected portions of the 1962 novel, they carry us to the rhythms and cadences of an idyllic world that tugs at our own yearnings for innocence. It is true that Wiebe recognizes that such a world can belong only to the child, and then, to be sure, only to the child recalled by the adult—but nonetheless it is a world that, without irony, he presents and realizes in its fullness in the memoir. It is a world suffused with the wonders of language, and shaped by the sounds of the voice.

Wiebe explains his understanding of a child's relation to language—first the sounds, then the meanings—at many points in the memoir. He suggests that a child at birth falls into a kind of language bath, an “immersion of words” (*of this earth* 131). Wiebe as memoirist revels in the texture and aura that his family and community and church produced

² The blurb on the back cover summarizes the concerns of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*: “Fleeing from privation and hardship in Russia, a small group of Mennonites have settled in the rich farming lands of Saskatchewan during the years of the Depression. The community has thrived, while still adhering to its ancient traditions and beliefs. / Then comes the year 1944, and into the lives of a people dedicated to peace and non-violence come the increasingly powerful threats and challenges from the war-torn world outside. Through a careful weaving of events, Mr. Wiebe reveals the violence that lurks just beneath the surface in the lives of this Mennonite community. The ebb and flow of times and events and their effect on this intensely religious people are described in passages of power and great vibrancy.”

with the lavish soundscape of their words and songs. He uses limpid layers of language to let words from the past sift through and mingle with his play of words in the present. “Herr, Gott, du bist unsere Zuflucht für und für,” he writes in his prologue, “Lord, God, you have been our refuge in all generations.” Words such as these from Psalm 90 he heard, read aloud and recited, at home and in church, “before [he] could speak any language” (3). Words were at the heart of the sensory net into which he fell as a child.

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, a parallel soundscape is intermittently present in the ethos that defines young Hal. But it is mainly the world of Thom that we hear and feel in the novel. However, Thom has difficulty in hearing and feeling his own world, so bereft is he of any language that he might require for such understanding. Tragically, the dynamics of the community in which he lives have stripped him of a complexly nuanced and subtly analytical and humanely critical language that he only fumblingly seeks. Hal, younger and not yet any kind of threat to the power structures in the community of the novel, can get away with expressing an excess of unbridled and undisciplined language. For Thom, the community’s strict dogma and discipline have led him to a scarcity of words, a shortage of linguistic expression, a paucity of narrative choices, and have reduced the range of his emotional life.³

What makes an examination of the novel in light of the memoir particularly compelling and urgent (and, to be sure, ironic) is the essentially autobiographical nature of both texts. The novel’s material setting—its place in Saskatchewan, its time, its demographic, and, implicitly, many of its people—is more or less identical to that of the memoir, published 44 years later. Hence, if we come to the exuberant memoir after having read the acerbic novel, we might at first wonder at Wiebe’s uninhibited sense of rejoicing—of his awe at the very nature of the grandeur and mystery of existence even in physically difficult times—that is sustained throughout the very long text of the memoir.

But some of the memoir’s details—the overlapping subjectivity with the “Hal” portions of the novel, or allusions to parallel images or events in the novel—make clear that Wiebe would have us re-read those portions of the novel and, in the end, re-read and understand afresh the novel as

³ That the dominant trajectory and tone of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* offer a world at odds with those of the memoir is established by its epigraph, which stands imperturbably and starkly at odds with the epigraphs of the memoir. Embedding the words of the novel’s title, the epigraph is an Old Testament passage, drawn from Daniel 8: “And in the latter time, a king / shall stand up. / And his power shall be mighty / and he shall prosper. / And he shall magnify himself in his heart, / and by peace shall destroy many: / But he shall be broken without hand.”

a whole. With the memoir, then, Wiebe provides a bold and dramatic invitation to re-think his controversial first novel with which he came to public prominence nearly a half-century ago. It is an invitation to re-enter and explore again certain lyrical layers of the novel where plot and story and narrative trajectory seem to come to a stop, and where poetic utterance, an unbridled embrace of the joy of sensual existence within a natural idyll of sky and tree, wind and water, begin.

* * *

Thom Wiens's interior world, which dominates the novel, is one of painful edges. It is objectified in whatever causes him to stumble when he "feel[s] something abrupt against his boot" (*Peace* 82) rising out of a swamp just beyond the slough where he and his friend Pete Block are cutting hay. Pete, seeing Thom trip, offers a dully pragmatic response: "Shouldn't be any rocks here in the swamp" (82). It is, in fact, not a rock, but a skull. Thom, who surmises that it must come from a wood-buffalo, imagines, too, that it might fit in to the story of some unknown Indian hunter decades ago (83). He laments that the words to tell such a story are not accessible to him nor, seemingly, to anyone in Canada: "Not one remembered word of how generations upon generations [of Indians] lived and died" (83). Thom is aware that about "white men" (82) there is a plenteous supply of words in the "stacks of European history books to read" (83).

Pete, at ease with the community's prejudices against Indians, challenges Thom's would-be imaginative flight through space and time and a possible—perhaps golden—Indian past by reducing the focus to the here and now. He scoffs at Thom's yearning for story-telling by scoffing at the Indians on the neighbouring reserve who, he says, would stoop to any kind of subterfuge just to steal five chickens from his dad. Thom is shocked by the incommensurability of the two themes, the infinite vastness of a unique but unknown history against the "conventional triviality" summed up by Pete's anxiety over missing five chickens. But he cannot find the means—the story, any story—to respond to Pete's reductive criteria for understanding an Other. Frustratedly recognizing his incapacity to respond with words, "Thom hurled the skull as far as he could" (*Peace* 83), so that it might lie safely in the still-unmown hay on the next piece of land, which belongs to his own family, and await the arrival there perhaps of some new language. Pete, held back by his dull imagination, only snorts at Thom, telling him that it will ruin his mower when he runs over it. Thom is filled with anger, but is trapped in his claustrophobic feeling of inarticulate confusion.⁴

⁴ The recently departed schoolteacher, Joseph Dueck, who is present in the novel in epistolary and flashback formulations, does provide a model of eloquent articulation

When Thom's own hay mower later gets caught not on that skull but on the root of a tree, his neighbour, the kindly Pastor Lepp leaves his own mower to come over to help Thom. Suddenly: "Without warning, without looking up, Thom said, 'What are the traditions of the fathers?'" (*Peace* 86). The pastor is startled, but nonetheless sympathetically engages Thom in a lengthy conversation about the beliefs and actions of the local church community. Privately, he claims that he wishes for Thom an effective English-language mission in teaching children from the Indian community. However, he declares that, when he speaks from the pulpit on a Sunday, and speaks exclusively in German, he must side with the rigid structures of that community. Thom is startled by the gentle pastor's capacity for moving so illogically and tight-heartedly against his own private sensibilities.

Pastor Lepp and Pete Block, like other adults of Thom's religious community drawn inexorably into the tight orbit of the church, are obsessively controlled by Pete's father, Deacon Peter Block, who polices both the language and the silences in the community. Although both Pastor Lepp and the young Pete Block are at intervals close to the serious and sincere Thom Wiens, they demonstrate soon enough that they belong to the fear-driven camp of the "massively domineering" Deacon ("Author" 65). Thom is endlessly stymied by these people who are controlled by Deacon Block, people who produce in him his seething crisis of spirit and conscience, and so alienate and isolate him inside his own tormented mind and body. Wiebe uses the "uncertain . . . confused . . . ambivalent" Thom to pursue what is for him the "quest for truth" at the heart of the narrative ("Author" 65), but it is a quest that Thom does not have the language to fulfill.

Speaking to an audience at the University of Manitoba's St. John's College twenty-five years after the publication of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe provided touchstones in the novel that I shall pick up in this essay. He alluded repeatedly to the episode of Thom standing in the hay slough and contemplating the buffalo skull, and seemed to intimate that there was something of the novelist—of an early version of Rudy Wiebe himself, as it were—in that moment. It was a moment that included, for Thom, the rudiments of story-telling, for, as Wiebe put it, "that half-rotted skull does suggest greater possibilities." That moment, with the skull in his

and visionary thought. His spirit hovers over the novel, but he is absent from the narrative diegetic.

It is interesting to note that already in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* Wiebe alluded to the story of Big Bear (111). In *of this earth* Wiebe marvels at his ignorance at travelling, without knowing the significance, at age eleven and a half, on a bus alongside Indian lands where Big Bear had been born 120 years before. Yet Big Bear would, says Wiebe, bringing to mind much of his work, including his *The Temptations of Big Bear*, "someday inhabit half a century of my personal, my writing, life" (*of this earth* 325).

hands, lets Thom begin to sense something beyond “mere bone,” beyond even the once-massive body of the beast, right to an incipient sense of a world made up of “that surrounding landscape, that air, those particular people [on the reserve] with their desires, their endless human necessities” (“Skull” 20). Wiebe claimed that Thom begins to catch a glimpse, however faint and fleeting, of life beyond the reductively programmed religious absolutes of his community: “Thom in the swamp does what a novelist can do: lends us eyes, ears, tongue” (20). But, overall, the dangerous swamp with its sucking mud and seeping water becomes an image for what keeps Thom from breaking outside the so-called Christian dogma that clings to him and entraps him. For all Thom’s seeing, he cannot advance to any kind of significant saying. As Wiebe pointed out to his Winnipeg audience, Thom remained trapped inside a conflict-ridden and claustrophobic world, paralyzed by “suppression and avoidance” (*Peace* 238).⁵

When Thom, in some desperation, does cast about for stories by which he might seek some kind of redemption and release, he finds little solace in his searching. His mind flashes back to stories he read in some “pale-blue booklets” buried on the bottom shelf of his scrawny school library—stories of Greek mythology (*Peace* 84). When the story of Prometheus flashes to mind, he can only see himself as both the giant who has carried the divine fire to man and the eagle eating the giant’s liver, “daily ravaging . . . the writhing body” (85).

Along with the skull, two other grim images and motifs that leap from the pages in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* include the story of Elizabeth and her father and of the Christmas pageant that is juxtaposed to the violent episode in the barn. In his twenty-fifth anniversary recollections, Wiebe identified all three—the skull episode, the Elizabeth/Deacon Block relationship, the combination of Christmas-nativity childlike sweetness and futile violence—as belonging to a string of “broken suggestions of stories” that he had written during his student days of the 1950s for Professor F.M. Salter’s writing classes at the University of Alberta.

But Wiebe identified also a fourth, that of the two young boys’ frog hunt so evocatively told in the first Prelude of the novel. The description

⁵ Wiebe could not prevent himself from pointing out that Thom, holding the skull, does not attempt to evoke Hamlet, nor the jester Yorick, with an “Alas, poor Bison, I knew him . . .” (“Skull” 20).

During that anniversary lecture in Winnipeg Wiebe confessed that, once it had appeared in Canada, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* provided even its author with lessons about words, and became for him “both an exaltation and a trauma” (“Skull” 8): “With my wife and two infant children, I was living in Winnipeg and editing a weekly church paper when *Peace Shall Destroy Many* was published in September, 1962. By March, 1963, I was no longer editor and by August we had left Canada. O, words have power, power beyond what I had imagined in three years of wrestling with them [while writing that book]” (8).

of the two young boys, one fair, one dark, on their spring hunt for frogs' eggs (9–10), stands in sharp contrast to the other three. The rhythms are more relaxed, a spirit of lightness and brightness hovers over all.

Wiebe, contextualizing that Prelude in his 1987 recollections, said alluringly:

Perhaps only those who have lived through the cold, the darkness of a northern prairie winter can comprehend the miracle of warm earth and water and spring green leaves and frogs singing; can comprehend the incredible feeling that the bright morning spring air fondling your nostrils releases you into. ("Skull" 11)

With those words Wiebe was, in effect, not only summarizing a minor strand of attentiveness in the novel, but also anticipating his memoir—for the spirit and tone, the rhythm and temper, of the opening Prelude of the novel are, so to speak, carried over into *of this earth*, where they are vastly expanded. Indeed, in the memoir, it seems like we are held in a carefree world of "lookin' for frogs' eggs again." Descriptions like this one, of the coming of spring—as though taken from *Fern Hill*—suffuse the entire memoir:

... one morning the world had rolled over into bright green to the music of frogs singing between the rushes of every flooded slough. The creeks ran loud as ducks gabbling under the plank culverts, and before I was aware of it my creased pants were crumpled from not having been rolled up far enough when I waded in the mossy, sinking slough, muddy and slimed with frogs' eggs. (209)

* * *

In the memoir, gone is the anxiety that knots the stomach—never mind the spirit and the soul, the mind and the heart—of the 1962 novel's protagonist Thom Wiens. Gone is Thom's clumsy groping for truth with his awkward mix of "sincerity, uncertainty, confusion, mistakes, and renewed attempts" ("Author" 65). For example, although the troubling heft and burdensome weight given to the five stolen chickens are hinted at, they now romantically link local Indians to the nomadic Bashkirs of Russia. Mildly bothersome details about chickens now become lost in the haze of silly gossip of a "talky" neighbour (*of this earth* 311).

Gone too, or rather, transformed into lightly-handled vestigial residue, are those three dark elements, wrapped in dour sourness, that I have already taken (if somewhat arbitrarily) from Wiebe's 1987 list.

First: gone altogether is what Wiebe has called "the fiction that determines the entire body of the novel, . . . the story of Elizabeth and her father"

(“Skull” 11). In the novel, Elizabeth dies in the pangs of her secret pregnancy, the result of her sexual union with the Metis hired hand, that she has kept hidden from her hyper-patriarchal father. There are deaths in the memoir, certainly. Especially significant to Wiebe is the death of his dear sister Helen, a death that is described with a sad melancholy, but not with any kind of hopelessness or despair. In the memoir, a conversational Wiebe—relaxing in his own deep sense of personal being, of spiritual and material rootedness—simply trusts his audience with the details of his life. Comfortable with his own control of language, he gives the sad tragedy in the family a cradle for coming to rest within the folds of his gentle recollections. By contrast, in the 1962 novel, Thom’s—and by implication, the reader’s—route to knowledge is brutal, confrontational, filled with shock, with disgust, and hypocrisies, with false taboos and manufactured fears of transgression.

Second: the pale-blue booklets with their terrifying images of Promethean self-violation are back, but are now filled with the narrator’s hilarious day-dreams of Theseus and the Minotaur (203), or his happy experiences of reading and re-reading of “laughing, golden Aphrodite, the irresistible goddess of love and beauty,” in love with the “bent and blackened” Hephaestus (212).

Third: a Christmas program followed by violence in a barn (recalling the Christmas program at the end of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*) is now but a shimmering speculation among nostalgic memories about whether in fact there had been an actual Christmas program during the fall when Wiebe was nine years old. Perhaps there was no teacher at all that term—perhaps because there had been some kind of trouble. “It might be that the Christmas concert went wrong, something happened between a soldier on leave and the teacher, in the barn, while Santa Claus was handing out Christmas bags to us little kids,” Wiebe says with a deliberate and teasing vagueness (213). For Wiebe—offering readers the persona of a slightly bemused and wise elder statesman, or of the well-tempered memoir writer—there is now no sense of sexual tension, no pained exploration of hypocrisies, power, dogma. Only this casual reflection that includes his hinting at connections between 2006 memoir and 1962 novel: “that may well be a shadow incarnation of the ending of my first novel—but the fact is I can remember neither teacher nor problem” (213).

Wiebe has liberated and revealed and explored fully in his memoir a spirit that only lingered along some of the happier edges of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. In the memoir he in effect offers a recuperative reading of the spirit of Thom’s younger brother Hal, to whom early reviewers remained, as Hildegard E. Tiessen points out, oblivious. His name, an abbreviated form of Helmut, suggests, in the German, “bright spirit” (Tiessen 171). Hal is a positive force representing renewal for the com-

munity and, at the end, announcing the end of its isolation, she observes (Tiessen 171–72).

Language flows freely and non-judgmentally for Hal, as it does not for his brother Thom—who is earnest, searching, quick to physical anger, slow to find generous spaces where words can grow and flourish. Hal, playing hooky from school, is the first speaker in that opening Prelude, where he cries out with a jubilant, “Let’s go!” (*Peace* 10). This certainly is not Eliot’s “Let us go then, you and I.” Racing along barefoot in the field that the agonized Thom is ploughing, and transforming himself from “Indian” to fighter-plane as he runs lightly on the earth, Hal is the first speaker in the narrative proper, too, carrying himself forward in an embodying gush of words. Even a word like “half-breed,” commonly used negatively by people in his community, holds no ethical or moral value for Hal (15). And it is Hal, ever ready to brim with words (on those occasions when we encounter him), who offers the novel’s closing benediction. As the Wiens family, Thom at the reins of the cutter, heads home through the icy, clear, anguish-riddled December night, Hal chirps up with his unself-conscious “Wish it was spring so we could go lookin’ for frogs’ eggs again” (238). “‘Yes,’ Mrs Wiens said, holding her little boy tightly.” At the same time she imagines, with some kind of desperate hope, that Thom, who is “staring skyward,” might be “driving them toward the brightest star in the heavens” (*Peace* 238–39). Wiebe puts strong limits on Hal’s wish for spring and Mrs. Wiens’s fantasy; right after they have been expressed, he closes the novel by referring to the World War Two backdrop that informs the tone and the issues of the whole work: “Around the world the guns were already booming in a new day” (239).

Wiebe’s memoir lets things float more open-endedly and buoyantly in its closing pages. If the idyllic images at the heart of *Fern Hill* offer continuities with Wiebe’s edenic memoir, the mournful ending of *Fern Hill*, capturing an adult’s perspective, does not. Wiebe’s memoir ends with affirmations of its celebration of story and word, with him at age thirteen looking ahead to a new phase of life on the southern Alberta prairie where—as in the manner of young Hal’s life in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*—there seems to be space adequate for expressing an infinitude of words:

A seemingly endless land forever open to the visitation of wind. Bracing myself into that breathing wind, I would grow to feel it: a land too far to see, fathomless to the looking eye—but, perhaps, touchable by words. . . . words forged and bolted together into the living architecture of story. (387)

Wiebe's memoir becomes a kind of blueprint that maps a re-reading of his first novel. In a metaphoric sense, the memoir is a kind of coming into language for the Hal of the novel. Its open joy in language, from the opening to the closing page, makes all the more palpable and poignant the language crisis that Thom experiences in the novel.

The memoir lets Wiebe explore the dynamic by which a child and words, language, story grow into each other, intuitively, as it were, become as one with each other. It is a child who embodies a fullness of religious insight, absorbing and conveying it in innocence and without question, and—in keeping with the spirit of the Mennonite/Christian community overall, including, astonishingly, all of its adults—certainly without the pain of tormented questioning and questing that Thom endures in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. In writing a memoir that enters into the kind of conversation with his first novel that I have here been suggesting, he has written an exhilarating work that a reader of that novel, even a reader attentive to the Hal of that novel, might not have expected, for the memoir is so much more spirited and free-wheeling at multiple levels even than the episodes involving Hal in the novel. In the memoir, Wiebe has found a way of expressing how a culture produces a Christian way of life that is readily accessible to all its members.

Why should Wiebe's 1962 novel be so troubled—with Hal, its “bright light,” barely visible—and his 2006 memoir so untroubled? Why should the two works manifest such astonishing differences—in tone, attitude, and content, in textures and tensions, in how Wiebe negotiates the spaces involving himself, his material, and his audience?

The differences have something to do with Wiebe, without telling anyone, having conflated two historic venues in his novel. Although the novel is manifestly set in the remote Saskatchewan boreal forest of the 1934–47 memoir, it in fact draws also on the politics of the Mennonite church and community to which the Wiebe family moved in May 1947, when Wiebe was thirteen, and where Wiebe grew up as a teenager and young adult. The astringent world defined of Deacon Block of the novel, for example, is actually drawn from Wiebe's bitter experiences of church elders that he observed in southern Alberta, where his family moved in May 1947. Spiritually speaking, it is essentially the “Hal” portions of the novel that conform with the broad outlines and the delicious depths of the very place where the memoir is set.

But the differences are partly a function also of the passage of time—for example, of the respective eras in which Wiebe is writing. Thus they are a function, possibly, of the late modernism still exerting its assumptions in a novel that was written during the late fifties and early sixties, and of the postmodernism informing the leisurely and non-judgmental recollections of memoir.

The differences are partly a function, too, of the change in genre and the concomitant change in centres of subjectivity. These are a function of conventions affecting literary forms, as Wiebe moves from the urgently programmatic novel written in the third person and centring on an earnest and anxious young adult to the reverie of first-person memoir. The memoir as genre invites the author to respond to his place as a child in an exotic world of strange immigrants at great remove from the typical Canadian reader. Indeed, it is almost a world of an “Other,” for in many ways it is remote even from Wiebe’s own place in the urban and urbane world of city and university, and of national and international reputation. In reality, his “Mennonite” life has become grafted onto his professional life in a very wide world. Yet, too, signifier and signified seem to stand close together and their differences seem almost to dissolve in Wiebe’s memoir, and so the exotic “Otherness” is simultaneously made intimate, just as ironic distance between the world of the child and adult is muted.

The differences partly have something to do with the status of the writer, with the changed socio-cultural position of the writer within various public (including literary and religious) spheres, with Wiebe himself having graduated, as it were, from the role of a “young theologian” (to quote from jacket blurbs) in his twenties when he wrote his first novel as a kind of angry young man to what reviewers now regularly call “one of Canada’s most gifted writers,” a tried and true writer who is now in his seventies, a writer known for his interest in pursuing empathetically the remote and hidden voices of the unknown Canadian—in the memoir, vividly pursuing his own formative voice (6).⁶

The differences have something to do with Wiebe as a master artist now free and easy within an apparently tension-free world untouched by debilitating rancour and obsessive control, where he has time to follow the dramatic rhythms of satisfying reflection, of shapes of beckoning images awaiting attention in old family photo albums. He is demonstrably performing being at ease now, unfazed by bits of forgetting, happily prepared to announce a memory gap as a memory gap. Even though Wiebe is known for work saturated in his meticulous historical research, for work that draws (although sometimes not without irony) on “fact,” he foregoes the illusion of managing an air-tight mastery of facts in the memoir. His emphasis on an infant’s inevitable immersion into a bath of language notwithstanding, he avoids absolute readings of the self as child.

⁶ Wiebe’s famous short story “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” provides his paradigmatic summation of his stance as a writer in pursuit of silenced—and only partially and complicatedly retrievable—voices.

The differences have something to do, too, with Wiebe's own longing. Wiebe clearly takes enormous joy in playfully creating the world of the child. In his memoir he explores the child to give vast scope to his reading of the human subject more generally. For him, as for Carolyn Steedman, writing on autobiography, childhood provides a privileged entry point into "the human subject, of locating it in time and chronology, and 'explaining' it." And through his 2006 exploration of a Mennonite childhood, Wiebe finds a means of connecting subjectivity—and his own history of subjectivity—to the broader culture, one that foregrounds his Mennonite culture (Steedman 11, 13).

Eventually, the young child of the memoir presumably will gather up some of the language keys that, if he enters a world (even a religious world) close to what Wiebe understands today, will eventually make life (and religion) comprehensible to him in generous and gentle linguistic terms. He will get there by a circuitous and leisurely route, happily and unselfconsciously inviting the adult reader along—even if the adult reader chuckles knowingly at the touches of innocence that he/she, but not the boy, can understand as provisional. It is a meandering and easy-going route that is unlikely to bring the boy of the memoir into the tense confines that a Thom Wiens portrays in the 1962 novel.

of this earth—as though an adaptation and expansion of Hal's crystalline and submerged presence in the repressed creases of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*—gives the reader a new view of the childhood world of Wiebe: a new centre, new suggestions of figure and ground, a new balance. And, at the same time, the memoir invites us to return to *Peace Shall Destroy Many* with new eyes. It unlocks and makes explicit some of the novel's apparently only implicit treasures and sweetnesses. It invites us to see the novel – indeed, to see the 1962 "Wiebe" himself—as though (to draw on the Eliot of my epigraph) for the first time.

WORKS CITED

Steedman, Carolyn. *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History*. London: Rivers Oram, 1992.

Tiessen, Hildegard E. "A Mighty Inner River: 'Peace' in the Early Fiction of Rudy Wiebe." *The Canadian Novel: Here and Now*. Ed. John Moss. Toronto: NC, 1978. 169–81.

Toorn, Penny van. *Rudy Wiebe and the Historicity of the Word*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995.

Wiebe, Rudy. "An Author Speaks about His Novel." *A Voice in the Land: Essays by and about Rudy Wiebe*. Ed. W.J. Keith. Edmonton: NeWest, 1981. 64–68.

---. *of this earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest*. Toronto: Knopf, 2006.

---. *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Toronto: McClelland, 1962. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964.

---. "The Skull in the Swamp." *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 5 (1987): 8–20.

David Jasper

University of Glasgow

The Artist and Religion in the Contemporary World

ABSTRACT

Although we begin with the words of the poet Henry Vaughan, it is the visual artists above all who know and see the mystery of the Creation of all things in light, suffering for their art in its blinding, sacrificial illumination. In modern painting this is particularly true of van Gogh and J.M.W. Turner. But God speaks the Creation into being through an unheard word, and so, too, the greatest of musicians, as most tragically in the case of Beethoven, hear their sublime music only in a profound silence. The Church then needs to see and listen in order, in the words of Heidegger, to learn to “dwell poetically on earth” before God. To dwell thus lies at the heart of its life, liturgically and in its pastoral ministry, as illustrated in the poetry of the English priest and poet, David Scott. This can also be seen as a “letting go” before God and an allowing of a space in which there might be a “letting the unsayable be unsaid” and order found even over the abyss. This is what Vladimir Nabokov has called “the marvel of consciousness” which is truly a seeing in the darkness. The poet, artist and musician can bring us close to the brink of the mystery, and thus the artist is always close to the heart of the church’s worship and its ministry of care where words meet silence, and light meets darkness. Such, indeed, is the true marvel of consciousness in the ultimate risk which is the final vocation of the poet and artist, as it was of Christ himself, and all his saints. The church must be ever attentive to the deeply Christocentric ministry of art and the creative power of word and image in the letting the unsayable be unsaid. With the artist we may perhaps stand on Pisgah Height with Moses with a new imaginative perception of the divine Creation. The essay concludes on a personal note, drawing upon the author’s own experience in retreat in the desert, with a reminder of the thought of Thomas Merton, a solitary in the community of the Church.

ABSTRACT

They are all gone into the world of light!
And I alone sit lingering here;
Their very memory is fair and bright
And my sad thoughts doth clear.

I see them walking in an Air of glory,
Whose light doth trample on my days:
My days which are at best but dull and hoary,
Mere glimmerings and decays.
(Vaughan 318)

In the beginning, before time itself began, God said let there be light and there was light. The divine creative word is different from any human word for as the Lord says in Isaiah, “it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). In this word are contained all the secrets of creation, from chaos is brought an order that is brought into being by the will of God and the distinction is made between Creator and creature.

This material order is formed from the immaterial not first in the shapes and forms of nature but in the distinction between light and darkness, a distinction in which the most profound and mysterious of meanings resides. From the beginning of creation the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overwhelmed or even understood it. This is most truly and perhaps only known to us in the vocation of the artist which is at once the most sacred and profane of all callings. In the eyes of Vincent van Gogh in his self-portraits, especially those painted in the near madness of his final years, we can see him striving to reveal to us the deepest abyss of his vision which at once sees everything and nothing. In his last letter to his brother Theo, and his last letter ever written, composed only days before his suicide on 27 July 1890, van Gogh wrote: “Well, my own work, I am risking my life for it, and my reason has half-foundered owing to it . . . ” (qtd. in Roskill 340). In the depths of van Gogh’s seeing the natural and the supernatural become one, nature and grace flow together, and he sees with horror the truth of the moment of God’s words, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3) for then, too, darkness is revealed. In the passion of the eyes of van Gogh there is a meeting of all opposites and a new totality which is at once the darkness of death and a vision that is the sanctification of even darkness itself, in Milton’s phrase, a “darkness visible”¹ and transfigured as in Christ’s passion on the cross. In such a vision, which in European art is revealed most fully in the Gothic art of Giotto, we see

¹ See, John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book 1, line 63.

Christ portrayed as at once fully human and fully divine, a mystery that is proclaimed in the doctrines of Christian theology, but is finally beyond all theological understanding except in what is seen in the eyes of the artist.

In the art of Rembrandt and van Gogh the light shines in an absolute *depth*; by contrast, in cubist and modern abstract painting it moves across the absolute *surface* of the deep. Light at once reveals and hides, for the deepest mystery and glory of God's creative word is at once known and utterly unknown. In the art of the English painter J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) such absolute light both blinds and reveals as the forms of nature are the signs of divine order and yet are consumed by the radiance of God's glory. In 1828, Turner painted the legend of Regulus, a Roman consul whose suffering St. Augustine compares even to Christian martyrdom in *The City of God*, and whose punishment after capture by the Carthaginians was to be forced to look into the glare of the setting sun until blinded by it. In Turner's work, we see the painting as if we were Regulus himself, blinded by light. It is a theme taken up even more radically almost twenty years later by Turner in his late work, *The Angel Standing in the Sun*, which draws on the image from Revelation 19:17 ("Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God'"). A contemporary reviewer in *The Spectator* for 9 May 1846 described the painting as a "*tours de force* that shows how nearly the gross materials of the palette can be made to emulate the source of light" (qtd. in Joll, Butlin, and Herrman 7). The artist as creator is thus, as it were, a mirror image of the divine creator in the beginning who speaks light into being to reveal the material substance of the creation. In Turner's painting the angel with raised sword emerges as from a vortex of dazzling light that begins as white, gradually shading to yellow and finally red. The angel and the light are one. Around the rim of the vortex flit, indistinctly, the birds of prey of Revelation. In the foreground, and equally indistinct, are various biblical figures, among whom may be identified Judith holding aloft the severed head of Holofernes, and perhaps Adam and Eve lamenting the death of Abel. Like van Gogh, as he approached death, Turner sees into the abyss which is both the beginning and the end of all things, seeing with the eyes of the artist that are at once all light and all darkness.

But who heard the voice of God as he spoke the world into being? Just as van Gogh and Rembrandt know most deeply the light that is within an absolute darkness, even the darkness of God, so the poet and the musician alone truly hear the word and the music within the deepest silence. Thus the Egyptian poet Edmond Jabès can write of silence:

You do not go into the desert to find identity but to lose it, to lose your personality, to become anonymous. You make yourself void. You become

silence. It is very hard to live with silence. The real silence is death and this is terrible. It is very hard in the desert. You must become more silent than the silence around you. And then something extraordinary happens: you hear silence speak.²

The voice of God which brought all things into being through light is also that silence which speaks. It is almost impossible for us to hear such silence, which is the fullness of all language and from which everything and nothing emanates. But the poet, the maker in language, is absorbed in the silence which is both the beginning and the end of all speech, the silent text which is the blueprint of all creation. Such is the silence of Elijah's still small voice in the wilderness which is truly the voice of God: a sound without sound, a wind without a stir and wholly present only as an absence (1 Kings 19:12). Silence, too, is at the very heart of music. Some of Beethoven's most sublime composition is found in his late string quartet No.15, Opus 132 (1825). It is music which the composer himself never actually heard except within his inmost being and soul, trapped as he was in a profound physical deafness to which his conversation books and battered piano bear tragic witness. It is music also born out of the practical chaos of Beethoven's life—financial worries, illness, concern for an errant ward and nephew. As from the chaos before creation God brings all things into being, so from the mess and muddle of our fallen lives, the artist hears the silence of God and speaks of it out of an inner silence which few of us can even imagine or dare to think of. It is no accident that this quartet was written not long after Beethoven had completed his great Mass in D, the *Missa Solemnis* (1819–23), for which he had made a close study of liturgical music. The results of this are most deeply apparent in the quartet's sublimely mystical third movement, the *Molto adagio*, which he entitled, "A convalescent's Hymn of Thanksgiving to God, in the Lydian mode."

The artist ever seeks finally the hymn of thanksgiving, that which in the Christian tradition (and it is a hymn present also and variously in Islam, Judaism and the great religions of the East) lies at the heart of the Eucharist: and at its centre is the silence in which alone we know the unknowable, the total presence of God. For, in the words of the theologian Thomas J.J. Altizer, "the real ending of speech is the dawning of resurrection" (96)—a present actuality that is glimpsed and momentarily heard in the sacramental enactment of the liturgy as a miraculous impossibility. But this is an actuality which is known also to the poet—as the dying King Lear, slipping into eternity with Cordelia in his arms, speaks his version of Christ's last word from the cross in the Fourth Gospel, "It is finished,"

² I have never been able to trace the source of these words in Jabès' writings.

in that most moving line in all of Shakespeare's works—the five repeated “nevers.” The past is past and for Lear there is only the vision of the future—the call to *see* and to look (as with the eyes of van Gogh):

Thou'lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never!
 Pray you, undo this button: thank you, Sir.
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
 Look there, look there! (5.3.306–10)

220

Through the unseeing eyes of the aged Lear we see into that abyss, though “we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long.” But yet even we might glimpse the light and catch the word of Total Presence which we can never fully grasp, in the words of the poet Wallace Stevens, those “evanescent symmetries” (97), sacraments of the harmonious whole.

The poet, the musician and the artist are never more needed by the church than today, the church whose religion E.M. Forster describes in *A Passage to India* (1924) as “poor little talkative Christianity.” For the artist, as S.T. Coleridge in “Kubla Khan” (1798) and all the Romantic poets knew, exists on the edge of the utterly sacred and the absolutely profane, speaking the word into silence and seeing in the moment of the transfiguration of darkness into pure light. Thus to dwell poetically on earth is to live in awareness of the godhead, in the face of the Nothing, that, as has been said, looking back to the thought of Martin Heidegger, “grants the possibility of the presence of and the Being of the things that there are” (Edwards 184). Thus to dwell moves finally beyond the formalities of theology and even our practices of worship (though yet it lies at the heart of the liturgy), and it is to risk reason and even, as for van Gogh, life itself. Yet, as art above all is utterly truthful, its poetry is what tries to make music of what occurs in life. Those words are not mine, but were said by the French poet Yves Bonnefoy of his own book of poetry which is beautifully entitled *Ce qui fut sans lumière* (1987), and in the English translation, *In the Shadow's Light*: again, it is the light that shines in the darkness. But now let us turn to a contemporary English poet/priest, David Scott, and his poetry of pure understatement and the silence that heals and enlightens. It is a deliberate move from the vast to the beauty and tragedy of common human experience and the pastoral life of the church. The poem is entitled “Parish Visit:”

Going about something quite different,
 begging quiet entrance
 with nothing in my bag, I land
 on the other side of the red painted step
 hoping things will take effect.

The space in the house is ten months old
and time has not yet filled it up,
nor is the headstone carved.
He died when he was twenty
and she was practised at drawing
him back from the brink
cajoling in spoons of soup.
We make little runs at understanding
as the winter afternoon
lights up the clothes on the rack;
we make so many
the glow in the grate almost
dips below the horizon,
but does not quite go out
It is a timely hint
and I make for the door and the dark yard,
warmed by the tea,
talking about things quite different. (77)

Scott here catches perfectly the profound truth that the words of care embrace a greater silence in which it is profoundly necessary both to speak and not to speak, just as no-one heard God's word in the beginning, that which brought order from chaos. The poet knows, then, that the text, as with the word of pastoral care, is precisely *not* a matter of getting at some hidden meaning, but rather, as has been said by Heidegger, a "letting the unsayable be not said" (qtd. in Clark 118), and a being before the salving mystery. Another form of this is the knowing when to let go, to let being be before God. Perhaps the only moment of pure poetry in the writings of that most intellectual of creatures, C.S. Lewis, is on the final page of his meditation on his loss of his wife to death, *A Grief Observed*, a moment of transcendence in the letting be of the other:

. . . I have come to misunderstand a little less completely what a pure intelligence might be, lean over too far. There is also, whatever it means, the resurrection of the body. We cannot understand. The best is perhaps what we understand least.

Didn't people dispute once whether the final vision of God was more an act of intelligence or of love? That is probably another of the nonsense questions.

How wicked it would be, if we could call the dead back! She said not to me but to the chaplain, "I am at peace with God." She smiled, but not at me . . . (63-64)

We stand over the abyss and even there we can smile. The poet knows what one modern writer, Vladimir Nabokov, has called "the marvel of

consciousness—that sudden window swinging open to a sunlit landscape amid the night of non-being” (qtd. in Danto 159). It is that sunlit landscape which van Gogh sees, and paints for us in the countryside around Saint-Rémy even as he looks into the very night of death. In the Christian church’s liturgy it is found in the moment in the Great Thanksgiving prayer when the earthly congregation loses itself in that multitude of angels and archangels and the whole church past and present, a supremely timeless moment when we, the least of all that company, dare to sing with them the anthem to God’s glory, the Sanctus even as we stand in the edge of death itself—“on the night when he was given up to death.” Thus we shift, in a moment, from all eternity to the supreme moment of non-being in human time when Christ was given up to death.

Time and again the poet and the artist risk everything to bring us to the brink of the mystery, inviting us to see the unseeable and to hear the word of silence as it speaks. At their most daring artists have suffered as have the greatest of saints—St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart and all those others abused and despised even by the church itself. Artists and those whom genius touches traditionally are not necessarily the best of people, though they may be, and even the sublime John Milton was once described as “a true poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it.” But that remark is made in a work by his fellow poet William Blake entitled *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c. 1790–93)—and that perhaps is the true and sacred vocation of the poet, to see into the abyss in which finally heaven and hell are one and reconciled in the peace which passes all understanding. It is very hard for the church to look into this abyss, for, except at moments of pure transcendence in its liturgy, it is still too preoccupied with fighting the battles against sin, the world and the devil, and, perhaps, sometimes less worthy battles as well. That is why it is too often easy to criticize the artist for impracticality, for failing to be useful, for, it might be said, the artist is the one who fully believes, who dares, impossibly, to shed doubt, though perhaps at the cost of everything. Thus the greatest artists are deeply Christocentric and one with the creator God in their daring to be even within the creative and visionary logos—why van Gogh and Beethoven and Turner each suffered their own passions of suffering in their lives. For, in the words of the so-called “Father of Canadian Poetry,” Charles Sangster (1822–93), writing of Moses, perhaps the greatest of all poets, in his poem entitled “Faith,” for who knows if, after all, Moses did not write the first books of the Bible as Turner thought:

Faith is the Christian’s Pisgah. Here he stands
 Enthroned above the world; and with the eye
 Of full belief looks through the smiling sky

Into the Future, where the Sacred Lands
Of Promise . . . are brought nigh,
And he beholds their beauty . . . (qtd. in Landow 204)

But Moses himself, of course, never entered the Promised Land of Canaan—he merely beheld it from Pisgah heights: and so with the artist. In the eighteenth century poetry was described as the handmaid of religion, but nothing could be further from the truth: for creativity cannot be commissioned nor can the reproduction of appearances do finally more than replicate our theological shortcomings. Over fifty years ago, in a bid for the freedom of religious art from the institutions of religion, the American theologian Paul Tillich remarked that the “sentimental, beautifying naturalism. . . the feeble drawing, the poverty of vision, the petty historicity of our church-sponsored art is not simply unendurable, but *incredible*. . . it calls for iconoclasm.”³ Now, of course, iconoclasm has ever been within the Christian church which in its early days took over the Jewish prohibition of idolatry, summed up in the Second Commandment, more or less wholesale. And the fear of idolatry propelled the Protestant reformation of the image into images as little more than illustrations of the already proclaimed theology of the church and thus towards that poverty of vision of which Tillich speaks. The fact is that there never has been in the church what the British theologian Jeremy Begbie has called a direct and ultimately harmonious relationship between its theology and the arts, but rather one which is far more edgy and more problematic, the vision of the latter always seeing further, both more darkly and more brightly than ever the necessary compulsions of the former.

But this is not to say that theology and the arts do not have much in common: both the theologian and the artist have a calling to the *prophetic*; they have a responsibility to the *sacramental*; they understand the fundamental importance of the art of *memory*. But the theologian, it may be, carries a responsibility from which the artist is free—though his or hers may be, in the end, the far darker tragedy. For Moses, after the vision of the Pisgah height, was buried in an unknown grave in the wilderness, and did not go on to bear the burdens of settlement in the Promised Land. At the conclusion of Arnold Schoenberg’s unfinished opera *Moses und Aron* (1932), Moses, the supreme architect of the vision of the people, finally sinks to the ground in despair in silence: “O Wort, du Wort, das mir fehlt!” (“O word, thou word, that I lack!”). But in his silence he saw the land for the people to which he had led them, and the world was all before them though nothing could be taken for granted. Our version of the Pisgah vi-

³ See further, Paul Tillich, “Art and Ultimate Reality,” 219–35.

sion which challenges all inherited speech and image is perhaps described by the late Peter Fuller in his book *Images of God* when he writes:

Even if we have ceased to believe in God, nature can provide [the symbolic order] for us; the answer lies not in the reproduction of appearances, but in an *imaginative perception* of natural form, in which its particularities are not denied, but grasped and transfigured. (16)

This shift from the “reproduction of appearances” to “imaginative perception” is both challenging and deeply uncomfortable, especially for those of us who would prefer to keep up appearances and pretend that things are as they always have been, and that, perhaps, the repetition of ancient formularies in religion and the imposition of established disciplines will suffice to counter the flow of change.

But neither the poet nor the artist of themselves can make things better. As the First World War poet Wilfred Owen wrote: “All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful” (31). The poet reminds us that ugliness will continue to exist despite art and despite the church, but poetry never allows us to install the unreasoning of ugliness in our institutions. In the words of the art critic Donald Kuspit,

. . . artistic form mediates ugliness without socially and metaphysically reifying it, which allows it to give birth to beauty. Art in fact strips ugliness of the social and metaphysical overlay that obscures and sanitizes its insanity. Art does not rationalize ingrained irrationality but lets it stand forth in all its inevitability. (186)

In what then can we believe if the irrational is inevitable? But, does this not precisely describe the scandal of the cross, a supreme moment in art beyond all reason in all its ugliness and beauty, supremely a new space for exploration, a space indeed for the sacred, placing us where now, perhaps, we even have little wish to be and where we have no language to interpret the mystery. Then, in this space as in all art, we have to do the impossible.

In the creative power of the word and in the power of images and music the impossible does not cease to be impossible, but can present itself to us in all its impossibility in moments of supreme beauty, or awe and terror; in moments of searing consciousness in a world in which we too often prefer to close our eyes and not to see the ugly and disfigured. But finally in that marvel of consciousness—that sudden window swinging open to a sunlight landscape amid the night of nonbeing—we are prompted to dare to be what we have not been in a radical re-vision of the ethical, the aesthetic and finally the spiritual. The poet and the artist draw us to be-

hold that which God saw in the beginning, and saw that it was good—the beauty in the particularities of the commonplace, the world in a grain of sand, the ever new glories of the natural and the sublime. Both Velasquez and van Gogh drew us in their art to contemplate the profound beauty in the faces of the aged and worn, in the everyday things which we take for granted—domestic pots, shoes, the common stuff of daily life—prompting us afresh to contemplate therein the questions of most profound importance.

Throughout the ages of Christianity in the West the Christian church has been one of the greatest of patrons of the arts. But it has also too often patronized the artist whose greatest works have frequently been too edgy, too difficult, too impossible for the church to tolerate. In his last portraits van Gogh stares into an abyss which even he cannot bear, suffering for his art even to death. It is an abyss known also to the figures of Saul and Bathsheba in Rembrandt's art. The greatest art, poetry and music is that which lets the unsayable be unsaid, so that silence may speak and we hear, glimpse the terrible beauty of the God whom we dare to worship in the Sanctus. In the icons of Christ's face in the Eastern Church it has been said that the image of Christ is empty of His presence and full of His absence:

What could be more faithful to the Incarnation (it has been remarked), which the Greek Fathers also called *kenosis*, evacuation or emptying? To incarnate. To empty. When the Word became flesh, divinity did not fill up with matter nor did matter fill up with divinity. (Baudinet 151)

And so finally we return to where we began—with the Word which links matter with divinity.

Allow me to end on a personal note. Some years ago I undertook a solitary retreat for some time in the deserts of West Texas. It was there, in a very faint manner, that I knew for the first time what it is to be at once solitary and to be in communion with all being, and to begin to hear the words of silence, and see in nature the images beyond image which lie at the heart of all true art. I saw, perhaps, so faintly, with the eyes of van Gogh and heard the music in the silence of Beethoven: impossible, fearful—but it is possible if we take care enough. Then I realized what the monk Thomas Merton meant when he wrote these words, and I thought of van Gogh: "It is only when the solitary dies and goes to heaven that he sees clearly that this possibility was already actualized in his life and he did not know it for his solitude consisted above all in the 'possible' possession of God and of nothing else but God, in pure hope." (Merton 242–43). To see this possibility in the world of light, and to see that it is

good, is the deepest work of the artist and the artist's gift to the church in a moment suspended in time, in equilibrium, in all things: "One with One, one from One, one in One and one in One in all eternity. Amen" (Eckhart 108).

WORKS CITED

Altizer, Thomas J.J. *The Self-Embodiment of God*. New York: Harper, 1977.

Baudinet, Marie-José. "The Face of Christ, the Form of the Church." *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part One*. Ed. Michael Feher, with Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi. New York: Zone, 1989.

Bible, the New Oxford Annotated. New Revised Standard Version. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Bonnefoy, Yves. *In the Shadow's Light (Ce Qui Fut Sans Lumière)*. Trans. John Naughton. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Clark, Timothy. *Martin Heidegger*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Danto, Arthur C. *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*. Chicago: Open Court, 2003.

Eckhart, Meister. "On the Noble Man." *Selected Writings*. Trans. Oliver Davies. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994.

Edwards, James C. *The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Fuller, Peter. *Images of God: The Consolations of Lost Illusions*. London: Chatto, 1985.

Joll, Evelyn, Martin Butlin, and Luke Herrman, eds. *The Oxford Companion to J.M.W. Turner*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Kuspit, Donald. *The End of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Landow, George P. *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*. Boston: Routledge, 1980.

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. London: Faber, 1961.

Merton, Thomas. "Thoughts in Solitude." *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master. The Essential Writings*. Ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham. New York: Paulist, 1992.

Owen, Wilfred. *The Collected Poems*. Ed. C. Day Lewis. London: Chatto, 1963.

Roskill, Mark, ed. *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*. London: Fontana, 1983.

The Artist and Religion...

Scott, David. *A Quiet Gathering*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1984.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Ed. Kenneth Muir. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen, 1972.

Stevens, Wallace. *Collected Poems*. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Tillich, Paul. "Art and Ultimate Reality." *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*. Ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. New York: Crossroad, 1984. 219–35.

Vaughan, Henry. *Poetry and Selected Prose*. Ed. L.C. Martin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Tomasz Dobrogoszcz

University of Łódź

The Hidden Gaze of the Other in Michael Haneke's *Hidden*

ABSTRACT

In his 2005 French production *Hidden* (*Caché*), Michael Haneke continues disturbing his audience with poignant and stirring images. When Georges and Anne Laurent keep finding on their doorstep videotapes showing the exterior of their house filmed with a hidden camera, they do not realize that trying to trace the identity of the photographer will lead Georges back to his deeply concealed childhood atrocity and gravely affect their present life. With *Hidden*, Haneke presents a provocative case of Freudian return of the repressed and probes the uncertain grounding and pretentiousness of French national self-importance.

The article attempts an analysis of *Hidden* from two interconnected perspectives, provided by the use of the Lacanian category of the gaze in relation to film studies and by the application of certain categories derived from post-colonial theory (voiced here by Homi Bhabha). The discussion ventures to demonstrate that the camera-eye "hidden" in its impossible position can be interpreted as a gaze imagined by Georges in the field of the Other. The voyeuristic act of filming also suggests the question of colonial surveillance, which relates to the racial issue underlying the conflict repressed by Georges. Haneke investigates the way in which the symbolic power bestowed on the authority of the French state facilitates discrimination. Georges, a model representative of the civil/civilized society, is shown as rent by primal fears of imaginary savage "terror," desperately trying to fortify his dominion against Algerian aggressors who are otherwise a necessary part of the structure.

ABSTRACT

“Stay seated as the credits roll”—the instructions are spoken off-screen as a television talk-show on literature comes to an end. The words, which will be muted in the editing process, are directed at the participants of the discussion, bidding them remain in their seats during the final shot of the programme. The host of the show is Georges Laurent, the main protagonist of Michael Haneke’s 2005 *Hidden* (*Caché*). However, the line “stay seated as the credits roll” might also be read for an extradiegetic, metacinematic function: the film demands of its audience not to leave the theatre too early, but to carefully watch the very last shots. Robin Woods, analyzing the film in *Artforum International*, seems pessimistic about the director’s chances here, when he observes that “half the audience . . . sensing the imminence of the end credits . . . typically gets up and leaves, missing the film’s ultimate and crucial revelation, registered characteristically in distant long shot.” One might perhaps argue that the “typical” audience of a Hollywood blockbuster is probably not the audience for this Austrian filmmaker.

Haneke deserves his reputation of a highly demanding and motivating director. He has repeatedly scorned Hollywood films for constructing their audience as passive, and emphasizes his own ambition for “active participants” who “make connections [and] solve enigmas [themselves] rather than have them explained” (Wood). As Jonathan Thomas notes, by means of his cinematic research into images governing the collective perception of humans, Haneke “revitalize[s] film spectatorship as a critical and pensive enterprise.” It has been generally observed—both by audiences and critics—that *Hidden*, following a certain Haneke practice of allusion and echo, bears a number of correspondences to Hitchcock, *Rear Window* being perhaps the most natural association, as both films involve the act of spying on others (cf. Yacowar, Woods). However, on the most basic level, Haneke does not finally identify the voyeur and thus “leaves the plot’s mystery unsolved” (Yacowar). On the one hand, it could be rightly assumed that leaving the enigma of the camera-eye unresolved is deftly postmodern, deconstructing the suspense of the whodunit genre. But Haneke’s strategy is not confined to such a local purpose, as I will try to demonstrate. *Hidden* gives us a chance to examine how the Lacanian category of the gaze interacts with the post-colonial problems of post-09/11 Europe.

Hidden does not disappoint those of Haneke’s admirers who value the inexpressible quality of the encounter with the uncanny which his other films provide. This time the eerie begins with the opening take: the tediously prolonged static shot of the exterior of a small urban house proves to be contained in a different reality than viewers might have initially assumed. It does not belong to the objectively seen world of the

film's main diegesis. We are not merely sitting in the cinema and watching Haneke's *Hidden* at this point; we are sharing the visual experience of its two main characters: the footage on the screen is of Georges and Anne's house, recorded on a videotape which someone has left on their doorstep. We watch by their side, as it were, or through them. Soon we register—as the image shifts into high speed search on a VCR¹—that the real status of the scene is not what we have presumed. This is further substantiated by the film soundtrack: the voices off screen turn out to be Georges and Anne commenting on what they have seen on the tape. This, again, has a disquieting effect on the viewer, or, as Thomas ironically puts it, provides “a talking cure to our emergent sensation of spectatorial confusion.”

230

This recourse to psychoanalytical jargon is very much in place. Haneke himself refers to obvious psychoanalytical roots of his films. In an interview concerning the making of *Hidden* he divulges that it is “the privilege of all artists to be able to sort out . . . their neuroses” through their creative processes (Face “*Caché*”). Doubtlessly, *Hidden* is a film about the repressed trauma which returns to haunt the main protagonist after forty years. It begins in the Hitchcockian manner: Georges and Anne Laurent repeatedly find on their threshold videotapes containing recordings of their house seen from a distance, the recordings made by an unidentified stranger (who, as we finally discover, has no declared identity). The protagonists' family name is hardly haphazard: its choice is a subtle allusion with which Haneke acknowledges the connection to Lynch's *Lost Highway*—Fred Madison and his wife find videotapes with similar content, too, and Fred hears a voice whispering into his intercom “Dick Laurent is dead.” But there are more tapes in *Hidden* and they are more articulate: they launch Georges on the voyage into the murky regions of his self, impelling him to probe the depths he would much rather leave unfathomed.

In this way *Hidden* seems to demonstrate a classical case of a Freudian “return of the repressed.” The scraps of haunting material—disquieting videotapes, foreboding child-made pictures, ghastly nightmares—accumulate to threaten Georges' conscious mind. He follows the clues offered by the tapes and explores a past he has assiduously erased. Obviously, his unconscious mind provides a solution to the enigma, and, obviously, the trauma lies in his childhood: as a little boy Georges deceptively

¹ An obvious cross-reference to Haneke's perhaps most famous metacinematic device: a scene in which one of the villains in *Funny Games*, dissatisfied with the way the plot has developed, uses a remote control to rewind *the very film itself*. In both cases the visual effect of VCR high speed search disrupts the ontological assumptions of the viewer.

eliminated a potential rival to his familial domination by throwing false accusations at Majid, an Algerian boy Georges' parents wanted to adopt after his family had perished in race riots. The repressed guilt finally re-surfaces when he makes a conscious but highly uncomfortable decision to reveal it. The film dramatizes this interrelation clearly in a scene when Georges announces to his friends: "I won't hide it." On the level of the story his words imply he does not want to conceal that he and Anne have been receiving mysterious videotapes. Deeper still, they signify his conscious decision to un-repress the ignominious trauma of the past. The result of the effort is instantaneous: the tape he plays immediately afterwards shows his childhood house, providing the first unambiguous hint for his soul-searching. Nonetheless, Georges is not ready to share the shameful and awkward results of self-exploration, even with his wife: only after his lies are denounced does he finally disclose the full story of Majid to Anne.

In *Hidden* Georges undergoes a self-expository ordeal during which the repressed trauma of childhood guilt re-enters his consciousness. However, it is difficult to unambiguously decide whether this process has a cathartic effect on him. The last time we see him, he comes back home, goes to his bedroom, carefully draws the curtains, undresses, and rests his naked body between the sheets, hiding in the darkness and silence. As he withdraws to his most intimate territory and assumes an embryonic position in this most womblike environment, he recedes into the deepest sleep. Darkness and seclusion prevent Georges from being seen, which lends the scene a symbolic dimension. As Karl Abraham's assertions are reinstated by Homi Bhabha:

The pleasure-value of darkness is a withdrawal in order to know nothing of the external world. Its symbolic meaning, however, is thoroughly ambivalent. Darkness signifies at once both birth and death; it is in all cases a desire to return to the fullness of the mother, a desire for an unbroken and undifferentiated line of vision and origin. (117–18)

Georges seems pervaded with resignation, withdraws and prepares for repose, but it may not necessarily give him relief. He has just comprehended that his inconsiderate childhood misdeed brought a momentous change to somebody's life; in the subsequent scene his mind replays the scene in which Majid is being taken from his parents' house (possibly the most poignant scene in the film). This situation finds theoretical expression in Todd McGowan, a critic using Lacanian categories for film analysis, when he says that "grasp[ing] the hole that exists within the symbolic order . . . traumatizes the subject, depriving the subject of the idea of ever

escaping lack” (203). Georges’ detective work on his past, climaxing in the overly dramatic, theatrical and possibly phantasmatic scene of Majid’s suicide, derails his conventional approach to both morality and reality; he is punctured with self-disillusionment and realizes an elemental lack in the superstructure of his civilized, Western self.

In exploring the Freudian theme of the return of the repressed Haneke effectively resorts to the use of dreams. In interviews the director acknowledges their immense potential, stressing, at the same time, that dreams are very hard to be represented cinematically (*Face “Cache”*).² For Georges, nightmares function as the reinforcement of the disquieting effect of the mysterious videotapes. The dream sequences are short, bleak and of a piercing intensity. They are filmed and edited into the main plot line in a disturbing manner, and provide no intelligible hints about their reference to the main film frame. Only much later do we understand that they show the perspective of the six-year-old Georges and are meant as the projections of his unconscious—picturing the wronged Algerian boy. As Yacowar articulates it, Georges’ “frozen conscience plays the scene[s] like a hidden video camera.”

The question of a *hidden* video camera is the cornerstone of Haneke’s vision. In point of fact, the source of video footage Georges and Anne watch is never revealed in the film. When Georges examines the alley from which their house is seen on the tape, he finds neither camera nor any other clue pointing to the identity of its operator. The scene of the first conversation between Georges and Majid is presented twice: the first time it belongs to the inner frame of the diegesis, filmed “objectively,” with conventional counter-shots of both interlocutors; the second time the frame has slipped and we watch it with Anne and Georges on their TV screen, as the scene filmed from a hidden camera. But both Majid and his son deny planting the camera in the apartment, and a careful examination of the “objective” shots does not reveal the place where it could have been mounted. Woods suggests that either Majid or his son must have known about the videos; this would seem logical, but it neglects Haneke’s metacinematic inclinations. The fact that video material is shot from an impossible perspective suggests its metaphorical dimension. Thomas sharply observes that “the initial camera set-up [is] positioned on the Rue des Iris—an unmistakable reference to the iris (or eye) of the . . . hidden camera that gazes upon [the Laurents’] household” and reasons that “a Lacanian would read the street sign as a reference to the gaze that is out there in the world,

² Haneke mentions Buñuel as one of few filmmakers who have succeeded at this. He is dissatisfied, for instance, with Bergman’s representation of dreams. Curiously, he does not mention Lynch.

unhinged from any particular subject position, looming, taunting . . . and thereby positioning Georges in a paranoid way.”

For Jacques Lacan, the gaze is a part of the subject as being watched, rather than a part of another subject watching it. Elaborating on Sartre's definition, Lacan states:

As the locus of the relation between me, the annihilating subject, and that which surrounds me, the gaze seems to possess such a privilege that it goes so far as to have me scotomized, I who look, the eye of him who sees me as object. In so far as I am under the gaze, . . . I no longer see the eye that looks at me. . . . The gaze I encounter . . . is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other. (84)

Within the context of *Hidden*, the Lacanian category of the gaze appears to bear a significant resemblance to the content of video footage left on the Laurents' doorstep. After all, Georges cannot “see the eye that looks at him” and imagines this gaze “in the field of the Other.” The camera-eye, placed in an impossible position, could well be apprehended as Georges' own, and the audiences', scotomized gaze directed at himself.

McGowan further notes that the “gaze . . . involves the spectator in the filmic image, disrupting the spectator's ability to remain . . . absent” from cinematic experience (6). This clearly concords with Haneke's conception of filmmaking, which provides a very active role for the audience. The inter-subjective gaze manifested by *Hidden* convincingly demonstrates the lack in the object: the disintegration of Georges' symbolic order markedly illustrates it. However, as McGowan divulges, the consequence is momentous:

The nothingness of the object is at once our own nothingness as well. The gaze is nothing but our presence in what we are looking at, but we are nothing but this gaze. We are, that is to say, a distortion in Being. The direct encounter with the gaze exposes us as this distortion and uproots every other form of identity to which we cling. (210)

McGowan points to the critical potential this Lacanian category has to film studies, since in the cinema “the subject remains obscured in the dark while the object appears completely exposed on the screen” (8).

This contrast between the darkness of obscurity and the light of exposure is very effectively employed by Haneke in the last of Georges' dream sequences: an acutely emphatic scene where the struggling Majid is taken to a car to be driven to an orphanage. The director films this in a long, distant shot, a technique which is one of his trademarks. The merciless camera is unmoved, mechanical, emotionless; the scene painfully

static and interminable. Although Haneke has to use the perspective of the six-year-old Georges, supplementing it with the ostensible detachment and callousness of the camera emphasizes the tragedy of the little Algerian boy. However, the composition of the frame in this sequence evokes other far-reaching associations. Most of the picture, comprising the centre and the top, portrays the bright, sunlit farmyard of Georges' parents' estate. The lower part of the screen, along with both sides, lies in darkness: the eye of the camera watches Majid's tragedy from inside an unlit farm shed. The dark area might be interpreted as the shadow engulfing Georges' mind: the shed has previously witnessed another ghastly scene, repeated in his nightmares—when Majid, beguiled by Georges, decapitates a rooster with an axe, which finally discourages the French family from adopting him. In the black outline of the frame we can still see the axe, a prop necessary for this phantasmal projection. Additionally, the starkness of contrast between blindingly bright centre and obscurely dark margins could connote the splitting of the subject into its conscious and unconscious part. What can be clearly seen centre-stage—Majid's hopeless struggle not to be taken away—is utterly controlled by what has already happened in the dark wings—the killing of the rooster. The brightly lit, colourful part of the screen provides the focus for our attention, but it is encircled by the area of impenetrable obscurity, which displays only some indistinct contours. Finally, if we are tempted to interpret this set of frames in their most basic graphical sense—the striking contrast between white and black—we approach a highly substantial dimension of *Hidden*: the racial dilemma.

To understand the correspondence between the Lacanian category of the gaze and the racial-colonial context we can turn to Homi Bhabha. As the post-colonial critic asserts, “one has to see the *surveillance* of colonial power as functioning in relation to the regime of the scopic drive. That is, the drive that represents the pleasure in ‘seeing,’ which has the look as its object of desire . . . and locates the surveyed object within the ‘imaginary’ relation” (109). Bhabha starts from the most basic Lacan's premise that “to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus,” and finds that its logical corollary is that “the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting” in the subject (63). Observing “the alienation of the eye,” he further concludes that “the subject cannot be apprehended without the absence or invisibility that constitutes it . . . so that the subject speaks, and is seen, from where it is *not*” (67), and ventures to interrogate “not simply the image of the person, but the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed” (68). This impossible place, where the subject “is not” and from which “questions

of identity are . . . posed” seems to be represented in Haneke’s film by the impossible location of the “hidden” camera. Rue des Iris metaphorically represents “the alienation of the eye,” the “space of splitting,” the estranging and yet defining gaze which is an inescapable dimension of Georges.

The six-year-old Georges is the narcissistic split subject which feels threatened by his colonial other—Majid. He appeals to the archaic stereotype of a “black demon” engraved in his parents, invoking in them the primal fear that the Algerian savage will harm their sweet, innocent child. This echoes the hysterical cry of the white boy from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*: “Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up” (qtd. in Bhabha 117). Georges subsequently represses the inconvenient awareness of the inevitable effect of his action which makes the Algerian boy “turn away from himself, his race, in his total identification with the positivity of whiteness which is at once colour and no colour” (Bhabha 109). Racial and cultural stereotypes and prejudices functioning in France ensure that the boy’s rejection also influences his social and financial standing: this is distinctly represented by the stark contrast between the elegant interior of Georges’ house and the plainness of Majid’s apartment.

Nonetheless, after forty years of repression, the racial phantoms have to finally resurface, as Georges proves to be what Bhabha might name the “post-Enlightenment man tethered to . . . his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline . . . disturbs and divides the very time of his being” (62). Suggestively, Georges’ occupation situates him in a special ideological position: he is the host of a television talk-show which discusses literature, and he is thus linked both to the French intellectual elite and the opinion-forming power of the media. We could quite safely assume that his highly ambivalent repressed racial hatred towards the Algerians can be identified with a more general phobia of his own nation. Thomas claims that “the film mounts a critique of what France’s effectively dominant culture has constituted as its selective tradition, specifically insofar as its unresolved historical omissions erupt traumatically in the guise of pathological and even fatal disturbances.” In this manner, the return of the repressed motif relates not only to the main character of *Hidden*, but to the highly civilized post-Enlightenment society he represents.

Haneke portrays the essence of Western racial prejudice with astounding mastery in a crisp, blunt scene. When the Laurents leave a police station (a signifier of symbolic authority itself), Georges carelessly steps out in a street from behind a parked van and is almost hit by a young black man on a bicycle. Georges is furious—the biker was “going the wrong way down a one-way street”—and abuses him verbally, but the

black man refuses to take the blame and retorts harshly. The case is seemingly straightforward: the biker *was not* following the highway code, he is responsible for the situation. Yet the conflict can be viewed from another perspective: whereas it is true that the black man is not abiding by the rules, the rules themselves have been established by the white authority. Moreover, the regulation at issue is purely arbitrary: no natural law decides which way we can go down a one-way street, it is merely a matter of accepted convention. Declining to obey the white man's code is for the biker—the colonial—an act of self-righteousness. Regarded in this manner, the scene—which has no immediate connection with the plot of the film—becomes significant as a metaphor of post-colonial relations in France. The figurative dimension of the scene is additionally reinforced by the fact that immediately after the brawl Georges and Anne get into their *white* car. Thus, apart from using colours to accentuate the racial/cultural difference, *Hidden* juxtaposes the car—the signifier of wealth, technology and civilisation, against the bike—corresponding to simplicity and physicality.

The reaction of the black biker to Georges' aggression is also quite meaningful. He responds to the colonizer's invectives with a straightforward suggestion: "Yell at me again. Come on, yell at me again." The provocative irony is so effective precisely because of the centuries-deep inheritance of colonial surveillance and domination, the history of generations of the colonized who were unceasingly repressed and subjected to verbal and physical oppression: yelled at, beaten and unconditionally subjugated. A corresponding situation recurs twice more in the film: when Georges confronts first Majid and then his son. In the former incident, when he desperately urges the Algerian not to stir his conscience with videotapes, his threats stop with an enigmatic "if." Majid concludes the menace for him:

You'll kick my ass? That shouldn't be hard. You're a lot bigger than the last time. Kicking my ass won't leave you any wiser about me. Even if you beat me to death. But you're too refined for that.

Similarly, when Majid's son pays Georges a disquieting visit at his workplace, and he automatically assumes that the boy desires eye-for-an-eye retribution—"What do you want? A fight?"—the colonizer's aggression and demonstration of power is deflected with an ironic display of vulnerability: "You're probably stronger than me. Go ahead, hit me!" But even after all these hints, Georges is not able to learn his lesson: his conscious self is still not ready to accept the role of the oppressor and he dismisses the boy's suggestions as insane ramblings—"You're sick. You're

as sick as your father." Nonetheless, the message has been dispatched, and Haneke's audience absorb "the legacy of . . . colonial violence and the bewildering amnesia with which it has been hidden" (Thomas).

Typically, colonial violence is perpetrated by the governmentally authorized institutions of power. When Georges threatens his adversaries with the use of power, he has obviously much more to rely on than his own physical strength. Throughout the conflict with Majid and his son, with the anonymous operator of the video camera, with the impossible gaze watching him, and, ultimately with the ever-increasing feeling of guilt which he tries to cram back into his unconscious, he repetitively invokes to his aid the symbolic authority of the state, predominantly personified by the police. The wrangle with the biker takes place in front of the police station, where the Laurents have just reported the videotape hassle. When their son, Pierrot, stays at his friend's for the night and they are worried, the police take Majid and his son into custody, locking them, as Georges puts it, "in a cage." Apparently, the westernized perspective does not allow Georges to recognize the oppressive potential of the symbolic power, even though he acknowledges that Majid's parents were killed in 1961 in "the police massacre." The symbolic structure of the French state assures him the patronising position of master. When Majid's son invades his territory in the TV company offices, Georges remarks in a sarcastic matter-of-fact tone: "you know you're not allowed in here," clearly marking the boundaries of his jurisdiction—the Algerian boy is not authorized in the building, but he is also not authorized in France, in the white man's dominion.

Perhaps one of the most bitter dimensions of irony displayed in Haneke's film pertains to the question of symbolic authorization bestowed upon the state. Several times in the film Georges complains about his family being "terrorized" with videotapes that encroach on his right to privacy and violate his domestic security. This is particularly devious in the general political context which *Hidden* subtly sketches for its viewer. The word "terror" is signalled a few times from the TV screen visible in the background of the main storyline, from news bulletins covering terror-related events in Iraq and Palestine, flashes from America's "War On Terror." Georges, undeniably a creature of TV habit, earnestly picks up the catchy media phrase "campaign of terror" and uses it in his attack on Majid's family. This prompt usage of the "terrorist" label resonates with Homi Bhabha's assertion that: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (101). Still, as Thomas notes, if the video footage raises the issue of surveillance, it becomes strikingly paradoxical at a time when "news of the government tracking and spying on

its citizens in the name of security has become routine in the nominal democracies of Europe and the United States.” In fact, Georges’ stance proves hypocritical: he is happy to renounce his civil rights, provided it will serve the functioning of the civil society which secures his illusory secure position of master. But, as Majid remarks, “What wouldn’t we do not to lose what’s ours?”

The issue of the security of the self is another Haneke preoccupation here; in fact, in *Hidden* protection is often achieved by hiding. Thomas enumerates the barricades separating the Laurents’ abode from the external world: a set of doors, a security gate, a “shrub that doubles both as a domestic barrier and as a signifier of a fortified ego (if not a fortified Europe).” Georges and Anne are quite seriously preoccupied with guarding their privacy and insulating themselves from the exterior: Haneke’s camera often focuses both on “signifiers of fortification” (Thomas) and the meticulous rituals of closing many doors. Precisely for this reason the Laurents are so vexed by the ubiquitous snooping camera-eye, as it blatantly undermines their hard-earned feeling of immunity. Unfortunately, what they overlook is that the camera gaze does not issue from any external subject: it is—like the Lacanian blind spot—an inherent part of Georges, a symbolic resurfacing of his long-repressed racist guilt. The videotapes, the metaphorically palpable dimension of the gaze, materialize exactly on the threshold of their “sanctuary,” the borderline between the outward world and the inward ego.

As *Hidden* relates to the issue of the threat of imaginary “savage terror” directed against an innocently white Europe, it is illuminating to investigate the menace with which the six-year-old Georges frightens his parents off adopting Majid. The diabolical scenario schemed by the envious boy is carved so deeply in his unconscious that it returns to him forty years later and is presented in one of the film’s dream sequences, where the Algerian boy decapitates a rooster. This moment is gory and estranging, but, apart from its direct effect, it has a supplementary impact on the parents’ unconscious: Georges arouses their dormant racial prejudice and fear. The act of beheading a rooster also functions on a symbolical level—Majid cuts off the head of the Gallic rooster, *le coq gaulois*—he is not only a threat to Georges, he is something much graver: the embodiment of the Algerian threat to France.

Returning to the opening paragraph, what happens if we “stay seated as the credits roll”? In the last shot of the film, a long stationary take, we contemplate the front view of Pierrot’s school, an everyday hustle and bustle of young people going to and fro, and for a moment we see (but cannot hear!) a conversation between Pierrot and Majid’s son. It is not clear whether the boys have met before, it is not revealed what they talk

about. Yacowar focuses in this scene on the “absence of children of colour” in front of school; for him, “the shot conveys white privilege. For all France’s passionate intellectual liberalism, the country’s imperialist past persists in the struggles of its huge disadvantaged Arab underclass.” Wood, who chooses to foreground the connection between the boys, would like to see in it “the possibility of collaboration, revolution, and renewal within the younger generation.”

While such interpretations do not exclude one another, we should view them through the prism of a detail that we have seen halfway through the film: among various posters on the walls of Pierrot’s bedroom is a picture of Zinedine Zidane. Zidane is a renowned French football player, the captain of the national team which won the first and only World Cup for France in 1998, a player who scored three goals in the final game in Paris. Curiously, Zidane, possibly the most recognizable icon of French sport at the time, is a son of Algerian immigrants; his parents are Muslim and one of his family members has even played for the Algerian national football team. The apparent paradox is not, in fact, so uncommon; Bhabha might call this a moment “in which the native . . . meets the demand of colonial discourse,” a demand for the Negro which has been spotted by Fanon:

It is recognizably true that the chain of stereotypical signification is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse. . . . The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. In each case what is being dramatized is a separation – *between* races, cultures [and] histories. (118)

WORKS CITED

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Face “Cache” [Documentary on the making of *Cache*]. Dir. Yves Montmayeur. Perf. Michael Haneke. *Hidden*. DVD.
- Funny Games*. Dir. Michael Haneke. Artificial Eye, 1997. DVD.
- Hidden (Cache)*. Dir. Michael Haneke. Artificial Eye, 2006. DVD.
- McGowan, Todd. *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2008.
- Lacan, Jacques. “Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*.” *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1981. 67–122.

- Lost Highway*. Dir. David Lynch. Universal Studios, 1997. DVD.
- Thomas, Jonathan. "Michael Haneke's New(s) Images." *Art Journal* 67.3 (2008). *Questia*. 22 Dec 2009.
- Wood, Robin. "Hidden in Plain Sight: Robin Wood on Michael Haneke's *Caché*." *Artforum International* 44.5 (2006). *Questia*. 22 Dec 2009.
- Yacowar, Maurice. "*Caché* and the Private/public Secret." *Queen's Quarterly* 113.2 (2006). *Questia*. 22 Dec 2009.

Joanna Kruczkowska

University of Łódź

The Use of Ulster Speech by Michael Longley and Tom Paulin

ABSTRACT

The article examines the application and exploration of Ulster dialects in the work of two poets of Northern Irish Protestant background, Tom Paulin and Michael Longley. It depicts Paulin's attitude to the past and the present of their community of origin, the former positive and the latter negative, which is responsible for the ambiguities in his use of and his comments on the local speech. Both poets employ the vernacular to refer to their immediate context, i.e. the conflict in Ulster, and in this respect linguistic difference comes to be associated with violence. Yet another vital element of their exploration of the dialect is its link to their origins, home and the intimacy it evokes, which offers a contrary perspective on the issue of languages and makes their approach equivocal. This context in Paulin's poetry is further enriched with allusions to or open discussion of the United Irishmen ideal and the international Protestant experience, and with his reworking of ancient Greek myth and tragedy, while in Longley's poetry it is set in the framework of "translations" from Homer which, strangely enough, transport the reader to contemporary Ireland. While Longley in his comments (interviews and autobiographical writings) relates the dialect to his personal experience, Paulin (in his essays and in interviews) seems to situate it in a vaster network of social and political concepts that he has developed in connection with language, which in Ireland has never seemed a neutral phenomenon detached from historical and political implications. Longley's use of local speech is seldom discussed by critics; Paulin's, on the contrary, has stirred diverse reactions and controversies. The article investigates some of these critical views chiefly concerned with the alleged artificiality of his use of local words and with his politicizing the dialects. Performing the analysis of his poems and essays, the article argues for Paulin's "consistency in inconsistency," i.e. the fact that his application of dialectal words reflects his love-hate attitude to his community of origin, and that

in the clash of two realities, of the conflict and of home, his stance and literary practice is not far from Longley's, which has been regarded as quite neutral as one can infer from the lack of critical controversy about it. The voices of the two poets and their use of local speech provide a crucial insight into the Northern Irish reality with all its intricacy and paradox.

ABSTRACT

242

Michael Longley and Tom Paulin, two poets of the Northern Irish Protestant background, both make an extensive and remarkable use of the speech of their locale. They share an ambivalent attitude towards their community of origin, and their use of Ulster dialects reflects exactly this ambivalence. Some critics (Gerald Dawe, for instance) fail to notice this connection, especially in the case of Paulin, while Longley's use of the vernacular is rarely discussed. Both Longley and Paulin have written poems in which they present themselves as seditious figures using their Northern speech as a kind of a cipher. Paulin further envisages it as a secret code transmitted between the writer and the reader. He also seems to look for a style that would be close to such mode of writing, "coding" certain words and making his poems hermetic. The vernacular in his writing comes within a vast context of oral culture, sound, history (linguistic one included), and politics. Longley similarly sets the dialects against a social and political background, stretching its scope by references to modern European and ancient Greek history and myth, which occasionally happens to be Paulin's practice, too. Both poets explore the potential of the local speech as a powerful tool to treat the theme of the Northern Irish conflict.

Before going on to an analysis of their application of Ulster dialects in poetry, it is necessary to have a brief look at the poets' cultural background, realizing first of all that the tags "Protestant" and "Catholic" are often used in the North to demarcate one's community of origin without really referring to religion. Longley, whose parents moved from England to Ireland, spoke British English at home and attended a Protestant school. As he said in one interview, "The result of being brought up by English parents in Ireland is that I feel slightly ill at ease on both islands. . . . It's out of such splits, out of such tensions, that I write, perhaps" ("Q. & A.: Michael Longley" 20). Although basically Longley considers himself an Irish poet, his feeling of identity is never self-complacent and the confession of

it never easy. We are not going to focus on all aspects of his internal split—Irish, English, or linked to religion—but exclusively on the connection with “the sick counties we call home,” as he terms Ulster in his “Letters” (*Poems 1963–1983* 84). Trying to evade identification with Ulster culture, Longley does not renounce the region: “I still don’t think of myself as an Ulster writer. I think of myself as a writer who comes from Ulster, as an Ulsterman who writes” (“The Longley Tapes” 22). It is not geography that seems to be the issue, but politics and denomination. With regard to the former, he feels an outsider, alien to both his unionist community of origin and its nationalist alternative. He seeks to strike his own balance, find a middle ground between the two: “I’m like a support of a see-saw” (“Porządnie skrojony płatek śniegu” 265). Similarly to Paulin, Mahon or Muldoon, he takes on the air of a subversive, “spying on” the philistine and smug Protestant community: “Among nationalists I feel a unionist, and among unionists I behave like a nationalist” (“Porządnie skrojony płatek śniegu” 265). In reference to religion he defines himself in contradictory terms, as “a pagan and one of those awkward Protestants” (“Font,” *Gorse Fires* 29), the former meaning his current real state of beliefs, while the latter relating to his origins by means of the conventional label. He remembers that at the outbreak of the conflict he was “consumed with Protestant guilt” but ever since he “decided that feeling guilty is a waste of time” (“The Longley Tapes” 24).

Paulin’s background seems just as much, if not more, complex. Although extremely critical about the Northern Irish Protestant unionists and their “state,” he says he has never been “entirely detribalized” (*Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State* 13). Born in Leeds, at the age of four he moved to Belfast together with his family of Presbyterian Scottish, English and Manx stock. Raised in Belfast, he went on to study at Hull and Oxford, then lectured at Nottingham and now at Oxford. He feels an Irish writer but denies a clear-cut sense of identity, be it Irish or English, and bewares of the ancestry worship, though in his poetry he celebrates certain figures of the past, such as the United Irishmen. When an Ulster press baron once asked him, “Are you an Ulsterman?” Paulin found himself unable to answer and slipped away (*The Hillsborough Script* 2). Leaving Belfast in a hurry, which he remembers in a penitential tone in “Fortogiveness” (*The Wind Dog* 56), he was fleeing the nets of “a crazy society, an ahistorical one-party state with a skewed and uncertain culture” (“Q. & A. with Tom Paulin” 31). Yet the formative Belfast years have dominated his feelings about the issue of identity: denying belonging anywhere, he still believes that the North is “one of the places you belong in,” as he states in “Surveillances” (*The Strange Museum* 6). Religion in his opinion constitutes one of the elements of the ‘sensed’ identity, which he confirms by devoting

many texts to social and political dimensions of Protestantism (both negative and positive), to Protestant imagination as both a creative and a limiting force, and to international Protestant experience as a context for the North of Ireland, where Protestants have paradoxically felt under siege. Paulin himself seems to be driven to and repelled by various aspects of his community of origin.

With time Paulin developed concepts behind language and poetic diction that aimed to liberate his style from the formality of his first collections. Employing a more colloquial tone, the poet started to make use of local dialect and emphasize the meaning of “orality.” Paulin’s thinking about language falls into the network of pronounced social and political ideas, which as a practice stands out from most of contemporary Irish poetry (Heaney comes closest in this respect). The vernacular and the oral qualities of the language, together with some other aspects of it such as punctuation or syntax, are involved, in his view, in the social and political struggle for territory, property, culture, national identity and power (*A New Look at the Language Question*).

Notions of “oral” style, sound and speech, connected with the influence of Hardy and Frost, seem to be vital for the analysis of Paulin’s poems. Yet this analysis reveals that it is not communal identification that lies at the heart of his focus on the language’s oral qualities or of his use of dialect. It is rather a love-hate relationship: love of his community’s language, oratory, and radical tradition (embodied in his poetry by the United Irishmen), and hate of their current ideas and state (unionism with its Orange parades). In his introduction to *Minotaur* Paulin sets orality against the social and political value of print: “Within oral culture there is an instinctive suspicion of print culture because it expresses power and law” (6), while “orality is synonymous with powerlessness and failure” (152–53). Paulin’s own poetry often seems to “strain to utter itself” (“Matins,” *Walking a Line* 10) against the power of print. Yet orality is not disabled, on the contrary. Paulin associates it with Protestantism: if speech is freedom, the United Irishmen’s accent, sounds and pronunciation support their political ideal. In “On the Windfarm” the poet compares both speech and history in the making, Being and Becoming, to an untamed wind (*Walking a Line* 48–52).

His comment that “the writer must aim to go beyond writing into a kind of speech continuum” (*Minotaur* 104) could be applied to his own poems starting with the *Liberty Tree*, where he began to combine various types of diction, among others Ulster speech and Belfast dialect. Neil Corcoran observes that *Liberty Tree* is more “supple and musical,” “by turns luxuriant and ascetic,” while *Fivemiletown* is “paring Paulin’s natural eloquence to the bone” (412–13). Paulin was also influenced by the energy

of American English after his stay in the United States in 1983–84, where among the American Scots-Irish he discovered “some sort of recognition of this displaced tribe which in some way I might belong to. I was trying to get a kind of redneck language in the book [*Fivemiletown*]” (“Q&A: Paulin”). This discovery converged with his reflection on the work of the American painter of Scotch-Irish stock, Jackson Pollock. Paulin in his own poetry has been trying to sound out Pollock’s spirit of “blindly and intuitively, not knowing what you’re at but doing it,” as he formulates it in “I Am Nature” (*Fivemiletown* 32–34). Detesting the style of the nineteenth-century English literary tradition, he found a formula of fighting it in “orality,” whose spontaneity and energy affected his acts of writing.

Paulin has kept his Ulster pronunciation despite, or perhaps against, his living in England and teaching at Oxford. “Fortogiveness” provides the reader with a clear indication of this attitude: “I’m still at home in [Belfast] speech / even though somewhere along the way / my vowels have maybe got shifted or faked” (*The Wind Dog* 56). The notions of home and community sometimes converge in his perception of the vernacular, just as they do for Longley and Heaney. In “The Wind Dog” Paulin recalls his native Belfast speech in the family context:

and why does my mother say *modren*
not *modern*?
a modrun nuvel not a modern novel
a *fanatic* not a fanatic
which is a way of saying
this is my mother tongue. (*The Wind Dog* 29)

My references to Heaney and Longley are not coincidental. The poem abounds with quotations from Longley (“no continuing city”), Heaney (“Broagh,” “exposure,” “muddy compound”), Muldoon (“quoo”), Rosenberg (“break of day in the trenches”), John Clare and others. Paulin cherishes the notion of the universal community of writers with its constant flux of ideas, and “The Wind Dog” is yet another “community-of-writers” poem in his creative output. Some of the local linguistic “investigations” in this poem suggest that Paulin speaks on behalf of his fellow poets immersed in the sounds of the Northern Irish conflict or in the “acoustic exposure” of another war (Rosenberg in the First World War). For Paulin it is a rare poetic statement of this kind. It slightly resonates with the “generational” tone of Longley’s “Letters.” In “The Wind Dog” he reifies sound and associates it with landscape. The allusions to Heaney’s place-name poems further provide a hint about his ironizing the genre and prove that Paulin cannot see the possibility of going back to harmony and safety

of the “origins,” be it childhood or etymology. The conflict in Ulster has put an end to “innocence.” Nature has been replaced by the bombed city, and the sound of the place is not the one of humans but of war machines.¹

Behind Paulin’s use of dialect lies the notion of creative, spontaneous and risky orality, which he writes about in *A New Look at the Language Question* when he argues for a Hiberno-English dictionary. Another aspect he values highly is the intimate complicity between the reader and the writer using a dialect. This may come as challenging for some readers. Paulin’s own use of local words is in this respect more extreme than Heaney’s or Longley’s, who would provide their readers with explanations in earlier collections. Paulin generally leaves local words unexplained. He recognizes the difficulty but is more interested in the effect of this experiment. Programmatically opposing the idea of linguistic purity which he regards racist, he uses local speech as a form of contestation: “If you look at the way in which the English language has been historically described, the central concept is of the well of English undefiled. I hope to defile that well as much as possible” (“Q&A: Paulin”). There is a detectable note of *enfant terrible*-ness in this statement, this act of sabotage, just as in his writings about England. It is a demonstration of not only personal or creative freedom, but also a political declaration of a “barbarian” opposing the British. In “The Wind Dog” he openly states that the linguistic purity of British English—and of Irish, for that matter—is a fake, and goes on to mockingly “defile” standard forms of the adjectives “English” and “Irish” with the regional accent: “this is echt British . . . / not a spring well / —the well of English / or the well of Oirish undefiled” (28). Using the term “language” interchangeably with “dialect,” his linguistic project in *A New Look at the Language Question* involves Ulster Scots, Irish and Irish English mediated by the creative powers of Irish English. Paulin’s study of the use of the vernacular by fellow poets (*Minotaur*) offers yet a deeper insight into the issue and coincides at times with Heaney’s comments on the translation of *Beowulf*. They share the perception of Ulster dialects—private, secret, family speech—as a key to the official language once imposed by the conquest.

In Paulin’s poetry, the speakers of those dialects are mostly involved in political activities: Orangemen in “Drumcree Three” (*The Wind Dog* 15–18), the Paisley-like preacher in “Drumcree Four” (*The Wind Dog* 72–73; one of the most interesting of Paulin’s poems in terms of the sound layer of Ulster speech and rhetoric), the UDA in “Cadmus and the Dragon”

¹ Compare another ironic *dinnseanchas* of Paulin’s, “A Naïve Risk” (*The Wind Dog* 80–81), also referring to a bombing and commenting on the peace process and the role of poetry.

(*Walking a Line* 93–101), the unionist civil servants—paradoxically targets of ridicule for the British (*The Hillsborough Script*), some protagonists of *The Riot Act*, but also the schoolmaster in “Father of History” (*Liberty Tree* 32) whose distinct accent gives away not only his place of origin, but also his republican convictions and, probably, denomination. As opposed to the preacher’s of “Drumcree Four,” his faith is a humanist’s concern. The language of his ideas is lucid and practical, while his burr (the rough pronunciation of “r” in some accents) takes on rebelliousness and physique of the “liberty tree”—the symbol of the 1798 uprising. The dialect is also a kind of a “secret code,” shared with the rest of the United Irishmen. This free speech carries the promise of the rebirth of the republican ideal, which Paulin tries to resuscitate in his poetry. A similar correspondence between Ulster dialect and Protestant republicanism appears in “And Where Do You Stand on the National Question?” where fascination with local accent has sexual connotations, suggesting the emotional power of the political ideal.

Paulin himself does not always “relish” the dialect. Sometimes it evokes a fear of historical and political extremities, as in “Politik”:

I’d be dead chuffed if I could catch
the dialects of those sea-loughs,
but I’m scared of all that’s hard
and completely subjective:
those quartz voices in the playground
of a school called Rosetta Primary
whose basalt and sandstone have gone
like Napoleon into Egypt. (*Liberty Tree* 30)

Paulin’s feelings about dialects, whose sounds he describes in an emotional way, are clearly contradictory. Despite its spikiness, the speech of the United Irishmen is friendly: warm, kind, loved and enjoyed. The unionist dialects are quartz, hard and subjective (Rosetta Primary in Belfast is predominantly Protestant). With its ironic title the poem distances Paulin from his community of origin, especially in the siege atmosphere of Belfast.

Gerald Dawe (29) pointed to Paulin’s inconsistency in this particular poem: “dead chuffed” (‘extremely pleased’) is a dialectal word, thus the poet wishes “to do what he has actually achieved—to use from ‘the dialects’ one term of reference ‘dead chuffed’”. So it is confusing to confess that he is *scared* of that world while simultaneously making deliberate use of parts of its language.” One can infer that Paulin’s attitude to the language seems to be the love-hate relationship—but Dawe draws a different conclusion:

“The poet cannot really have it both ways. Only out of the control of the ‘completely subjective’ can any true grasp of a people’s language, and consequently their experience, emerge.” Dawe seems to differentiate unionists’ dialects from Paulin’s—but despite Paulin’s position outside that tribe and their ideology, their language is still part of the culture he hails from, while the vernacular is also a means of resisting the Standard (English, establishment), the state. In *A New Look at the Language Question* he remarks that the loyalist separatist idea of creating a dictionary for homeless Ulster dialect words “is a response to the homeless or displaced feeling which is now such a significant part of the loyalist imagination” (13). What is more, their consciousness of being a “minority people” (14) makes them believe that their dialect is threatened both by the British English and Ulster English—“the provincial language of Official Unionism” (15). Peter McDonald describes Paulin’s two-faceted attitude towards Ulster speech as “speaking as though from within the community he examines, whilst also subjecting that community to a withering, external scrutiny” (100). The opposition of belonging and homelessness perfectly illustrates this “dialect question.” Patricia Craig remarks that “homesickness in Paulin’s poems is the sickness of, not for, the place” and thus he is inventing “a style capable of . . . staying close to home and achieving a formidable range, of making gestures of nonconformity and taking account of tradition” (“History” 118). She traces his use of the vernacular to the Rhyming Weavers, who extensively used Ulster Scots and with whom Paulin shares political ideals. Craig also points to the affinity between Paulin’s plain, expressive use of dialect and Louis MacNeice’s unromantic use of language. The source of their attitudes lies with “the deracination of one and disaffection of the other” (“Reflexes and Reflections” n.p.).

In “Politik” the allusion to the Rosetta stone brings into play several factors: history of conquest and colony; enigma, intelligibility and inaccessibility of dialects; the dialects’ “stony” sounds associated with the die-hard ideas of the community; and the date of Napoleon’s discovery (1799), suggestive of sectarianism which won over the United Irishmen rising. Just as in Muldoon’s “Anseo” school Irish is later used by paramilitary nationalists as a “secret code,” so in Paulin’s poem the dialects of the Rosetta Primary embody the unionist past and present.

Critics such as George Watson (33) or David Wheatley (7) accuse Paulin of appropriating dialect, of using it for political purposes. Yet can this be avoided in the country whose dominant language is a colonial heritage? By depicting the use of the vernacular by the UDA (who back up their aspiration to Northern Ireland’s independence with Ulster Scots), by the United Irishmen and by himself, Paulin does not advocate the view that they all hold the same views. As a tool of the poet’s strife against standard

British English the vernacular does not lose its aesthetic value, marking the evolution of Paulin's poetry from the constricted, subdued diction towards linguistic freedom, association of images and sound games, as well as towards richer texture and contexts due to the use of local and colloquial expressions. Critics such as Robert Johnstone ("Guldering Unself-consciously" 87) judge his use of dialect as artificial, self-conscious and programmatic, contrary to his claims of "orality" and spontaneity. Elmer Andrews ("Tom Paulin" 338) is the only one, beside Clare Wills, to explain the linguistic associative freedom or anarchy of Paulin's poetry as an exploration rather than limitation, and who appreciates the poem that is not reducible to semantic "meanings." No matter how we approach it, in Ireland language with its inherent history seems not to be "politically neutral." Poets acknowledge this fact; instead of trying to "appropriate" it they explore those historical relations which also bear on politics.

Michael Longley's linguistic background was one of the reasons for his "double identity" or internal split. In *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters* he recalls the problems of acceptance he faced at school. His English accent acquired at home and associated with the better-off middle-class distinguished him from his working-class friends at that time. The moments of his going to school and back home were the ones of re-creating, re-inventing himself in order to integrate with his surroundings. This reaction is characteristic of immigrants' children, for whom difference means peer exclusion or even aggression. Twice a day Longley was crossing the border of two personalities, the two worlds where language defined identity and the sense of belonging.

In the course of his education, linguistic characteristics shifted from social class to regional difference. As Longley remembers in "River & Fountain" referring to his and Derek Mahon's studies at Trinity, "Etonians on Commons cut our accents with a knife." (*The Ghost Orchid* 55) Their accent was a clear mark of their origins: "We were from the North . . . College Square in Belfast and the Linen Hall / Had been our patch" (55). Again language was the reason for discrimination, classification and prejudice. Yet as an element of cultural difference, it also allowed the two poets to gain distance to their immediate surroundings—the Index, the Ban and other phenomena of the Irish Republic of that time—and to their home further away. It became the means of defying those issues, adding to Longley's and Mahon's imagined role of subversives with their own "secret" language (which appears quite similar to Paulin's stance).

In some of his poems drawing on antiquity Longley employs words from Ulster and Belfast dialects and, to a lesser extent, Irish. "Homecoming" or "The Butchers" employ individual Irish words, "Laertes"—Bel-

fast dialect, “The Helmet”—Scots, “The Vision of Theoclymenus”—Ulster Scots, and “Phemios and Medon” is written almost entirely in Ulster Scots.² The poet does not comment on his use of local words and he is rarely, if ever, asked that question. For sure, one would not expect such a linguistic variety in translations or poems drawing on the Classics. It again brings to mind Heaney’s practice in *Beowulf*: “In those instances where a local Ulster word seemed either poetically or historically right, I felt free to use it” (xxii–xxx). We may wonder about the practicalities of Heaney’s translation—how effective it is if there is no Ulster Scots or Hiberno-English dictionary or a Northern Irish person at hand, especially that his glossed translation of *Beowulf* was initially commissioned by Norton for American universities. Similarly, Longley’s “Phemios and Medon” is hardly definable in terms of dialect and not completely understood by a Southerner, not to mention a foreigner. We may wonder about the political aspects of choosing whether to resurrect Homer in Belfast dialect or in Ulster Scots, which makes a difference in the North of Ireland.

Referring to “The Butchers,” Robert Johnstone asks a rhetorical question: “And why ‘Butchers’ if not to make us think of the Shankill Butchers, loyalists who excused their acts of foul sadism as defensive actions?” (“Harmonics between Electrified Fences” 79) The Irish *sheugh* for ‘ditch’ (quite current in Ulster speech) marks the place of action of the poem rather than defines the protagonists’ identity, yet the adjective “bog,” bringing to mind Heaney’s “Kinship,” is associated with murderous impulses and death. Already “The Vision of Theoclymenus,” anticipating the *Odyssey* “butchers,” uses an Ulster Scots word, while “Phemios and Medon,” the episode directly preceding Homer’s original “butchers,” uses extensively Ulster Scots. Longley confirms Johnstone’s judgement by comparing “his part of Mayo” with Ithaca (sandy and remote) and Greece, and remembers that summer when everybody was talking about the Protestant gang:

I’ve often thought that that part of Ireland . . . looks like Greece. Or Greece looks like a dust-bowl version of Ireland. . . at that time one of the things people were talking about was the Shankill Road murders. There’d been some dreadful killings and torturings in outhouses, very remote places like that. My physical circumstances brought to the surface, or brought to my attention, perhaps, that passage in the *Odys-*

² In early volumes Longley provides explanations of the words in references, giving up this practice with the publication of *The Ghost Orchid*. “Homecoming:” ‘bullaun’ (‘stone-basin’), the word used also in “In Mayo” (*Poems* 118–19). “The Butchers:” ‘sheugh’ (‘ditch’—*Gorse Fires* 51). “Laertes:” ‘duncher’ (‘flat cap’—*Gorse Fires* 33). “The Helmet:” ‘wean’ (‘baby’), ‘mammy’, ‘babbie’ (*The Ghost Orchid* 38). “The Vision of Theoclymenus:” ‘peerie-heedit’ (‘confused, disoriented’—*The Weather in Japan* 15).

The Use of Ulster Speech...

sey . . . where Odysseus, with the help of Telemachus and the swineherd and somebody else, wipes out the suitors. And I had in the back of my mind the Shankill Butchers. (*Metre* 18)

In “Phemios and Medon,” when Odysseus intends to “redd the house,” both suitors “hook it and hunker fornent the altar of Zeus, / Afeard and skelly-eyed, keeking everywhere for death.” Generally in the poem, the Ulster dialect is used for communication and for the narrative: by Odysseus and Telemachos in direct speech, and by Telemachos as the narrator in indirect speech:

I gulder to me da: ‘Dinnae gut him wi yer gully,
He’s only a harmless crayter. And how’s about Medon
The toast-master whose ashy-pet I was? Did ye ding him . . .?
Thon oul gabble-blooter’s a canny huer . . .
Out he spalters, flaffing his hands, blirting to my knees . . .
[Odysseus:] ‘You may thank Telemachos for this chance to wise up
And pass on the message of oul dacency.’ (*The Ghost Orchid* 44)

Although “oul dacency” is a running term in the North denoting “peaceful coexistence” of the communities before the conflict (however such coexistence may have been considered “decent” predominantly by one community only), here it sounds grotesque in the context of Odysseus’ intended slaughter in his own house in the name of decency. Still, though they are accomplices, it is a conversation between a father and his son. In a few other poems by Longley, dialect accompanies intimate meetings, profoundly moving scenes of reunion and homecoming after years of exile. In “Laertes,” for instance, we can see Odysseus’ (and metaphorically Longley’s own) father wearing his Belfast *duncher*, while the speaker of “The Mustard Tin” tries to go back in time at the deathbed of his parent and *hokes around* his childhood for familiar objects (‘looks for them’).

Both Paulin and Longley situate language in a socio-political perspective. Although this aspect is more noticeable in Paulin’s poetry, language in Longley’s work is not free from political implications. Their use of Ulster dialects has a double edge. On the one hand it refers the reader to the Northern Irish conflict regarded by many in terms of the civil war, and is often placed in the framework of Greek mythology. In Paulin’s writings this trend is represented, for example, by “Cadmus and the Dragon” or his two plays, *The Riot Act* after *Antigone* and *Seize the Fire* after *Prometheus Bound*. On the other hand, the dialects evoke family bonds, childhood and home. They use local words to reveal the background and workings of violence, but also to express affection and the feeling of safety with which those words can provide the speaker. In the first case the poets show the

vernacular employed as yet another weapon of unionism, or they employ it themselves as a means of satirizing loyalists. It happens that the speakers of their poems are members of the linguistic, but not political, community, which attests to the internal split within the group of Protestant descent. In the second case, when it is associated with home, the dialect seems to be the North's cultural heritage which frequently gets somewhat depoliticized in Longley's poetry. In Paulin's, the notion of home is too political for the dialect to ever get liberated. In both cases it provides one of most vital foundations for the poets' active engagement in the discussion of history and politics, reflecting all inconsistencies and ambiguities of life in Northern Ireland in times of the conflict.

Andrews, Elmer, ed. *Contemporary Irish Poetry: A Collection of Critical Essays*. London: Macmillan, 1992.

---. "Tom Paulin: Underground Resistance Fighter." *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature*. Ed. Michael Kenneally. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1995: 329–43.

Corcoran, Neil. "Tom Paulin." *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English*. Ed. Ian Hamilton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994: 412–13.

Craig, Patricia. "History and Its Retrieval in Contemporary Northern Irish Poetry: Paulin, Montague and Others." *Contemporary Irish Poetry: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Elmer Andrews. London: Macmillan, 1992: 107–23.

---. "Reflexes and Reflections." Rev. of *Ireland and the English Crisis*, by Tom Paulin. *Times Literary Supplement* 19 Apr. 1985.

Dawe, Gerald. "Poems of a Northern Protestant." Rev. of *Liberty Tree*, by Tom Paulin. *ILS* (1984): 29.

Heaney, Seamus. "Introduction." *Beowulf*. Trans. Seamus Heaney. London: Faber, 1999: ix–xxx.

Johnstone, Robert. "Guldering Unselfconsciously." Rev. of Field Day Pamphlets Nos. 1 to 3, by Tom Paulin, Seamus Heaney and Seamus Deane. *Honest Ulsterman* 75 (May 1984): 85–91.

---. "Harmonics between Electrified Fences." Rev. of *Gorse Fires*, by Michael Longley. *Honest Ulsterman* 92 (1991): 78–82.

Longley, Michael. *Gorse Fires*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1991.

---. *Poems 1963–1983*. Dublin: Gallery, 1985.

---. *The Ghost Orchid*. London: Cape Poetry, 1995.

---. *The Weather in Japan*. London: Cape Poetry, 2000.

- . *Tuppenny Stung: Autobiographical Chapters*. Belfast: Lagan, 1994.
- . Interview by Sarah Broom. *Metre* 4 (1998): 17–26.
- . Interview by Jerzy Jarniewicz and Piotr Sommer. “Porządnie skrojony platek śniegu.” *Literatura na Świecie* 4–5 (2000): 251–67.
- . Interview by Dillon Johnston. “Q. & A.: Michael Longley.” *ILS* (1986): 20–22.
- . Interview. “The Longley Tapes.” *Honest Ulsterman* 78 (1985): 13–31.
- McDonald, Peter. “History and Poetry: Derek Mahon and Tom Paulin.” *Contemporary Irish Poetry: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Elmer Andrews. London: Macmillan, 1992: 86–106.
- Paulin, Tom. *A New Look at the Language Question*. Derry: Field Day Theatre Company, 1983.
- . *Fivemiletown*. London: Faber, 1987.
- . *Ireland and the English Crisis*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1984.
- . *Liberty Tree*. London: Faber, 1983.
- . *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- . *Seize the Fire*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.
- . *The Hillsborough Script: A Dramatic Satire*. London: Faber, 1987.
- . *The Riot Act*. London: Faber, 1985.
- . *The Strange Museum*. London: Faber, 1980.
- . *The Wind Dog*. London: Faber, 1999.
- . *Walking a Line*. London: Faber, 1994.
- . Interview by Eamonn Hughes. “Q. & A. with Tom Paulin.” *ILS* (1988): 31–32.
- Watson, George. “An Uncomfortable, Spikey Poet.” Rev. of *Fivemiletown*, by Tom Paulin. *ILS* (1988): 33.
- Wheatley, David. “Billycan Campfire Tinniness.” Rev. of *The Wind Dog*, by Tom Paulin. *ILS* (2000): 7.
- Wills, Clair. *Improprieties: Politics and Sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Katarzyna Ojrzyńska

University of Łódź

One, Mad Hornpipe: Dance as a Tool of Subversion in Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney*

ABSTRACT

The plot of Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney* oscillates around the theme of perception, blindness and eye-sight recovery. Although visually impaired, the eponymous character is a self-reliant and independent person who is very active, both professionally and socially. What serves as the source of tragedy in the play is the male desire to compensate for Molly's physical disability perceived as a sign of deficiency and oddity that needs to be normalized. Prompted by her husband, Molly decides to undergo a surgery which gives her a chance to regain sight and, thus, become a part of the world of the visually abled. Yet, subsequent to the operation, Molly cannot adapt herself to the new reality and develops a medical condition called blindsight, which leads to her final alienation and confusion.

Focusing predominantly on the main character of the play, this paper examines the ways in which Molly Sweeney experiences the surrounding world and seeks satisfaction and self-fulfilment through physical activities, such as swimming or dancing, which she vividly describes in her monologues. It explores the double nature of Molly who, despite her self-sufficiency, capacity for rebellion and a sense of autonomy, seems prone to male manipulation exercised at first by her father, later by her husband Frank and doctor Rice. Her expression of independence becomes particularly conspicuous in the scene of a party organized the night before her surgery when she performs a wild and frantic hornpipe, which serves as a form of momentary upheaval and a visualization of the outburst of extreme emotions. Although the dance is not presented onstage, it has a crucial function in the play, for it serves as its powerful climax, after which Molly experiences gradual deterioration.

Interpreted in the context of the history of Irish dance, the mad hornpipe appears replete with meanings and allusions. Traditionally associated with human sexuality and the female element, dance was often

treated by the Irish clergy with a great deal of distrust as a source of evil and moral corruption. Consequently, like in the case of the frenzied reel in another famous Frielian play, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the limitless and unrestricted performance in the climactic scene of *Molly Sweeney* may be seen as a tool of subversion and female opposition to the Irish patriarchal order. It is a unique moment in which the protagonist seizes male power and gains full, though very temporary, control over her life.

ABSTRACT

Written in 1994, *Molly Sweeney* is a play about restoring health to a person who suffers from an incurable disease. However, as Niel notices, comparing the drama to another Frielian masterpiece, "As in *Faith Healer*, we witness the miracle of a cure but, again, it is a cure without healing" (221). The thematic concept of *Molly Sweeney* is based on a paradox: what is believed to be a remedy, in reality, brings about only destruction. Self-sufficient and independent, the eponymous character challenges the conventional image of a visually disabled person. Molly is presented by Friel as an active member of the local community. The woman is not only successful in her professional life but also engaged in various leisure activities whose significance is underscored by her vivid descriptions of the sensual experience of swimming. The dramatic change in the play takes place after the surgery, subsequent to which Molly's energy and vitality are replaced with deterioration and stagnation.

In terms of the climax, the play follows the convention established in *Dancing at Lughnasa* in which Friel introduces a piece of traditional music and dance to mark the point of highest tension, after which the audience faces nothing but a gradual decline and degradation of the family. Although the use of dance in *Molly Sweeney* is much less elaborate than in the case of the Mundy sisters, the fragment in which Molly describes her mad hornpipe seems central to the whole drama. The climactic dance is a unique moment when she expresses her independence, rebels against the normalizing attitude of masculine authority and openly gives vent to the hidden instinctive fear of the unknown future.

At the beginning of the play, the blind Molly Sweeney leads a normal life in spite of her impairment. She takes up various activities which give her pleasure and a sense of self-fulfilment. On a daily basis working as a massage therapist at the local Health Centre, Molly spends her free time in an active way, keeping herself busy with diverse hobbies. In her

childhood, the woman was deprived of a possibility to attend school and to develop her interests. Therefore, now she evidently searches for other ways to achieve self-realization and satisfaction. Following the traditional association between the female and the body, Friel presents her favourite pastimes as having a very physical character. As Murray observes, “Molly’s own delicate balance finds its proper expression in the unlikely activities of swimming and dancing, where she finds her identity in defiance of the body and its limitations through disability” (“*Molly Sweeney*” 235). The protagonist describes her experience connected with her hobbies in a very self-conscious way. In her recollection of the time she spent at the swimming pool, Molly states:

I really did believe I got more pleasure, more delight from swimming than sighted people can ever get. Just offering yourself to the experience—every pore open and eager for that world of pure sensation, of sensation alone—sensation that could not have been enhanced by sight—experience that only existed by touch and feel; and moving swiftly and rhythmically through that enfolding world; and the sense of such assurance, such liberation, such concordance . . . (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 19)

Resulting from the frequent use of structural parallelisms, the repetitive form of the passage accurately conveys the rhythmical character of the activity and, with the mention of all the pores open and willing to receive the stimuli, accentuates the highly sensuous aspect of the experience. This description stresses Molly’s sense of belonging to the physical world and her assured attitude towards life. The brisk, rhythmical movement of the protagonist’s body in the water is both a reflection and an expression of Molly’s inner balance and confidence. “[L]iberating through the harmony it brought with the physical world around her” (Niel 220), swimming symbolizes the protagonist’s union with nature. Although visually impaired, Molly effectively uses her other senses and intuition to receive various external stimuli that help her to experience the surrounding world, which highly contrasts with the woman’s final condition in which she totally rejects any sensory contact with the reality.

It may be argued that the protagonist’s words used to describe swimming could equally well apply to her sensations when practicing another of her favourite activities, dancing, with one major difference that the water in the swimming pool is replaced with air filling the dancehall. Pine notices a further correspondence between the two, arguing that

[i]n the passage in which Molly describes the sensation of swimming, there is a direct restatement of the conclusion of *Lughnasa*: ‘moving swiftly and rhythmically through that enfolding world’ (*MS* 24) not

only echoes ‘moving rhythmically, languorously, in complete isolation (DL 71) but linguistically it recreates the echoing *image*, (301)

which serves as a possible level of comparison between the two plays. Swimming and dancing provide the characters with a feeling of harmony with the world, resulting from the experience of spatial freedom through movement. Yet, a moment after she finishes her reminiscence, Molly’s docility prevails over the confidence in her cognitive skills; she describes her experience as silly and incomprehensible to others (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 19), which suggests a return to the submissive position and the assumption of the male, rational point of view.

As Catherine Byrne recalls, during her preparations for the role of Molly, she went swimming with visually impaired people. The actress describes her experience in the following way:

Twenty people in the pool—I was the only sighted one. I got out and was terrified. They just swam round like lunatics. Never bumped into each other once. *I* kept bumping into them! I came out and *I* felt like the person with the disability. (qtd. in Coult 154)

Her account of the event exposes the gap between the world of the sighted and that of the visually impaired. In this sense, Byrne’s experience can be compared to the sense of loss and confusion experienced by Molly after the operation. Furthermore, in her recollections, the actress undermines the traditional superiority of the abled over the physically impaired. Byrne stresses the high abilities of blind people and the way they tend to be underestimated by the sighted members of society. This fact also finds a reflection in the Friel’s play. Fully aware of her skills and attributes, Molly does not conform to the popular image of a blind person who needs constant care and guidance. At one point, she openly states: “I knew only my own world. I don’t think of it as a deprived world. Disadvantaged in some ways; of course it was. But at that stage I never thought of it as deprived” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 18–19), which shows her as a self-reliant and confident person who is conscious of the fact that, due to the impairment, her other senses have become more receptive to external factors.

One might even argue that her highly developed skills such as dancing, swimming or even cycling give Molly a sense of superiority over sighted people. She is capable of enjoying more intense bodily sensations than ordinary human beings who are either unable or too inhibited to fully surrender to such experience. She declares:

Oh, I can’t tell you the joy swimming gave me. I used to think the other people in the pool with me, the sighted people, that in some way their

pleasure was actually diminished because they could see, because seeing in some way qualified the sensation; and that if they only knew how full, how total my pleasure was, I used to tell myself that they must, they really must envy me. (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 19)

As the visual disability resulted in enhancing other senses, the subsequent partial restoration of sight deprives Molly of her ability to experience intense sensual pleasure from physical activities such as swimming or dancing. As Wyschogrod puts it, “For Molly, astonishingly, blindness provides the open sesame of sensations” (113). Hence, some time after the surgery, it appears that the new experience available to the protagonist cannot compensate for the loss she has suffered.

258

Generally, while one may have an impression that Molly is independent and self-sufficient, it is conspicuous that she appears rather submissive and blindly trusting towards the male characters: her father, her husband Frank and doctor Rice, who play decisive roles in her life and contribute to her final tragedy. This is clearly discernible, for instance, when she decides to have the surgery. As doctor Rice observes: “I knew she was there at Frank’s insistence, to please him, and not with any expectation that I could help” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 13). It is also noteworthy that, when she accepts Frank’s marriage proposal, Molly admits that she did it “for no very good reason at all” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 31), as if she followed certain social conventions and wanted to fulfil the expectations of other people.

Yet, Friel does not present Molly as totally subservient and passively accepting the will of others. There are at least two moments in the play when she openly manifests her rebellion against the fate imposed on her by the men. One instance is when the protagonist rejects the new world, withdraws from reality and retreats to what she calls a “border country” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 57) of blindsight; the other takes place much earlier during a party organized the night before her first surgery when Molly performs a spontaneous and energetic hornpipe.

To have a full understanding of the scene, it is crucial to interpret it in the context of changes introduced to Irish dance in the first half of the twentieth century. Traditionally associated with human sexuality and the female element, dance was often treated by the local Catholic clergy with a large dose of suspicion. As an Irish parish priest stated already in the 1670s, “dancing leads to bad thoughts and evil actions. It is dancing that excites the desires of the body. In the dance are seen frenzy and woe, and with dance thousands go to the black hell” (qtd. in Kavanagh, Keohane and Kuhling 731). Such a negative attitude towards this form of bodily movement had particularly strong repercussions in the nationalist times. It may be observed that the rebirth of the free Irish state coincided with the

growing strictness of Catholic mentality. This had an immense influence on various, and especially bodily, forms of entertainment and the modern Irish notion of femininity.

The nationalist vision of the new country provided very limited options available to women whose role, as most clearly stated in de Valera's Constitution of 1937, was restricted to the household. As Mayer remarks,

Women are encouraged to represent and manifest the ideal of Mary in their own 'essence'—in their behaviour, their motherhood and their relationship with others. In other words it is through their mimetic performance of Mary's model that individual Irish women come to embody femininity and, by extension, the Irish nation. (qtd. in Sweeney 20)

In this sense, the gendered social construct of Irish womanhood may be seen as a peculiar combination of the mythical ideal of Cathleen Ní Houlihan and that of the chaste and immaculate Virgin Mary. Treated more like objects than subjects by the new patriarchal State, the Irish women had very limited possibilities of self-development in both personal and professional spheres of life.

Similarly dance, which is traditionally believed to have "its origins in the mythological female principle" (Levin 86), was in modern Ireland subject to a number of restrictions whose aim was both to desexualize the dancer and to eradicate all the foreign influences that for centuries had been giving shape to the Irish culture. As Royce states, "When dance is used as a symbol of identity, it differs qualitatively from dance that is used for recreation" (163). It seems that in most cases these two forms coexist in equilibrium. Yet, in Ireland, for a long time the only officially approved dance was that which served the nationalist purpose. As O'Connor has it, "[t]he Irish body was to be 'pure' both in terms of its being 'authentically Irish,' i.e. untrammelled by any outside influences, as well as in terms of sexual modesty and constraint" (qtd. in Mulrooney 38). All this resulted, for instance, in the introduction of the canon of thirty *céilí* dances, which were "praised for the fact that there was very little contact between the sexes [as f]or elite cultural nationalists, then, the ideal Irish dancing body was an asexual body" (O'Connor qtd. in Mulrooney 39), and a total elimination of any arm movement from Irish dancing. Thus, the extremely rigid posture that is nowadays commonly, though, as one may argue, groundlessly, seen as typical of all traditional Irish dances can be perceived as a perfect epitome of the restrictions imposed on the Irish body by the stringent rules of parochial nationalist and Catholic morality, which becomes particularly prominent when compared, for example, with highly sensual flamenco, whose power and energy also relies on the sophisticated movement of feet.

In Friel's *Molly Sweeney*, the dance is not presented onstage and is evoked solely on the verbal level of the play. The dramatic piece consists of three independent monologues, providing different but complementary accounts of one story and highlighting the solitude and isolation of the characters as well as the irreversibility of the events which have taken place and belong to the domain of memory. Such a strategy can be seen as typical of Irish drama, the narrative form alluding to the oral tradition of the Island and the frequent hostility towards excessive physical expression. Thus, by virtue of lacking its theatrical equivalent, Molly's description of the hornpipe provides a commentary on the position of dance in the Irish theatre and the fact that, even in the contemporary Irish culture, the dancing body often remains confined within the dominant mode of storytelling. Yet, though absent from the stage, the frantic performance of the protagonist is a powerful manifestation of her feelings and serves as a potent climax of the drama.

Molly's dance takes place during a spontaneous meeting the night before the surgery. The event conforms to the idea of a traditional *céilí* that was originally "an evening visit, a friendly call" (Brennan 30). Although Breathnach suggests that the term originally meant "a gathering of neighbours in some house where talk and gossip on matters of local interest help to put in the night [in which] no musical entertainment or dancing [wa]s implied" (47), with time these two elements have eventually become an inseparable part of the event. On the evening before the operation, a group of friends and neighbours meet in Molly's house to engage in a number of traditional *céilí* activities: drinking, recitation, chatting, singing and playing tapes and fiddles. Following Frank's comment on the arrival of the unexpected guests: "Come on! This is beginning to feel like a wake!" (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 23), one could even argue that, with all the people gathered to celebrate the last night before Molly sets out on a journey to the land of the sighted, the party resembles the typically Irish custom called an "American wake" or a "spree" (Brennan 104–105). The comparison is particularly justified as the Irish term "wake" refers to both a funeral banquet and a traditional event organized to bid farewell to a person a night before their departure to America. Due to the distance between the continents, it was highly improbable that the man or the woman would ever return to their home country, which in a way anticipates the spiritual loss of the familiar world by the Frielian protagonist.

The friendly atmosphere of the gathering does not lift Molly's spirits or facilitate her reunion with the neighbours. Paradoxically, the woman feels desolate and abandoned, having no one to share her doubts with, as the guests purposefully avoid the topic of the surgery that is to be performed the following day. Furthermore, Molly states that what she experi-

enced “was the dread of exile, of being sent away. It was the desolation of homesickness” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25), feelings that are closely related also to the notion of emigration and which anticipate her later deterioration as well as the spiritual and physical banishment she will experience.

These emotions are given a violent outburst when, after the fiddler finishes the reel entitled “The Lament for Limerick,” the protagonist vigorously orders a hornpipe. She recalls: “I found myself on my feet in the middle of the sitting-room and calling, ‘A hornpipe, Tom! A mad, fast hornpipe!’” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25). Taking into account the powerful subversive nature of the subsequent performance, the choice of the tune is fully justified. “[S]lower than other solo measures, allowing great complexity of steps” (Brennan 66–67), hornpipe is a very energetic dance, traditionally performed by men, nowadays mostly in hard shoes. According to Breathnach:

The hornpipe was usually danced by one man alone. It was rarely danced by women, as the steps were regarded as requiring the vigour and sound which only a man could bring to them. It appears the ladies of Cork were exceptional in that they not alone danced the hornpipe, but used the heavier steps in jigs and reels which elsewhere were used exclusively by men. (45)

These qualities of the dance genre suggest that Molly’s performance combines lightness with dynamism and airiness with power. Her dance creates “the illusion of a conquest of gravity, i.e. freedom from the actual forces that are normally known and felt to control the dancer’s body” (Cohen 168). Yet, more importantly, through entering the male-dominated field, Molly challenges the rigid gendered conventions of dance. She kinaesthetically expresses her opposition to the rational rules of the patriarchal Irish state, according to which her intuitive fear of the operation cannot undermine the seemingly logical arguments of her husband. By ordering a hornpipe traditionally danced by men, she seizes male power and rebels against the idea of restoring her sight and, thus, displacing her from the world she has inhabited till the surgery.

Just before the dance, the protagonist is torn between her gratitude, trust and loyalty to Frank and Doctor Rice and a subconscious fear that during the operation, instead of gaining, she may lose something crucial and, therefore, reconsiders the surgery:

And then with a sudden anger I thought: why am I going for this operation? None of this is my choosing. Then why is this happening to me? I am being used. Of course I trust Frank. Of course I trust Mr. Rice. But how can they know what they are taking away from me? They don’t.

They can't. And have I anything to gain?—anything?—anything? (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25)

At this very moment, she becomes aware of the mechanisms of male manipulation which have been shaping her life. This leads to the inner conflict between the desire to rebel against the imposed solutions and the willingness to conform to the social expectations. The growing tension finds a release in the form of her bold energetic dance. The performance serves as a physical reflection of the truly volcanic—sudden and powerful—eruption of emotions which, till that time, have remained concealed. It suggests that, otherwise tamed and composed, Molly possesses a rebellious potential inherited from her mother whom she describes as constantly quarrelling with her father until coming down with a severe mental breakdown.

262

The hornpipe is a powerful manifestation of individuality, self-sufficiency and extraordinary skills that seem beyond the understanding of the sighted. In this respect, Molly impersonates the qualities which Fraleigh attributes to good dancers, stating: “The good dancer does not project her limitations; rather she projects her mastery of the dance she is performing, engendering a sense of limitlessness as an infinite (unrestricted) present” (33). Molly is fully aware of her skills. Thus, she begins the dance with a boastful and almost threatening exclamation: “Now watch me! You just watch me!” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25). The woman shows that she does not need her sight improved, as she can perfectly manage without it. As Bertha has it, interpreting the play in a postcolonial spirit:

This kind of ‘improvement’ forced upon her [Molly]—the eye operation to gain partial sight—corresponds to the paradigm of colonialism, based on the assumption that the colonial ‘other’ is less developed. That this intervention destroys the integrity and the possibilities of life moving at a different pace, relying on its own resources, is never a consideration. (162)

Molly’s dance is a manifestation of otherness that does not imply deficiency. It is as if she wanted to demonstrate that she is not a “second-class denizen” and does not need any “improvement.”

Although Molly frequently allows her husband to take control over her life and guide it in the direction he considers proper, agreeing to all his suggestions and ideas, one may have an impression that her real power lies in the inner sense of balance and composure. Even when she performs her powerful energetic dance, the protagonist does not wreak havoc but her movement is both controlled and precise. In O’Brien’s words,

Lacking any sense of discrepancy between who she is and what she wants, Molly is the antithesis of Frank’s restlessness. As compared to

One, Mad Hornpipe: Dance as a Tool...

Frank and Rice she appears to be in a state of grace, her integrity and independence enabling her to keep faith with herself. (95)

The opposition between Molly and her husband is also discernible in Rice's comment made upon observing the couple entering the clinic just before the operation:

He was on her left. Now in the open air a smaller presence in a shabby rain-coat and cap; his hands clasped behind his back; his eyes on the ground; his head bowed slightly against the wind so that he looked . . . passive. Not a trace of assurance, the ebullience, that relentless energy. (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 32)

Finally, this contrast is also noticeable on the verbal level. Coherent and well-organized monologues highlighting Molly's composure stand in a direct opposition to Frank's speeches that are chaotic and full of digressions, as well as Rice's parts in which he expresses the ecstatic hopes of restoring his reputation (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 14).

According to Murray, Molly has an "intuitive control over her body within her environment" ("Friel and O'Casey" 25). This can be explained in terms of both the stereotypical female intuition and, to some extent, the bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence which, according to Gardner's psychological theory of multiple intelligences, refers to the "ability to use one's body in highly differentiated and skilled ways, for expressive, as well as goal directed purposes" (Gardner 206). The protagonist dances "Weaving between all those people, darting between chairs and stools and cushions and bottles and glasses with complete assurance, with absolute confidence" (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25–26) and "Not a glass [is] overturned, not a shoulder brushed" (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25). This is an instance of a complete surrender to her emotions and the intuitive knowledge of the place she has gained using other senses than her sight.

The dance is both "Mad and wild and frenzied [and] so adroit, so efficient" that it shows "No timidity, no hesitations, no faltering" (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25). As Moloney has it, "The furious, expert hornpipe danced by Molly at the party held the night before her first surgery had spoken not only to her tactile proficiency but also to an immense banked resentment and capacity for defiance" (291). This suggests a correspondence between the protagonist's physical performance and the scene in *Wonderful Tennessee* in which George plays *Third Movement (Presto) of Beethoven's Sonata No. 14 (Moonlight)* (Friel, *Wonderful Tennessee* 48). "The playing," Friel indicates, "should express 'internal fury'; it is a cruel, self-inflicted parody of his imminent fate" (Cave 198). Therefore, despite the similarity resulting from the fact that both characters communicate the anger and

despair through their performance, it has to be stressed that the unfulfilled musician acts with more sense of self-irony than Molly. Unlike George, the woman still has a possibility to change her life. Giving vent to her rage through dance, Molly makes the last attempt to manifest her independence and regain control over her life.

Yet, the woman is unable to provide any reasonable justification for her doubts concerning the surgery. As Pine argues, “When Molly danced on the eve of the operation, it was in anger and defiance. Not yet refusal, because she still could not know what the new world would be” (299). The protagonist admits:

I was afraid that if things turned out as Frank and Mr. Rice hoped, I was afraid that I would never again know these people as I knew them now . . . I wondered—would I ever be as close to them as I was now. (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25)

264

Thus, the fury communicated through dance can be seen as resulting from Molly’s subconscious fear of the unfamiliar and her awareness of the fact that her life will somewhat change.

The dance scene alludes to the gendered dichotomy between rational and intuitive knowledge and the traditional valuation of the former as superior to the latter. Molly finds it impossible to voice her fright and anger using the rational male discourse. Instead, she achieves this by means of dance as a form of expression closely connected with the female element. And yet, unable to justify her fear verbally in a logical way, Molly repeatedly rejects all that her intuition tells her and, in order to fulfil the expectation of the society, tries to dispel all doubts using rational argumentation. She asks herself in relation to the restoration of eye-sight: “But why should it be frightening?” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 18), to which she cannot provide a satisfactory answer.

Abandoned and self-focused, the nature of Molly’s dance is very close to that of Friel’s another character, namely Kate Mundy’s “*totally concentrated, totally private [and] simultaneously controlled and frantic*” (Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa* 22) reel. What reinforces the similarity between the two otherwise very distinct forms of Irish traditional dance is the fact that both performers are equally overcome by the fear of the unknown future and the possibility of disintegration. These emotions find a reflection in their moves. As Pine argues, imagining the performance of the protagonist:

we may be able to share with Molly not only the elation of her blindness and ‘complete assurance’ (*MS* 22) but also the reason for the madness, the anger,

One, Mad Hornpipe: Dance as a Tool...

and the defiance: her fear of her impending exile from *her* world as the colonists take her into theirs. (Pine 289)

This impression is strengthened by the posture of both women's bodies. Rigid and upright, they seem to reflect the inner tension of the characters resulting from the discrepancy between their wishes and desires, and the limited possibilities they are offered. Although what comes to the fore in both cases is the emotional load of the performances which communicate both anger and despair, the women do not to break the convention of Irish dancing. Consequently, Molly's rigid bodily posture counterbalances the vigorous and subversive character of her dance and suggests certain inhibition and limitation, thus foreseeing her eventual surrender to the pressures of society.

Like Kate Mundy, who dances out of the kitchen and into the garden, Molly's performance is not restricted spatially as "in a rage of anger and defiance [she] dance[s] a wild and furious dance round and round that room; then out to the hall; then round the kitchen; then back to the room again and round it a third time" (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 25). It is an expression of power and freedom unhampered by physical disability. The impairment of sight does not deprive Molly of an ability to move confidently about the house, which reflects her potential to act with self-assurance in both the private and the public sphere of her life.

The situation changes dramatically after the surgery when Molly's living space becomes significantly limited. Marginalized and relegated from the public sphere, the woman shares the fate of her mother. She remains incarcerated literally—within the four walls of her room in the hospital, and metaphorically—in the private world of her thoughts, dreams and fantasies. Such restriction of space, depicted as a form of the matrilineal experience, can be seen as a strategy typical of colonizers and an instance of female oppression. This idea has been explored by Moloney who, seeing *Molly Sweeney* as a continuation of "Friel's tradition of the political theatre" (287), proposes a postcolonial feminist reading of the play. Comparing the eponymous character to the imperilled Cathleen Ní Houlihan, she states:

the blind Molly acts as a symbol for Gaelic Ireland, the partially sighted Molly serves as a metaphor for a colonized country, and Molly hospitalized for madness represents the postcolonial state. But most poignantly of all, Molly is also a contemporary Irishwoman, a damsel turned into hag by the postcolonial Irish male, and her experience signals the continuing vexed status of women in Ireland. (285)

Similarly, McMullan addresses the problem of patriarchal control in the modern nationalist Ireland as presented in Friel's play. Stating that "*Molly*

Sweeney (1994) directly stages the performance of male authority on the female body” (145), she observes that “Initially presented as self-possessed, independent and highly resourceful, [the woman’s] integrity is destroyed by instrumental masculine authority” (145). The vigour and energy of the climactic dance is, therefore, juxtaposed with the final stagnation and spatial limitation of the protagonist.

Molly’s spontaneous kinaesthetic and emotional outburst has a very temporary nature. For a moment, the woman asserts herself as able-bodied and in control of her movement and gestures, in this way contradicting the stereotypical image of a blind person who is unable to move without a guide, or at least a special cane. Yet, after she gives vent to her anger and defiance in the form of physical activity, Molly soon returns to the submissive position. Her dance ends as soon as Frank tells Tom to stop playing the fiddles. Molly instantly assumes a very rational point of view represented by her husband and states: “God knows how I didn’t kill myself or injure somebody. Or indeed how long it lasted. But it must have been terrifying to watch because, when I stopped, the room was hushed” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 26). The inability to justify her kinaesthetic outburst in a logical way leads to self-deprecating her skills and intuition. When the dance is over, she has no longer the same confidence in her abilities. Just after the outburst of power, Molly is instantly overwhelmed by fear and a sense of alienation. She recollects: “I was suddenly lost and anxious and frightened. I remember calling, ‘Rita? Where are you, Rita?’ ‘Here, at the window,’ she said. And I stumbled, groped my way to her and sat beside her” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 26). This unexpected change of behaviour when the dance is over clearly exposes the fragile aspect of Molly’s nature and her desperate need for support in these difficult moments of her life. It shows that the woman eventually surrenders to the pressure of society and assumes the role of a disabled person who is bound to depend on others rather than on her own resources.

The final medical condition of Molly is defined as blindsight, in which the woman is deprived of the skills she had before the operation, namely she is unable to distinguish between light and darkness and, as she complains, “Even the world of touch has shrunk” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 55). This state also has an immense effect on the protagonist’s psyche, as afterwards she no longer practices swimming, dancing or cycling, but remains enclosed within her room. From the medical point of view, Molly possesses the physical capability to see and yet she refuses to use it as a tool of experiencing reality. It appears that, conforming to social pressures and agreeing to undergo the operation, the woman deprives herself of sensuous pleasures and thus, in a way, restrains her body. The withdrawal from the familiar world leads also to a sense of spiritual loss and confusion,

which Friel shows as similar to the situation of an animal displaced from its natural habitat, providing an example of badgers (*Molly Sweeney* 51) and Iranian goats (*Molly Sweeney* 14–15). Paradoxically, because of the surgery, Molly turns from a self-sufficient and able-bodied individual to a disabled person who demands constant care. She no longer exhibits any potential for anger and rebellion, which is accurately presented by the image of her “wayward hair contained in a net” (Friel, *Molly Sweeney* 55). Controlled and deprived of her intuitive knowledge, Molly can lead only a shallow and futile half-existence.

Resembling the mad woman in the attic, Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Friel’s protagonist eventually becomes eliminated from the new world which she cannot adapt to. She shares the fate of her mother who, after a mental breakdown, was institutionalized by her husband. Similarly, in order to regain a certain dose of freedom, Frank commits Molly to a mental institution. As until 1997 divorce was illegal in Ireland, Moloney suggests that the provisions of the Mental Treatment Act of 1945 offered the most convenient way of getting rid of a problematic wife:

The Irish prohibition on divorce would exclude, however, an otherwise obvious way to attain . . . peace. [Yet] Irish law entitled him [Frank] to apply for his wife’s confinement in a mental institution [similarly as in the case of Molly’s father]. Not just an aggravated husband but a judge whose recommendations, even out of the courtroom, would be taken seriously. (297)

Therefore, in his play, Friel provides a commentary upon the position of women in contemporary Ireland, depicting them as colonized subjects whose identity, like the identity of the nation, needs to be liberated and redefined after the period of colonial suppression and patriarchal dictatorship. One could analogically apply a similar idea to such spheres of Irish culture as dance which for a long time was in numerous ways restricted by Catholic morality. The postcolonial confusion and problems with national identity, metaphorically represented by the postoperative condition of Molly, found a reflection in imposing limitations on Irish dance, which aimed at eliminating all foreign elements from the Irish dance tradition and desexualizing the body of the dancers.

It is, thus, no wonder that the protagonist’s most powerful emotional outburst assumes the kinaesthetic form that has a subversive potential against nationalist restrictions imposed on the body with its all manifestations. As has been already indicated, although belonging to the approved canon, the powerful hornpipe performed by Molly was traditionally seen as a typically male dance. It is one of the last signs of rebellion, or a subconscious attempt to seize the right to decide about her own fate earlier exer-

cised by her father, her husband and her ophthalmologist. This contributes to the fact that, even though it is not presented onstage, the performance of the protagonist serves as a powerful, emotionally charged climax of the play, after which the audience witnesses only decay and degradation.

Subsequent to the main character's surgery, her condition gradually deteriorates in the direction of stagnation and inactivity. Molly's final predicament may be interpreted as a commentary on the condition of contemporary Irish society. Impoverished and deprived of its attributes, it has to undergo a long process of reestablishing its identity, as at the present moment the nation, in many respects, is still limited and inhibited from further progress. This problem appears particularly acute as regards the perception of the body and the Irish concept of womanhood. Considered in the national times as potentially unruly and disruptive, these two elements still demand redefinition and liberation, their current situation symbolized by Molly's confinement in the psychiatric hospital. Analyzing the play in the postcolonial context, Moloney observes: "The colonizers, after all, have the freedom to move on; the options for the colonized, on the other hand, are always more limited" (291). Thus, while Molly, unable to find her place in the new world to which she has been introduced, becomes confined to a mental institution, the remaining two male characters can go on with their lives and search for the new ways to achieve self-fulfilment.

WORKS CITED

Bertha, Csilla. "Brian Friel as Postcolonial Playwright." *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*. Ed. Anthony Roche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 154–65.

Breathnach, Breandán. *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*. Dublin and Cork: Mercier, 1980.

Brennan, Helen. *The Story of Irish Dance*. Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001.

Cave, Richard Allen. "Questing for Ritual and Ceremony in a God-forsaken World: *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Wonderful Tennessee*." *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry: 'The Work Has Value.'* Ed. Donald E. Morse, Csilla Bertha and Mária Kurdi. Dublin: Carysfort, 2006. 181–204.

Cohen, Marshall. "Primitivism, Modernism and Dance Theory." *What is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Marshall Cohen and Roger Copeland. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. 161–77.

Coult, Tony. *About Friel: the Playwright and the Work*. London: Faber, 2003.

Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1987.

Friel, Brian. *Dancing at Lughnasa*. London: Faber, 1990.

---. *Molly Sweeney*. New York: Dramatist Play Service, 1996.

---. *Wonderful Tennessee*. Loughcrew: Gallery, 1993.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic, 1983.

Kavanagh, Donncha, Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling. "Dance-work: Images of Organisation in Irish Dance." *SAGE Directions in Organization Studies*. Ed. S. R. Clegg. London: SAGE, 2008. 725–42.

Levin, David Michael. "Philosophers and the Dance." *What is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Marshall Cohen and Roger Copeland. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. 85–93.

McMullan, Anna. "Performativity, Unruly Bodies and Gender in Brian Friel's Drama." *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*. Ed. Anthony Roche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 142–53.

Moloney, Karen M. "Molly Astray: Revisioning Ireland in Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 16 (2000): 285–310.

Mulrooney, Deidre, ed. *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland*. Dublin: Liffey, 2006.

Murray, Christopher. "Friel and O'Casey Juxtaposed." *Irish University Review* 29 (1999): 16–29.

---. "Molly Sweeney and its Sources: A Postmodern Case Study." *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry: 'The Work Has Value.'* Ed. Donald E. Morse, Csilla Bertha and Mária Kurdi. Dublin: Carysfort, 2006. 229–50.

Niel, Ruth. "Disability as Motif and Meaning in Brian Friel's Drama." *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry: 'The Work Has Value.'* Ed. Donald E. Morse, Csilla Bertha and Mária Kurdi. Dublin: Carysfort, 2006. 205–28.

O'Brien, George. "The Late Plays." *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*. Ed. Anthony Roche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 91–103.

Pine, Richard. *The Diviner: The Art of Brian Friel*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1999.

Royce, Anya Peterson. *The Anthropology of Dance*. Alton: Dance, 2002.

Sweeney, Bernadette. *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Wyschogrod, Edith. "Blind Man Seeing: From Chiasm to Hyperreality." *Crossover Queries: Dwelling with Negatives, Embodying Philosophy's Others*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006. 112–24.

Joanna Kosmalka

University of Łódź

Dichotomous Images in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*: In Pursuit of Objective Balance

ABSTRACT

Saturday sets out to depict the contemporary world with its ambiguities and paradox. In the novel, like in a mirror painting, every event, character and conflict is highlighted from diverse, often contradictory, angles by the narrator's extensive commentary, flashback and reference to other books. The prevailing happiness of mass protests against the war on Iraq is countered by the recollection of mass graves, an element of Saddam's callous regime, the real terrorist threat is contrasted with national paranoia, and the Prime Minister's performance of truthfulness is scrutinized by means of Paul Ekman's study of micro-expressions.

The technique of dualistic depiction is further used in order to describe the characters. Reworking the idea of two sides of the same coin, McEwan offers the novel as a metaphorical study of the intricacies of human personality. Therefore, Baxter becomes simultaneously an offender and a victim, John Grammaticus turns from a successful poet into an alcoholic womanizer, and Lilian Perowne's physical and mental disintegration is contrasted with her past as a champion swimmer.

McEwan's dichotomous description of the world echoes Barthes's binaries, not only in the duality itself, but also in the fact that the juxtaposition of contradictory images constitutes a more complete depiction of an event or a person. The contrast between the opposing ideas is further accentuated by the use of different jargons: the language of medicine, media, upper-class, working-class, and the like. The use of language throughout the novel seems to repeat the notion that by means of jargons people control and exclude others, highlighting their authority and constructing their position of supremacy.

Saturday, which captures acutely the events of a single day in the life of a renowned neurosurgeon, Henry Perowne, presents issues, such as the terrorist threat or the creation of media reality, that appear international in consciousness. The essay illustrates how, with admirable

artistry, McEwan incorporates meaningful images, visually complex descriptions and different kinds of language into a diary account, for readers to enjoy a more objective comment on the contemporary world.

ABSTRACT

McEwan in his stream-of-consciousness novel *Saturday* introduces a single third person narrator, Henry Perowne. And it is the extensive retrospections, discerning commentaries and meticulous descriptions of Perowne that endow his depiction of reality with a sophisticated even-handedness. Important are also his personal qualities. He is a 48-year-old renowned neurosurgeon, the devoted husband of Rosalind and the proud father of two children, Daisy and Theo. His professional training and predilection for logic influence his way of perceiving the world. Unlike Mrs. Dalloway or Leopold Bloom, Perowne delineates the external reality in an unemotional, analytical and organized way. He illuminates two oppositional views of the same issue without passing judgment. This brings to mind Barthes's binaries. According to the French theorist, a word acquires its meaning when juxtaposed with its binary opposition because the clear difference between the opposing ideas allows for an interpretation (Bonnycastle 245). *Ipso facto*, a word can be elucidated by comparison with its opposition, by defining "what it is not." McEwan's depiction of the world in *Saturday* echoes Barthes's dichotomy as events and characters in the novel are presented through contrast by means of digressions.

Depiction of the reality in terms of binary oppositions introduces, more or less successfully, objective balance to the narrative. The term objective balance, not to be mistaken with objectivism, is used in this essay to denote the narrator's ability to describe the events that he witnesses or even participates in with detachment, and his aptitude for detecting the ambiguities of the outside world, being aware of his own biases and emotions. Consequently, the moral judgment is left to readers.

For it is readers who have to decide, for example, whether the invasion on Iraq is just. On Saturday 15 February 2003, Perowne, on his way to a squash match, watches people preparing for a mass protest against the war on Iraq. He is perplexed by the happiness and excitement of the assembling crowd. People are hugging each other, cheering and clapping. He watches them taking out placards, banners, whistles, football rattles, funny hats and cartoonish rubber masks of politicians.

From the impatient pavement crowds, some dry runs with the noise-makers—a trombone, a squeeze-ball car horn, a lambeg drum. There are ragged practiced chants which at first he can't make out. Tumty tumty tum. Don't attack Iraq. Placards not yet on duty are held at slope, at rakish angles over shoulders. Not in my Name goes past a dozen times. (71)

The cheerful atmosphere of the protest is underlined by the rhythm of passages describing the march with its short, onomatopoeic words, arranged in simple sentences. These sentences include political slogans, *Don't attack Iraq, Jews against the War, Down with this sort of Thing*, the names of associations participating in the event that also carry the quality of political catch phrases, *British Association of Muslims, Swaffham Women's Choir* and the names of towns, *Stratford, Gloucester, Evesham* in order to imitate a lively beat of the march and its ambience. Behind Perowne's description, however, lurks criticism of the protesters' attitude and their ignorance towards the regime in Iraq. His immediate reaction to what he sees in the streets is a recollection of Miri Taleb, an Iraqi professor in his late sixties whom he once treated. The academic was subjected to torture for an unspecified crime, and he never discovered what the charges were against him. Commemoration of his imprisonment is permanent damage to both shoulders and scars of thorn bush on his thighs. Perowne reminisces the academic's story:

The torture was a routine—Miri and his companions heard the screaming from their cells, and waited to be called. Beatings, electrocution, anal rape, near drowning, thrashing the soles of the feet. Everyone, from top officials to street sweepers, lived in a state of anxiety, constant fear. (62)

In Henry's account of the professor's imprisonment the language of violence and terror prevails, devoid of any sentimentalism, as befits a surgeon. While Perowne enumerates plain facts, the emotions, introduced mostly through describing the procedures of the system, are confined to pain and fear. The factual and dry tone of these passages highlights the terror of Saddam's regime, and stands in stark contrast with the scene of the march, emphasizing the impropriety of emotions binding the mass protest. Watching the crowd on the news, Henry reflects upon his ambivalent and conflicting feelings about the invasion: "All this happiness on display is suspect. . . . If they think—and they could be right—that continued torture and summary executions, ethnic cleansing and occasional genocide are preferable to an invasion, they should be sombre in their view" (69). Perowne recapitulates two sides of the pro- and anti-war conflict, but resists consenting to either of them as both groups advance tenacious arguments.

Saddam behaves like a spoilt, “overgrown boy with a pudgy hangdog look, and dark eyes” who “feels a wish and its fulfilment as one” (39). He makes use of torture and murder as a means of maintaining his power, getting personally involved in ethnic cleansing or violent interrogations. Blair, on the other hand, is faced with a deadlock but he conceals his anxiety about the aptness of his decision. While Henry is watching Blair’s speech in Glasgow, his thoughts wander back to his brief encounter with the Prime Minister at the Tate Modern where Blair mistook him for an artist, and having realized his mistake, cut the conversation short and moved on. Henry detected in Blair’s hesitation a hairline crack. Now referring to a study by Paul Ekman, a renowned psychologist, who has reported that microexpressions betray lying, Henry tries to scrutinize the Prime Minister’s face on TV screen but in vain, and as a result, there emerges a paradoxical image of Blair as a sincere liar.

This kind of depiction extends to many other characters in *Saturday*. For example, the portrayal of Lilian Perowne, Henry’s mother, suffering from vascular dementia and living in an elderly home, is contrasted with the surgeon’s recollection of his mother as a champion swimmer; John Grammaticus, Henry’s father-in-law, used to be a successful poet but turned into an alcoholic womanizer; and Baxter, the intruder who terrorized the Perownes, is portrayed as a gene’s victim.

Baxter’s introduction into the novel as his red, series-five BMW collides with Perowne’s luxurious Mercedes S500 already suggests both the class conflict and Henry’s ambiguity in perception of the young man. The surgeon’s first glance at the BMW evokes his associations “for no good reason with criminality” and “drug-dealing” (83), while the driver’s posture emanates physical violence. As they shake their hands, Perowne tries to appraise Baxter:

Baxter is one of those smokers whose pores exude a perfume, an oily essence of his habit. Garlic affects certain people the same way. Possibly the kidneys are implicated. He’s a fidgety, small faced young man with thick eyebrows and dark brown hair razored close to the skull. The mouth is bulbously, with the smoothly shaved shadow of a strong beard adding to the effect of a muzzle. The general simian air is compounded by sloping shoulders, and the built-up trapezoids suggest time in the gym, compensating for his height perhaps. . . . He gives an impression of fretful impatience, of destructive energy waiting to be released. (88)

Thus, from the very beginning of the encounter, Henry realizes that if he does not consent to Baxter’s demands he will receive savage beating, but his pride outweighs his reason. As the violence nears eruption, Perowne detects that the attacker suffers from Huntington’s disease, and

mentally he lists the symptoms: “sudden uncontrollable alternations of mood, to the helpless jerky dance-like movements, intellectual dilapidation, memory failure, agnosia, apraxia, dementia, total loss of muscular control, rigidity sometimes, nightmarish hallucinations and a meaningless end” (94). From the moment of diagnosis, Henry begins to perceive Baxter partly as a thug and partly as a neurologically-conditioned being not fully responsible for his own behaviour. McEwan’s use of medical language in this passage, and throughout *Saturday*, echoes the notion that by means of language people control and exclude others; that with professional jargon and idiolects, they highlight their authority and construct their position of supremacy, and Perowne is fully aware of the power of language as he interrogates Baxter: “He surprises himself. This fussy, faintly archaic ‘indeed’ is not generally part of his lexicon. Deploying it entails decisions; he isn’t going to pretend to the language of the street. He is standing on professional dignity” (89). The surgeon uses his knowledge and medical terminology to gain dominance over the attacker and escape the beating. However, Baxter feels humiliated and in retaliation, he invades Henry’s house and terrorizes his family, using a knife. The transcendental power of poetry when Daisy recites Arnold Matthew’s poem “Dover Beach” and Henry’s promise of a new Huntington’s disease treatment distract Baxter and the family is able to overpower him. In the fight, Baxter sustains a head injury and is taken to hospital, and although it might seem implausibly coincidental, Perowne is called for his surgery. The roles change and now it is Henry holding a knife, which symbolizes dominance, to incise Baxter’s skull. Once Perowne is inside his brain, he ponders about the workings of human mind:

Just like digital codes of replicating life held within DNA, the brain’s fundamental secret will be laid open one day. But even when it has, the wonder will remain, that mere wet stuff can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound, and touch bound into a vivid illusion of an instantaneous present, with a self, another brightly wrought illusion, hovering like a ghost at its centre. Could it ever be explained, how matter becomes conscious? He can’t begin to imagine a satisfactory account, but he knows it will come, the secret will be revealed. (262)

This fragment is only one of Henry’s countless digressions on the medical progress whereby McEwan creates in *Saturday* neurologically determined world and his characters are biologically-conditioned beings. In this world, Perowne exercises some degree of power due to his profession, but not unlike Mrs. Dalloway who feels guilty and ashamed that because of her privileged life she has not shared the suffering of a shell-shocked veteran of World War I, Perowne blames himself for abusing his authority

towards Baxter. In this violent, young man, he recognizes a gene's victim, behind whose insanity is a deeply unhappy individual. Henry thinks himself into the mind of Baxter and experiences "many contradictory impulses" (271) as he simultaneously pities his fate, and hates him for threatening his well-being. With the appearance of Baxter, the symbol of violence, Perowne's life is marked with an unanticipated shift from the public to the private terror. Before the encounter, Perowne's experience of violence was an abstract concept, limited to the knowledge from the news coverage:

He takes a step towards the CD player, then changes his mind for he's feeling a pull, like gravity, of the approaching TV news. It's the condition of the times, this compulsion to hear how it stands with the world, and be joined to generality, to a community of anxiety. The habit's grown stronger these past two years; a different scale of news value has been set by monstrous and spectacular scenes. (29)

Thus, when at the crack of dawn, Perowne notices a plane coming down over the Post Office Tower, trailing a fireball from its wing, he associates it with a terrorist attack. Echoes of news and its language woven throughout his narration, which Katie Roiphe, an American book critic, regards for McEwan's reflections upon the world, might, in fact, denote Henry's involuntary entrapment in the media reality. As the novel, although historically framed, aims more at explaining how history is created rather than mirroring the events of a particular period. McEwan reveals this intention by drawing a direct connection between *Saturday* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which explores the ways in which history is given meaning through the telling of individual experience. For Saleem Sinai, born just as India gains independence from Britain, life becomes inextricably linked with the political, national, and religious events of his time.

Although Perowne prefers to have the world explained rather than to have it reinvented by magic realism, his role in *Saturday* resembles in many ways the function of Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*. Henry epitomizes England during the squash match with his American friend, Jay Strauss, and he describes history-in-the-making, using fragmented information from the media. He is aware that news is subordinated to image manipulation, that the dissemination of basic information is distorted by business interests, and that even horrifyingly immediate events have become in some way just dramatized media events which take place on TV in scenes manufactured for political purposes:

Does he think that his ambivalence—if that's what it really is—excuses him from the general conformity? He is deeper in than most. His nerves, like taunted strings, vibrate obediently with each news "release."

He's lost the habits of scepticism, he's becoming dim with contradictory opinion, he isn't thinking clearly, and just as bad, he senses, he isn't thinking independently. (185)

276

But it is Henry's ambivalence that directs his panic-stricken thoughts from the plane crash to the Schrödinger's Cat experiment, which he first learnt about on a physics course. The paradoxical experiment attempts to illustrate the problem of quantum mechanics; a cat is placed in a box with a bottle of cyanide connected to a detector. Depending on the state of the subatomic particle (spin up or spin down electron, it has either characteristic at random), the bottle might release the gas and kill the animal or it might stay intact. Ten minutes later an observer opens the box to see whether the cat is alive or dead. But between trapping the cat in the box and the end of the experiment, the cat is neither dead nor alive. The paradox of the Schrödinger's Cat experiment mirrors ambiguous state of Perowne's mind as he equally strongly believes that the plane crash can be either a terrorist attack or an unfortunate mechanical failure. Both of the possibilities are equally probable until one of the instances actually comes true.

Henry's lack of certainty about the nature of the plane crash, but also about the war on Iraq or Baxter and other conflicts in *Saturday*, is an important trait of Henry's personality continually returned to by McEwan throughout the novel: "He saw the fire in the sky and changed his mind about it twice" (13). "He had shifting ideas about this coming invasion" (61). "Opinions are a roll of a dice" (72). "Henry experiences his own ambivalence as a form of vertigo, of dizzy indecision" (143). "The certainties have dissolved into debating points" (287). Other numberless examples can be traced on almost every page of the novel as indecision is the key to Henry's reliability as a narrator.

In his moral realism and rejection of easy certainties, the surgeon emerges as the figure who attempts to convey a true message by analysing contradictions and ambiguities that exist in himself and in the outside world. McEwan divulges this ability of Perowne at the very beginning of *Saturday* quoting an excerpt from Saul Bellow's *Herzog* as a kind of motto to his book. The passage describes the man in the bleakness and isolation of the modern world, who is trying to come to some kind of conclusion about his own life and about the ambiguous world around him. In an interview for *The Guardian*, McEwan explains his choice of the book and the fragment: "Herzog reflects on the way the entire world presses in on him, and Bellow seems to set out a kind of manifesto, a ringing checklist of the challenges the novelist must confront, or the reality he must contain or describe." McEwan sets a similar task for Perowne, who has to depict the world with its ambiguities and paradox. Therefore,

every event, character and conflict that occurs on this particular Saturday is illuminated from multiple, often contradictory, points of view by Henry's extensive commentary, flashback and reference to other books. The mass protest is impugned by Perowne's recollection of Miri Taleb's torture, the real terrorist threat is contrasted with national paranoia, the certainty of the Prime Minister is negated by a flashback of Henry's brief encounter with Blair, and Baxter becomes an offender and a victim at once. The contrast between the opposing ideas is emphasized by different kinds of language, for example language of medicine, media, violence, slogans, upper-class or working-class, and by symbols and metaphors like the knife or the Schrödinger's Cat experiment. This dichotomous depiction of the world echoes Barthes's binaries not only in the duality itself but also in the fact that the juxtaposition of contradictory images constitutes a more complete description of an event or a person. Familiarized with different aspects of a conflict, readers are asked to pass moral judgment. This is how McEwan engages his readers in the narrative, and introduces objective balance into his stream-of-consciousness novel.

WORKS CITED

- Bellow, Saul. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 2001.
- Bonnycastle, Stephen. "Barthes, Roland." *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Ed. Irena Makaryk. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. 245-46.
- McEwan, Ian. "The Master." *Guardian* 7 Apr. 2005. 20 Sept. 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/apr/07/fiction.saulbellow>>.
- . *Saturday*. London: Cape, 2005.
- Roiphe, Katie. Interview. *Slate's Audio Book Club*. 5 Dec. 2006. 20 Sept. 2009 <<http://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/slates-audio-book-club/id158004629>>.

—
—
—
—
—

REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS



Agnieszka Salska

University of Łódź

Tributes to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz

Semrau, Janusz, ed. *American Literature in Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 1968–2008: A Selection of Articles*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009;

Kopcewicz, Andrzej. *Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fiction*. Ed. Janusz Semrau. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2009;

Semrau, Janusz, ed. "Will you tell me anything about yourself?" *Co-memorative Essays on Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2009.

In the course of the past year there came out three intellectually stimulating and carefully edited books dedicated to the memory of Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz (1934–2007). For Polish Americanists, Professor Kopcewicz was the Founding Father. The first Polish professor whose research interest in American literature was formally recognized as a distinctive field of specialization, Andrzej Kopcewicz became the Head of the first Department of American Literature in Poland established at Adam Mickiewicz University. He taught there for many years, acting as academic adviser or external reader for at least two generations of Polish Americanists at practically all universities in the country. His doctoral students and younger colleagues, whose dissertations and habilitationsschriften he supervised or read as a member of their degree committees, have by now become chairs of American Departments at various Polish institutions of higher education and have, in turn, educated their own successors.

Professor Kopcewicz's patience and kindness as a reader and adviser were legendary. So was his erudition and his appetite for intellectually stimulating conversation spiced with a wonderful, sometimes subversively wicked sense of humor. He graciously set off his position of acknowledged intellectual authority with the humility of a scholar attentive to differing opinions and open to learning from his students and younger colleagues. A supportive and inspiring teacher, a generous friend, and a charming person, an academic enamored of his discipline, Professor Kopcewicz walked through the increasingly pragmatic groves of our academe in the otherworldly aura of a man of learning so preoccupied with pursuits of the mind that the practicalities of daily existence seemed but a nuisance. The three

books dedicated to his memory amply testify to the loving admiration and respect he commanded among his students, disciples, friends and colleagues. Together with their contributions, the books collect Professor Kopcewicz's late essays keeping up our conversation with him across the Great Divide.

Presenting the volumes in order of their appearance, let me start with selections from *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*. Intended to emphasize "the continued presence of American literature in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* since its founding in 1968" (editor's Preface), the book is dedicated to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz as "the longest serving member of the editorial board." Opposite the title page of the handsomely published volume, its editor placed a particularly warm portrait of Professor Kopcewicz taken by Jerzy Durczak, probably the best photographic artist among Polish Americanists. Today, the picture must seem unbearably poignant to all of us who had benefited from Andrzej's vast knowledge and unstinting collegial support. The collection features 24 essays by international and Polish authors arranged in order of their appearance in the successive issues of the yearbook. Andrzej Kopcewicz's "Poe's Philosophy of Composition," published in the first issue of *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* opens the selection, especially strong on American poetry. Among the essays on a range of American poets from Dickinson (Magdalena Zapędowska) through the modernists like William Carlos Williams (Marta Sienicka), Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein (Paulina Ambroży-Lis) to contemporaries like David Waggoner (Joanna Durczak), I particularly enjoyed Joseph Kuhn's fine article dealing with the poetry of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, perhaps because, with the fading of New Criticism as the dominant critical approach, their work has undeservedly gone into eclipse as well. Pointing to the frequency with which titles such as "Pastoral," "Cold Pastoral," "Eclogue," or "Idyll" appear in the poetic volumes by Ransom and Tate, Kuhn's article ("Cold Pastoral: Irony and the Eclogue in the Poetry of Southern Fugitives") pays special attention to Tate's "The Swimmers." On the personal level the poem reveals for Kuhn "the terror in the Southern pastoral and its survival in the adult memory" (309) but the poem is also "a kind of historical pastoral" as it moves beyond the ironic yoking of the pastoral mode and the terrors of Southern racial history, "subduing the violence of nature to ritual without losing the rawness of naturalistic image" (310). The struggle of the late modernists (including, for instance, Elizabeth Bishop) to employ irony as a tool of asserting order, without diminishing its distancing and questioning power, seems to me a measure of the heroism of their project. Kuhn's article shows that effort very well indeed.

Among the articles dealing with American prose fiction, Andrzej Kopcewicz's "The Machine in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas

Pynchon. A Paradigmatic Reading” merits attention. Kopcewicz traces the circulation of the image of the machine in its different embodiments, from Adams’s dynamo through Stockton’s submarine to Pynchon’s rocket, as the ambivalent symbol of modernity and of the changes it brings about in the sphere of culture and morality. The most interesting aspect of Kopcewicz’s analysis is his acceptance of Stockton’s early science fiction novel as an “intertextual partner to both Adams and Pynchon” (191) on the basis of the symbolic merging in each variant of the machine image of sexual and technological energy. The three works differ widely in genre and the targeted audience. The essayistic, philosophical-autobiographical *Education* diagnoses the cultural shift to modernity; Stockton’s once popular short novel (first published in 1887) takes an imaginative leap to 1947 in a popular, simplified narrative form, while Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* attempts to represent the condition of western civilization following World War Two in an intricately fragmented, sprawling novel teeming with characters, subplots, shifts of location, and intertextual clues. In all three texts Kopcewicz uncovers a similar functioning of the machine metaphor which fuses (or displaces?) human re-productive with productive powers. The essay seems to me a significant contribution to the analysis of American cultural mythography.

Kopcewicz’s articles collected in *Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fiction* are linked by the author’s fascination with intertextuality as a critical approach, as a method of virtually living inside the world of literature, for Kopcewicz calls himself a paranoiac of intertextuality. In his persistent tracings of textually incestuous relations in the twentieth century novel in English, *Finnegans Wake* appears as the Great Father Text. Ever so many paths lead back to Joyce and, especially, to *Finnegans Wake*. It is perhaps unsurprising to read Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) alongside *Finnegans Wake* (1939) but Kopcewicz extends the Joycean genealogy viewing Gilbert Sorrentino’s *Mulligan’s Stew* (1979) and Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* (1967) and *The Dead Father* (1975) as *Finnegans* progeny. It’s not, of course, a question of direct borrowings, rather—of transformations of *Finnegans* motifs and games. As a lover of Barthelme’s stories, I especially appreciated Kopcewicz’s analyses of the American writer’s affinities with Joyce. While we usually think of Joyce’s work as the apex of high modernist literary elitism, we tend to think of Barthelme as the most democratically accessible among the so called American post-modernists like John Barth or Thomas Pynchon. Kopcewicz’s essays linking *Finnegans Wake* and the two novels by Barthelme persuasively demonstrate the erudition and depth of philosophical insight underlying Barthelme’s playfulness and the seemingly unpremeditated lightness of his style. *Intertextual Transactions* opens with an essay on “The Intertextual

Paradigm” which I would like to recommend as introductory reading for graduate students interested in the methodology and practice of intertextual criticism. The essay contains a useful bibliography.

The third of the commemorative books is a collection of essays on Melville’s classic tale “Bartleby the Scrivener” by six Polish authors with Joseph Kuhn, who has taught at Adam Mickiewicz University for so long that one no longer thinks of him as a foreign scholar. The book opens with Andrzej Kopcewicz’s essay on “Dark Rooms and Bartleby. An Intertextual Reading,” an essay included also in the volume of *Intertextual Transactions*. Its author places “Bartleby” in the context of Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*, Emerson’s “The Over Soul,” Borges’s story “God’s Script” and Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* persuasively integrating Melville’s text into the literary discourse investigating and calling “into question the concept of transcendental self-reliance” across temporal, spatial, and cultural divides.

Among the essays collected in this book, I was particularly moved by Tadeusz Sławek’s meditation on “Bartleby” as an inconclusive consideration of the possible? practicable? desirable? wise? modes of the individual’s being in the world; of being there as an integral, solitary, immutable self but also as a participant in the contractual, changeable social reality. Is any kind of wise compromise between the two equally necessary modes of our being at all possible? What are the consequent dangers and ills of unhesitant commitment to either mode? To my mind, that is the central, agonizing dilemma not only of “Bartleby” but of Melville’s whole work; the most profound source of his creativity but also—of his long creative impotence and personal suffering. Keeping the lawyer in the center of his meditation, Sławek reads the story as a narrative of the essentially prudent, public man’s awakening to the painful imperative of at least acknowledging the reality of existence outside the safety of his smoothly managed, wall enclosed office/ial way of life. Focused at the beginning of the story on functional adjustment to diffuse the conflict, the lawyer appears, by the story’s end, as helplessly exposed to the enigma of being as “a creature,” stripped of protective barriers of possessive authority and pragmatic efficiency, stripped even of bodily appetites, yet paradoxically aware, in confrontation with death, of being as spiritual (in opposition to legal) bond. With his wide erudition and inclination to subtle philosophical reflection, the clean simplicity of Sławek’s style feels noble in its concern for the reader and in its emphasis on the primacy of meaning as opposed to delight in the brilliance of wording. The latter feature mars for me Janusz Semrau’s contribution “‘He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there?’ Domesticating Bartleby.” Seeing Bartleby as a figure “in between,” contesting borders and categorical divisions, Semrau seems to

be thinking along the lines somewhat similar to Sławek's but he appears more interested in displaying verbal virtuosity than in achieving clarity of insight and argument.

Altogether, "*Will you tell me anything about yourself?*" is a fine collection of essays (one would like to mention as well Joseph Kuhn on the functioning of Egyptian-like architecture and references to Egypt in "Bartleby") returning to a classic American text, perhaps as much puzzled over as James's notoriously enigmatic *The Turn of the Screw*. The book insists that, as Marek Wilczyński in his "Bartleby after Lacan" repeats after Derrida (and somewhat helplessly too?), "There is a great deal to be said about the immense text of Melville's." The idea of having several critical voices converge in one volume on a strong canonical text seems to me especially appealing at the time when the sense of the canon has been questioned and eroded and when reading literary classics, if still practiced at all, is not infrequently done with unseemly self-serving intentions.

Bringing the three collections of essays to the attention of the readers of the first issue of *Text Matters*, I also want to join their editor and contributors in remembering Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz, in paying tribute to Him as colleague, friend and role model for, by now, quite a sizable group of Polish scholars and lovers of American literature.

Richard Profozich

University of Łódź

New Media Effects on Traditional News Sources: A Review of the State of American Newspapers

The internet is eating up newspapers. The New Media are having dramatic effects on all parts of American culture and on all types of Old Media, but newspapers seem to be suffering the most. Basically, the internet is taking away newspaper readers, lowering the value of information, and destroying the newspaper's traditional revenue source. The future looks rather grim if you are a newspaper editor, reporter, or reader.

Dave Barry, a respected long-time reporter for the *Washington Post*, stated the situation rather succinctly in a recent article which summarized major trends in 2009, saying, "The downward spiral of the newspaper industry continued, resulting in the firing of thousands of experienced reporters and an apparently permanent deterioration in the quality of American journalism." Referring to the technological trend that is at least partially responsible for the deterioration of American newspapers, he notes that more people are tweeting.

It was way back in 2000 that the number of U.S. households subscribing to internet access outnumbered those subscribing to daily newspapers (Dimitrova and Nezanski, 249). Since then news audience behaviors have changed dramatically. The number of Integrators, those who get their news from a variety of sources, and Net-Users, those who get their news primarily from the internet, have increased, comprising at least 40% of the American news audience ("Key News Audiences"). For those under 30 years of age, a full 64% get most of their national and international news from the internet ("Press Accuracy"). Peter Johnson reports that now "everyone is consuming their own kind of mix of media . . . [so that] most news consumers now get their news from four different types of media in a typical week," referring to a mix of broadcast TV, cable and satellite, radio, newspapers, and the internet. A 2009 Pew Center for the People and

the Press research study concludes that “audiences now consume news in new ways. They hunt and gather what they want when they want it, use search to comb among destinations and share what they find through a growing network of social media” (“The State of the News Media 2009”). It is difficult for traditional, hand-held newspapers to fit into this kind of consumption mix.

The result is a decrease in the scope and quality of newspaper reporting. Home town newspapers now focus more and more on local news, so that national and especially international news is disappearing from their pages. Another Pew study, “The Changing Newsroom: Gains and Losses in Today’s Papers,” explains that the typical paper contains fewer pages, shorter stories, less national and international news, and fewer articles about science, the arts, business or features. Recent studies show that local news has become the strong suit for newspapers. While television remains the main news source for all age groups and all types of news (national, international, and local), newspapers are a close second when it comes to local news, outstripping the internet: 64% get local news from TV, 41% from newspapers, and only 17% from the internet (“Press Accuracy”).

Trust is another area where newspapers, and TV, have an advantage over the internet. In fact, the internet rates lowest among American news audiences when it comes to issues of believability, accuracy, and validity. However, for the media as a whole, the picture is not good. “The public [has] a deep skepticism about what they see, hear and read in the media. No major news outlet—broadcast or cable, print or online—stood out as particularly credible”. On the whole, Americans think that “the news media are politically biased, that stories are often inaccurate, and that Journalists do not care about the people they report on.” Only about a quarter rated the honesty and ethical standards of journalists as high or very high (“The State of the News Media 2009”).

Yet most Americans rate traditional local news sources, local TV news, daily newspapers, and network television, as largely credible and trustworthy. The Pew center reports that 65% rated their daily newspaper as believable, while internet news sources rated only 13% and as low as 4 % (“The State of the News Media 2009”).

One of the biggest effects of the internet on the journalism industry is especially disturbing. It relates to the amount of information available and the way it is presented online. A study by the Associated Press, reported in the Columbia Journalism Review, shows that the information age produces far more information than people can manage or absorb. And it is presented in “a flood of unrelated snippets.” Internet sites contain many distractions, and they tend to compete for attention rather than for quality reporting. This atmosphere creates “news fatigue” and a “learned help-

lessness” where users show a tendency to passively receive news, rather than actively seek it. The result is that “the massive increase in information production and the negligible cost of distributing and storing information online have caused it to lose value.” And the problem is that the lowering of the desire to obtain news can spread to other outlets as well. The AP study concludes that “in order to preserve their vital public-service function—not to mention to survive—news organizations need to reevaluate their role in the information landscape and reinvent themselves to better serve their consumers. They need to raise the value of the information they present . . .”(Nordenson).

288 With all the changes and complexities in the journalism industry, and the challenges of the information age, of which the internet is a primary element, the bottom line for the industry as a whole, and especially for newspapers, may just be the bottom line. Technological advances have made the gathering and distribution of information easier than ever, but have created “financial pressures [that] sap [industry] strength and threaten its very survival,” so that newspapers face “steadily deteriorating advertising revenues and rising production costs” (“The Changing Newsroom”). The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism concludes that “it is now all but settled that advertising revenue—the model that financed journalism for the last century—will be inadequate to do so in this one. Growing by one third annually just two years ago, online ad revenue to news websites now appears to be flattening; in newspapers it is declining.” In fact, traditional newspaper ad revenue has fallen 23% in the last two years (“The State of the News Media 2009”).

Classified advertising, once the bread and butter of local newspapers, has shrunk by 50%, taken over by web sites such as Craig’s List. Traditional shopping ads are increasingly made unnecessary by online shopping sites. Newspapers, therefore, are especially vulnerable to the decreasing revenue flow and the competition for customers. It is in a race to find new ways to underwrite online news offerings while using the declining revenue from traditional publication practices to finance the transition.

With the issue of trust on their side, traditional Old Media news outlets have managed to hold on to most of their audience so far, even Integrators who use both traditional and internet media sources. Online sites of mainstream Old Media news sources, such as newspapers and television networks, have far larger internet audiences than do New Media sites. But will Old Media outlets, especially newspapers, be able to survive? Or will they be eaten up by the attractive, non-stop flow of flashy information on the web? The final conclusion of the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism is: “The problem facing American journalism [and newspapers in particular] is not fundamentally an audience problem or a credibility

problem. It is a revenue problem—the decoupling . . . of advertising from news.” If newspapers can find a way to make money from online news offerings, or build alternative web-based revenue sources, they may stave off the technological mantis from eating them alive.

WORKS CITED

Barry, Dave. “Lowlight of a Downer Year: Dave Barry on the Money, Madness and Misery of 2009.” *Washington Post* 27 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/barry/search.html>>. 28 Dec. 2009.

Dimitrova, Daniel, and Matt Nezanski. “Online Journalism and the War in Cyberspace: A Comparison Between U.S. and International Newspapers.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2006): 248–263.

“Key Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources.” *Pew Center for the People and the Press*. 17 Aug. 2008 <<http://peoplepress.org/Report/444/news-media/>>. 25 Feb. 2009.

Nordenson, Bree. “Overload! Journalism’s Battle for Relevance in an Age of Too Much Information.” *Columbia Journalism Review* Nov/Dec 2008. <http://www/cjr.org.feature/overload_1.php?page=all&print+true>. 30 Jan. 2009.

“Press Accuracy Rating Hits Two Decade Low.” *Pew Center for the People and the Press*. 13 Sep. 2009. <<http://people-press-org/report/543/press-accuracy>>. 11 Jan. 2010.

“The Changing Newsroom: Gains and Losses in Today’s Papers.” *Pew Center for the People and the Press*. 21 July 2008. <<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/904/changing-newsroom>>. 30 Jan. 2009.

“The State of the News Media 2009.” *Pew Center for the People and the Press*. 3 Dec. 2009. <<http://people-press.org/reports/?year=2009>>. 21 Dec. 2009.

Grzegorz Kość

University of Łódź

Review of *The Body*, ed. by Ilona Dobosiewicz and Jacek Gutorow

After *Community and Nearness* (2007) came *The Body* (2009), the second volume of “Readings in English and American Literature and Culture” series from the University of Opole Press, edited by Ilona Dobosiewicz and Jacek Gutorow. In preparations for the third heave, the editors, I hear, are now hunting for contributions in American studies on dreamy visions, illusions, reveries, altered states of consciousness and suchlike. But first, teasingly, they feigned the need to map what was once considered the more solid vectors in American culture, those dictated by irreducible bodies, resistant skin and nonnegotiable bodily needs. Of course, their collection shows in so many ways that the old dichotomies—body vs. soul, nature vs. culture—no longer hold.

Gutorow’s elegant introduction lays out the setting for his contributors. Cartesian extrapolations, he says, have long since been replaced by the accounts of the body offered by the late Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The world we are given is always already embodied, our corporeality nothing less than a “medium for having the world.” This also means “the lived body” is not just inscribed but also in the position to negotiate.

After the introduction the reader is plunged into a welter of approaches, specializations and critical temperaments. First in the collection, Ilona Dobosiewicz’s essay is modestly conceived but lucidly written; her treatment of the male body in Victorianism makes the book seem comprehensive. She discusses Thomas Hughes’s Victorian novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* to only evoke the discourses of athleticism and character building as important elements of Great Britain’s imperialist ideology. In the next essay Alicja Piechucka finds traces of *écriture féminine* in little known poems by Hart Crane and Mina Loy. Very solidly and lucidly argued, the essay only left me wondering why *écriture féminine* in the first place, and whether the choice of the poems was not arbitrary and Cixous’ concept made to seem applicable without limits. If Hart Crane and “Stark Major” is in, why not Hemingway and “The Indian Camp,” with its recognition of birth trauma unacknowledged by conventional medicine? Isn’t the woman’s breathy silence behind the doctor’s noisy self-assurances pre-

cisely *écriture* “in white ink”? Or how about Addie Bundren from *As I Lay Dying*? Couldn’t one make, in fact, a similar case for all writing that is solidly modernist? And then, of course, all the studies of woman-identified writing first might have to grapple with the observation of Derrida, Cixous’ friend, that all *écriture* is *écriture féminine*, all writing lapses into the other of logos.

Jerzy Durczak, in a highly readable piece, gropes for the main thematic concerns of Lucy Grealy’s 2003 *autopathography*. The title of Grealy’s novel *Autobiography of the Face* could not have been more apt. Very memorably, Jean Stafford in “The Interior Castle” withdraws from her social face/interface to commune with her disembodied self, re-fleshed with hallucinated tissue but anatomically evasive and safely removed from the reach of the most zealous surgeon. Durczak shows how Lucy Grealy, by contrast, “*was her face, was ugliness.*” Appreciating pain as staring her in the face and therefore more honest than her high school friends, affectionate for hospitals as offering her some respite from the revulsed looks, flaunting her sex appeal to make up for years of neglect, she is thoroughly invested in her face. Warning the reader it will be a venture into an understudied and under-understood subgenre of American autobiography, Durczak gives a detailed review of its sentiments and interests, quotes profusely, but avoids offering any incisive reading.

Boguta-Marchel’s essay on the grotesque in *Blood Meridian* seems a bit uncertain of its purposes. First, it ambitiously sifts through disparate and often verbose theories of the grotesque but rests with the disarming admission the term is “anything but clear.” No wonder the subsequent inventory of the grotesque images in the novel does not add up to much. For instance, the author presents well W. V. O’Connor’s definition of the grotesque as manifesting internally conflicted racism but then drops it as useless for McCarthy’s novel. Similarly Boguta-Marchel finds the existentialist sentiments in the grotesque mode of little help either. The last section on—curiously—the “limitations of visibility” only aggravates the general impression of directionlessness.

We are used to seeing Lacan’s name crop up in the most unlikely places, but Pawel Stachura’s essay is truly imaginative. He finds traces of Lacan’s imagination in the 1950s science fiction by Cordwainer Smith, known among foreign policy scholars as Paul M.A. Linebarger. Lacan read the artistic representations and dreams of bodily disfigurement, evisceration and suchlike as ways of reliving the anxieties and desires involved in the process of ego-formation. We’re hard wired to envision it in terms of a body seeking to ascertain its integrity against the infinite space. Cordwainer Smith’s characters have bodies dislocated, strained to the breaking point to live up to the scale and extremities of space. More interestingly they are rooted in

the same sentiments as Paul M.A. Linebarger's ideas on the psychologies of the Cold War and America's body politic. Stachura's modest claims and imaginative association show that nations and their ambitions are projections of ego-formative anxieties and desires.

Monika Sosnowska argues that Mary Reilly in Valerie Martin's rewriting of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* remembers through her body—her scarred hands and wrists—her father's domestic violence. "The change of optics" in the story to focus on a figure invisible to Stevenson's narrator parallels the change of optics in the theory of the senses from the scopic masculinity to tactile femininity. She writes at great length about the new interest in the symbol of human skin and its various uses as if it was a major recent paradigm shift (Bergson). The reading it yields is sensible but slightly disappointing after this initial fanfare.

Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis's study of the transgressive nature of the spinsterly bodies in the stories by major Southerners is truly imaginative and inspiring. And so is Paweł Marcinkiewicz's analysis of what he calls "lyricism" in Ashbery's late volumes *Where Shall I Wander* and *Worldly Country*. Here the body figures as a mode of the structurally complex *Dasein*. Marcinkiewicz explores less the phenomenological "lived body" than the various ways in which, in a neo-Platonic/Christian fashion, the self inhabits his corporeal frame and often feels weighed down by it. He also explores how the self skeptically revises accumulated knowledge, negotiates alterity, retroactively organizes fantastic snapshots of the past and is headed toward the shrouded future. I can't judge how well he reads the poems but Ashbery's being in the world may be matched by the elaborate architecture of Marcinkiewicz's argument.

So much in the essays, even those which seemed to me less successful, warrants serious attention. They all show that in American studies the "body," after decades of post-dualist sociological and anthropological revisions, is still "alive and kicking." I miss the bios of the contributors to see how the essays sit in their long-term projects and careers, but it is clear that the collection is a major publication on the trope of the body produced by Polish Americanists of late.

“Taste good iny?”: Images of and from Australian Indigenous Literature

Jared Thomas Speaks with
Teresa Podemska-Abt

TPA: Hi Jared, thanks for dedicating this time.

JT: Not at all, a pleasure.

TPA: Tell me, have you ever met a Polish person?

JT: I’ve had the pleasure of meeting a few Polish people and each and every one of them is very impressive.

TPA: Would you tell me about your “meeting” with Polish culture, perhaps you have read some Polish literature?

JT: My engagement with Polish people and culture is minimal in comparison with my interaction with people of other cultures but very positive. I first became aware of the plight of Polish immigrants and their culture through a friendship with young Australian Polish theatre director Magdalena Grubski. Stories of Magdalena’s parents’ immigration to Australia and their efforts to carve out a positive life for their family in the face of adversity are remarkable. Magdalena’s parents’ key concern when arriving

to Australia was ensuring that their children become very skilled English communicators. Subsequently Magdalena is today a significant creative and cultural producer living and working in Tasmania. Most recent engagement with Polish people and culture is that of working with Australian Polish students. Similarly, stories of their parents’ immigration to Australia are fascinating and reveal much accomplishment. I enjoy speaking with these students about how they continue to practise Polish culture and how they envisage maintaining cultural practice into the future. In terms of Polish literature and culture, I am aware of its wealth and I hope to, one day, experience it.

TPA: What is your definition of literature, especially Aboriginal literature?

JT: I grew up in a very working class family with both parents being of Aboriginal ancestry. My maternal grandfather Jim Fitzpatrick was Aboriginal Irish and until his grandparents landed in Australia and demanded that my great grandfather

leave my great grandmother due to her Aboriginality, my grandfather experienced a privileged western education. He embedded in me a respect for the power of language, articulation, story and reading while many of the people I grew up with in the working class town of Port Augusta didn't seem to care much for these things. Due to this, I have always been interested in stories that transcend class and culture, and therefore I value not only the written word as a form of literature but oral stories. My paternal great uncles have been recorded singing stories that continue for weeks, as the stories told of land and legends between the expanses of the Southern and Northern poles of Australia.

In regard to a definition of Aboriginal Australian literature, it is stories written and told by Aboriginal people and stories that discuss any aspect of Aboriginal life, culture and imaginings. In fact, Dreaming stories are still the most important stories told by Aboriginal people because they impart so much valuable knowledge about the land and our culture. I love reading works of fiction where the writers incorporate elements of Dreaming stories, place names and culture. Many fiction writers such as Kim Scott, Terri Janke, Larrissa Behrendt and of course Alexis Wright are doing this so effectively. Wright's writing is infused with cultural knowledge and all narrative is framed by a world in which dreaming continues rather

than being portrayed as a thing of the past.

TPA: Where do you think runs the borderline between Australian and Aboriginal literatures, if there is any?

JT: The writings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are distinctly different to those authored by non-Indigenous authors because they draw on lived experience as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are many non-Indigenous writers that include Aboriginal characters and issues in their work but without being Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander I think it impossible to truly convey the voice of Indigenous people. And essentially we are speaking from two opposing positions of those who have benefited from colonisation and the dispossessed. The power held by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors to comment on the nature of colonial Australia is inequitable as non-Indigenous writers often write from a cultural standpoint that is valued by the dominating status quo. The role of Aboriginal writers is to challenge the status quo. I would like to see more non-Aboriginal Australian authors acknowledge and surrender their privilege when writing about us and shared experience.

There are works by non-Aboriginal authors that are important discussions of Aboriginal Australia

such as *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* by Thomas Keneally. I also like Katherine Susannah Pritchard's *Coonardoo* and *Brumby Innes* as they provide a good description of the attitudes held by non-Indigenous people about Aboriginal Australia. To know of these attitudes is important when considering where barriers exist between people and how to overcome them. Even though Pritchard's representations are sometimes questionable, she was challenging commonly held notions about Aboriginal Australian and white Australian treatment of Aboriginal people. She must be commended for this.

It was unfortunate last year to hear Thomas Keneally say that he regrets writing *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. I think his regret stems primarily from public expression by Aboriginal people and communities that has built over the last ten or so years for people researching and writing about Aboriginal Australia to engage with them when doing so. There are some Aboriginal people that say outright that non-Aboriginal people shouldn't write about Aboriginal Australia, especially Dreaming stories or stories with strong cultural elements. I think that the majority of Aboriginal people understand that it is very difficult to censor writers though and therefore prefer that non-Indigenous people engage with them to ensure that the representation has integrity.

TPA: What in your opinion identifies contemporary Australian Indigenous literature?

JT: There are so many boundaries being pushed by Aboriginal writers at the moment so innovation is definitely one of the key characteristics of contemporary Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literatures. Brenton Ezra McKenna from Broome who writes graphic novels, for sure, has lately impressed readers. Since 1988 much of the work coming from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia was autobiographical. Today there is more fiction than ever being produced. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers are employing genres such as speculative, chick lit, horror and graphic novels to convey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and imaginings. Despite the variety of styles being used by authors between the works, there is a strong link to country, community, culture and family that is conveyed. I feel new work differs to past works as there is greater desire to celebrate, challenge, investigate aspects of Aboriginal life rather than continuing to paint ourselves as victims.

Some early Aboriginal literature—such as works by Oodgeroo Noonuccal,¹ much of whose work I love—reinforces the pervading

¹ Kath Walker.

attitudes of white Australians or presents inferiority to white people. There are some contemporary commentators that continue to do this but those Indigenous authors that are respected by their peers deconstruct and provide opposition to ideologies that impede the aspirations of Aboriginal Australia. It is very difficult to criticize Oodgeroo though because much of her writing is so beautiful and powerful. Perhaps her prominent attitudes were a political poetic employed to engage and re-educate audiences.

In the last decade writers like Tara June Winch and Kim Scott have emerged. Their writing is so beautifully poetic. Tara is known as a novelist but has been undertaking a mentorship with renowned playwright Wole Soyinka. *Swallow the Air* was an incredible success, and I feel that given her ability, dedication to craft and the experience she is gaining, her future works, like Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, will set new standards.

In terms of innovation, Anita Heiss' chick lit is interesting; it is exposing itself to a big readership. Anita would have to currently be Australia's best selling Aboriginal writer. She has edited important Aboriginal anthologies and produced an engaging critique of Aboriginal literature in recent years. She is so effective because she is one of the key advocates of Aboriginal writing in the country and has a great rapport with writers. I know that Ani-

ta is burning to write more literary works and critique but I think her work is so important because she is doing what most Aboriginal writers set out to do, which is to communicate knowledge about Aboriginal Australia to a large audience so that our future may be brighter.

TPA: What does it mean to be an Indigenous writer, and what kind of responsibility does such a role bring? What are the pros and cons of a model author and/or narrator or a character to voice his or her authority?

JT: Being a Nukunu writer is a great responsibility as I am often mesmerized by the fact that the act of storytelling is one that assists Nukunu people to forge, maintain and progress an amazing culture that produces profound interaction and love between people and care of the environment. In *Nukunu warrala*,² *Yura Muda* is the term for what is commonly referred to as the Dreaming. *Yura* means "man of the earth" and *Muda* means "country." *Yura Muda* means the connection between people and land and land and people and our traditional stories reinforce this connection. Through my writing I attempt to articulate, reinforce and inspire others to activate these connections. I do this in a number of works; my new novel *Calypso Summers*, for ex-

² In English—the Nukunu language.

ample, set in the 1980s, follows the journey of a young Nukunu man who generates a good economic base for his family through his knowledge of Nukunu culture and principle. I show how connection to country and the learning of cultural knowledge enriches his life—also by tapping into the mindset of young Nukunu and other Aboriginal readers so that they can see themselves reflected in the character. Once young people can engage with characters and hopefully like them, I can then begin to challenge their views or present them with alternatives.

In the case of “The Healing Tree,” I wanted to create sympathy for Alf so that the young readers, particularly Aboriginal people, could come to understand his experiences and hopefully not repeat them. This short story of course educates non-Aboriginal readers about Aboriginal Australia but it is written firstly for Aboriginal people. Due to the profound effect of colonisation, many Aboriginal youth don’t have the opportunity to engage with role models or learn about history or culture. Art and film fill this void.

Due to the responsibility of my role, my writing is a very collective enterprise. I ensure that many Nukunu people have the opportunity to advise upon and amend representations so that my writing in turn possesses the authority of the group rather than myself. “The

Healing Tree” was built upon actual experiences of an Aboriginal man outside of my group. In order to tell the story I spoke with him about my intent and asked his permission to write the story and to set it within the Nukunu context. I think it is through this process that representations move toward closer representations of “truth” of Aboriginal experience rather than merely being a construct based on personal being, experience and observation of Aboriginal life.

It would be false of me to say that I don’t enjoy the attention that communicating Nukunu culture brings but it is more satisfying to know that my representations are imbued with the principles of the collective and provide a legacy for future generations of Nukunu people and other Australians, both black and white, to engage with country and culture in the most meaningful way.

TPA: Your short story “The Healing Tree”³—from which I borrowed a phrase for our conversation’s title—shows uncommon gentleness, consideration, subtlety perhaps? Is this story an effect of traumas in your family, or is the narrator of the story a communal Indigenous voice?

JT: Firstly, thank you for your

³ Thomas, Jared. “The Healing Tree.” *Meanjin: Best New Writing in Australia* 65.1 (2006): 13–18.

very generous commentary on the work. Perhaps the qualities that you have picked up in the writing derive from a non-judgemental stance that I strive to adopt in relation to most human experience. The story's main focus is that of the effects of alcoholism as alcohol has been used as a device to dispossess people of their connection to land and culture. While Aboriginal people today are less likely to drink alcohol in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians, the effects of drinking have touched almost all Aboriginal families, so therefore while the story is told within the Nukunu context, I would like to think that it speaks to many Aboriginal Australians.

Members of my family acknowledge the need to heal from what has happened to us as individuals or as a group. You see, it is important to protect our safety by taking time out and resting and giving back to self. Aborigines often still experience racism and sometimes this can really put you in a bad mental space. I personally still get very angry from time to time by the terrible things that continue to occur to Aboriginal people across Australia, such as the current Northern Territory intervention.

I believe that spending time on country and reconnecting with country and culture is vital in our healing. It is also important that we as Aboriginal people take steps to heal ourselves rather than wait for

racism to disappear and the Government to miraculously introduce a raft of programs that fix everything.

TPA: The story starts from the voice of the uncle, the elder who is brought to the scene by Alf's memory of his rebellious youth, and ends up with the wish of an old, sick Alf, for his tormented heart to be cured by *yirtas*, the magic healing trees his father once taught him about. Does this envelope-like structure of the story mean that the most powerful voice of the story is the traditional voice?

JT: Simply the answer is yes. I believe that before the advent of capitalism and its historic key driving forces, colonisation and slavery, cultures everywhere had through trial and error over the ages refined ways of living that best utilized resources and accommodated human life and environmental sustainability. I hope to constantly remind people that the forsaking of life models that benefited entire communities and nations today only benefit very few and the only way to maintain human and environmental sustainability is to revert to the traditional or at least underpin the contemporary with traditional values. Alf's journey brings him to the realization of the value of his culture and the traditional.

The challenge for me as a writer with future works is to show how culture can coexist in a contemporary world and create better out-

comes for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

TPA: What are lingual realities of Aboriginal literature? Does the use of Aboriginal English or Indigenous languages add to the authority and/or authenticity of narration and/or heroes?

JT: I understand how language adds to the authority and authenticity of narration and I guess that my use of the Nukunu language does lend to an authority and authenticity. However, I use *Nukunu warrala* wherever it is appropriate, not to heighten the authority of my writing but to ensure that the Nukunu readers can see their culture reflected in my writing. There are few Nukunu language speakers and my incorporation of *Nukunu warrala* is intended to prolong and revitalize this language. I particularly like using Nukunu words for specific landmarks as it assists in reinforcing connection to our country. The way that Aboriginal English differs to mainstream is probably most evident when watching Aboriginal Theatre. When writing for an Aboriginal theatre company there is more scope than when writing a novel and having to deal with agents and editors to infuse the work with the language, speech patterns and idiosyncrasies of particular cultural groups. Vivienne Clemen’s *Bitin’ Back* is a wonderful read because the dialogue is so rich and

reveals so much about peoples’ values. It is interesting to note that the novel was an adaptation of her play which maybe reinforces my theory.

In my novel for children that will be released by Oxford University Press in 2011, Nukunu ways of thinking are explicit through language. Thirteen-year-old Dallas Davis is asked to assist a scientist in the protection of the *Eucalyptus albens*, an almost extinct eucalypt in Nukunu Country. When the scientist sees a bird fly from a tree, he asks what the Nukunu words are for “tree” and “bird.” He learns that the bird and tree have an individual name but the general term for bird and tree is *ita*.⁴ The scientist is confused. Dallas finds this strange and says that they are named the same thing because they can’t live without each other. It is a simple concept but these uses of language really do inform of Aboriginal worldview, in this case the way that Aboriginal people value symbiotic relationships.

TPA: Let’s ponder a bit more on powers that interplay within the story’s structure, narration and characters. It seems that Alf, a main character, has got the least authorial powers to be listened to, thus—to speak; is it because he can’t be trusted, can’t set an example for boys? Alf’s voice is weak, deceptive

⁴ A variation of the word *yirta* used in “The Healing Tree.”

and at times bitter, while his unhappy story is told validly. How much didactic, politics and (hi-)story is there in this story?

JT: Alf is powerful in that his voice represents the voice of the dispossessed and silenced. The power of his voice lies not in what is present but what is absent. Alf's experiences are common to many Aboriginal people, particularly men who are completely disenfranchised. They have spent their childhood in institutions separated from families and culture and are shunned from society as adults. Itinerant, they seek work or acceptance in places only to be continually rejected. The really sad thing about Alf is that his life began with a really strong cultural base. His father was nurturing as was the land he lived in but the realities of western society for Aboriginal people meant that he was marginalized.

In Aboriginal cultures the right to speak is activated by possession of knowledge, experience, and participation in certain cultural events, age and connection to certain parts of country. Alf is detached from all that is good about his cultural heritage and once he realizes this, it is too late to change his life.

Today, many of the barriers that were in place for Aboriginal people to participate in their culture no longer exist. It is my hope that young people again begin to feel proud about speaking about

culture and knowledge authoritatively. It really is heartening when you hear a young person speaking about their culture and land with passion.

TPA: "The Healing Tree" has one of the most beautiful, poetic, soft, loving images of the Australian landscape I've ever read. The picture reveals itself when Alf comes back home, which, shockingly, is a mission! (I'll come back to this Indigenous reality later.) Through Alf's eyes one sees a particular road, hills, ranges . . . This is a land depicted with the eye of a visual artist. I know that you are a man of many gifts—an academic, novelist, play writer, poet, teacher. Do you paint or make films perhaps? I wouldn't be surprised if you did, as many Indigenous writers work simultaneously in different art disciplines. David Page composes, writes, dances, directs, sings; I was amazed with his *Page 8*, brilliantly combining oral traditional storytelling and contemporary genres of drama, musical and pop show; Sally Morgan is an academic and a painter; Sam Watson—an academic teacher, activist, writer, filmmaker; and—on top of it—most Indigenous people speak a few languages. Can you comment on the Indigenous concept of creation, philosophy and beliefs behind talent and on the oral tradition genres in contemporary Indigenous artistic rendering?

JT: My girlfriend reckons I write schmaltzy pop songs or some such thing and she’s probably on the money. Traditionally Nukunu children would have the opportunity to partake in all aspects of social life and once a talent was discovered, this would be fostered. I experiment in a lot of artistic mediums and have a healthy appreciation for all. I have made some documentaries relating to life and culture of Nukunu people and have been involved in various capacities in the making of big Australian feature films. I paint a little but do this more for personal enjoyment rather than for public exhibition.

My daughter Tilly Tjala is showing great promise as a singer, actress, activist and storyteller—and I must encourage all of these things.

The semiotician Marshal McLuhan is renowned for the phrase “the medium is the message” and I think that Aboriginal artists such as Gordon Hookey and Richard Frankland have truly adopted this philosophy. Richard is an amazing singer/songwriter, author and filmmaker and Gordon is the master of combining text and image.

My parents both dabble in painting landscapes and one can’t help but be inspired and motivated by the wealth of artistic talent amongst Aboriginal Australia. Most of my professional life has consisted of facilitating the work of Aboriginal artists of all forms.

TPA: Who is the Indigenous writer/artist? Is s/he a bard? What is her/his assigned place within the Indigenous society? Is s/he a special person, what status does s/he have? Also, how is an image of an artist constructed by Indigenous art and literature?

JT: “Our future is our culture and our culture rests in the hands of our storytellers.” This is a profound statement shared with me by women of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands that I feel sums up perfectly the reverence Aboriginal people have for our storytellers. Aboriginal paintings, for example, do not exist in isolation from Dreaming or cultural stories. Importance is attributed to paintings in respect to the importance of the story or the degree of knowledge possessed by the person painting/telling the story.

There are many Aboriginal people that possess great storytelling ability but I am so often overwhelmed by the power of stories told me every day by Aboriginal people about everyday life or cultural experience. It is for this reason that many Aboriginal people with writing ability begin their writing careers by documenting the stories of family members. Our lives are so rich with story. All artistic statements stem from story. So in Aboriginal culture storytellers are considered the most important of artists and perhaps the

most esteemed people in the community.

TPA: Let's go back for a moment to the images of landscaping which—from my readings—are particularly vivid in A. Wright's *Carpentaria*, K. Scott's *True Country* or Herb Wharton's *Unbranded*. Land is often a predominant feature in many Indigenous literary works. It represents Indigenous mythology and philosophy. How does the literary concept of Land represent Indigenous culture, philosophy, beliefs and spirituality? How do you incorporate this concept in your work? Is it important to you, in what way?

JT: I know that I see Nukunu land differently than non-Nukunu and it is important to me to articulate the way that I see and think about country. My traditional country is more than plants, animals and geological formations; it is full of story, my lifeblood, ancestry and nourishment. It is the umbilical cord to the inner workings of self. There is a story for everything that exists on country and these stories highlight the way people interact with and see the world.

The film *Ten Canoes* for example focuses on stories relating to parts of the landscape that in turn underpin an all-encompassing worldview. Nukunu people call each little story relating to land, plants, animals and objects *Dangora*. Each story needs to be considered in relation to each other and

it is through these stories that understandings and discourses evolve.

There's a small section in my new novel *Calypso Summers* where the central character Calypso is travelling with his girlfriend and they see two *guldas*, sleepy lizards. Calypso's cousin informs that *guldas* always walk together in the direction of water and they mate together for life. This brief discussion about the lizards reveals Nukunu philosophies about love and how knowledge relating to animals enables people to live with their landscape.

Alexis Wright's literary power not only lies in communicating the way that Aboriginal people view country but western objects.

TPA: Evidently, Land is represented in a variety of artefacts that also constitute politics. Alexis Wright said: "I believe that Aboriginal government can work in Australia . . . I feel that the quest for Aboriginal government is relevant and important for the future stability of our people . . . and that I can use whatever skills I have as a writer to portray in literature how this dream could be lived."⁵ What is your understanding of this opinion and in what way would you support it?

⁵ Wright, Alexis. "Weapon of Poetry." *Overland* 193 (2008): 19. Also available at <http://web.overland.org.au/?page_id=576>.

JT: It is very important to me that successful Aboriginal governance is achieved. Pre-colonial Aboriginal government must have been very effective as we all share the Dreaming and it is known that many groups came together for ceremony and to trade and share resources. The principles of our governance are known to many but there are pressures that impact on the effectiveness of people to work together. I love reading books like Kevin Gilbert's *Because a White Man'll Never Do It* that examine Aboriginal governance and how Aboriginal people are subject to government policy.

I feel that it is critical for Aboriginal writers to further project a positive vision of how Aboriginal Australia can look like. Hope is critical to all people and where problems appear insurmountable, it is important for people to know that they can succeed. Thus, self-determination is very important to Aboriginal people. The concept of it means that we have access to good housing, health and education but are free to maintain and reinvigorate culture and language.

My next novel will be about how life could be if Aboriginal people, in this case the Nukunu, live the life we wish, devoid of opposition from government and western notions of appropriate education, spirituality and aspiration being imposed upon us.

TPA: Aboriginal literature sometimes “paints” land with the shapes

of a woman. Divine Serpent, as I understand it, is a manifestation of Indigenous cosmologies but also has a strong feminine element in it. What kind of mythical, metaphorical and/or symbolic connections between such images of land and ancestral snakes can be made?

JT: In Nukunu cosmology, there is both male and female serpent ancestors. The serpents are even believed to change gender for particular purposes. It is Nukunu belief that the Flinders Ranges and other geography such as creeks and islands along the coast were created by these ancestors. Wongihara is a significant site on Nukunu Country and it is the place where the snake ancestor gave law to Nukunu people. *Wongihara* literally means “where the snake spoke” and the Nukunu are often referred to as “the snake people.”

Stories about the deeds, trials and tribulations and creations of the rainbow serpent are very common amongst Aboriginal groups. I can't speak for other authors but when I write about the landscape in connection with serpents, it is because it is Nukunu belief that serpents formed the landscape and it certainly looks as if it was created by giant serpents. There is country in the Flinders Ranges that actually looks feminine and masculine in accord with the gender of the serpent that travelled through the landscape.

TPA: There are no women in your story. Why?

JT: There are strong women in other of my stories and Nukunu culture is based upon a matrilineal social organization so it is something that I have upmost respect for. “The Healing Tree” is a story pitched at young men. I have wonderful aunts that I would like to write about and some of the documentaries that I have made capture these characters.

TPA: You have mentioned Anita Heiss’ chick novel. Her heroine, Alice, is unusually strong. A free, knowledgeable woman. To what extent is such a heroine possible in real Indigenous life? What is her cultural archetype? Who is the boss in Indigenous cultures’ relationships? Angel Day and Normal Phantom, a couple from *Carpentaria*, live in separate worlds, well, men’s and women’s worlds. “Only when she had gone, was he able to understand that the woman had always been a hornet’s nest, waiting to be disturbed.” How close to the cultural roles of a man and a woman in the real world is Phantom’s reflection?

JT: With colonization, the gender roles of men were severely disrupted in comparison to those of women. The roles of men included conducting rituals, educating and nurturing children, and of course hunting. The basis for this activity is land as

all ritual and education related to it. Women performed similar roles to men but of course they had children and gathered for the family. I think it is easier for women to enjoy some of these traditional roles within a contemporary context whereas men have been disenfranchised to a different degree. In my family women have always been strong, tradition and family strong. This strength is the bonding element that has kept families together.

TPA: Some people say that Indigenous cultures of Australia have survived and are sustaining due to Indigenous women’s extreme abilities to adapt to tragic/harsh conditions, their procreation power and the status within their respective communities. It seems that the authority of Angel Day comes from such powers, and—in regard to her fate—from the element that unites the real with unreal, the real and abnormal, and in consequence—the normal and paranormal. The line between different states of our individual and collective human reality (physical, metaphysical, cosmic) is also expressed by the concept of Dreaming/Dreamtime that realizes itself in everyday life. How does this ontologically and epistemologically complicated, complex female character comply with the Indigenous present and traditional worlds? Where is the demarcating line between the real and fictional in Aboriginal literature?

JT: I think I may have responded to this in my last comment . . . Anyway, *Angel Day* is extremely strong; she tries to survive in her very hostile environment. The real and fictional in Aboriginal literature? I think I will have to give it further thought. I think the real is always enclosed in fiction. Importantly, I don't think of the Dreaming so much as the metaphysical but rather the pragmatic. If we disconnect the belief that mythical ancestors created certain landscapes or performed certain activities during creation time, the stories that exist from these “myths” still provide a wonderful blueprint for human interaction. The Dreaming does provide a wonderful lens through which to negotiate the world and I believe that some Aboriginal people believe in the Dreaming wholeheartedly and others believe in the power of the stories deriving from it.

TPA: While reading Indigenous literary works I am most often on the verge of politics. Politics and ideas reside within the actual context of civilizations, and at the same time they co-create cultural reality. As a result of Indigenous subjugation, Indigenous Peoples lost their status, and—to some degree—their cultural identity. But any acculturation process is always bilateral, thus it also affects the conqueror. On the verge of both cultures a new civilization group has been created; on one hand this group pursues its original roots,

on the other—it leans on its acculturation; henceforth a new culture, such as Indigenous contemporary literature has been created. How important is this kind of cultural flow, osmosis, infiltration of those two worlds in your life and literary work, and in Indigenous literature?

JT: The notion of “being caught between two worlds” is commonly bandied around in reference to Aboriginal Australia. I would like to see a reversion to traditional principles applied in the contemporary but the reality is that many Aboriginal people through circumstance embrace elements of western culture. I want to see non-Indigenous people acculturate Aboriginal worldviews and ways of living. For this to occur, it requires a movement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people becoming politicized and contesting the context of our “civilization.”

TPA: What do you think about the Australian literocritical postcolonial discourse? In what way does it benefit Indigenous authors and literature? Who is empowered by this discourse, and to what extent do Indigenous authors use it in their creative works? What, in your opinion, are the advantages and disadvantages of postcolonial literary interpretation strategies to Indigenous literary works?

JT: This is a very difficult question to answer because I have to con-

sider it from the position of teacher and student, writer and peer. First I have to declare that many Aboriginal people are very dubious about the term “post-colonialism.” There are so many things happening in Australia that highlight that colonisation is still a force in motion and Aboriginal people are in no better position to speak than we were twenty years ago. Now, Australia is still the only country in the Commonwealth not to have a treaty with its Indigenous people and the advancements and institutions gained by Aboriginal people from the late 1960s were seriously eroded during the years of the Howard government. The Rudd government continues to diminish Aboriginal self-determination, with support for the Northern Territory intervention being the best example of this. Briefly, the intervention was implemented to stop so-called endemic sexual abuse of children and alcoholism reported by media. The Racial Discrimination Act was suspended and the army was sent in to support the government taking administrative control of seventy-three communities. Consecutively, doctors began examinations and a handful of sexual abuse victims were revealed. More disturbing was that 80% of the children examined had severe health problems such as trachoma and otitis. This hasn't been heavily reported in mainstream media and the question “how did Australians let the health of chil-

dren become so poor?” was never asked. Government spending on the intervention is \$1.5 billion, yet substance abuse is up 77% and 13% more infants have been hospitalized for malnutrition.

Subsequently, communities are being told they will not receive housing until they sign forty year leases over their land. The issuing of mining leases has significantly increased during this period. For people in these communities, the exercise of colonial power is in full effect and it is due to this type of mistreatment of Aboriginal people and communities that the term “post-colonial” is abstract to Aboriginal Australia.

Now, postcolonialism is a forced concept and not a reality. It certainly isn't one invented by Aboriginal writers in relation to their work. Some see it as referring only to works being written in a time where colonialism has passed and there are more opportunities for minorities and the marginalized to speak. If we look at postcolonial literature as that whereby Aboriginal writers are trying to articulate identity and reclaim our past, again, the postcolonial theory becomes problematic as it has the potential to give rise to essentialist notions of Aboriginality; essentialism is what many Aboriginal writers challenge. You see, Aboriginal writers are largely responding to colonisation and being oppressed, mistreated and misrepresented and exposing silence and invisibility.

I think that Aboriginal creative writers are more concerned with introducing people to our epistemologies rather than considering western theory. Conversely, postcolonial literary interpretation strategies can be useful in developing an understanding of works of art but I am often bemused when learning how others have deconstructed my work. They either make the work seem really more sophisticated than it is or they miss the point of it altogether.

I'm interested in poststructuralist theory but would, for the most part, like to think it's only a subconscious consideration when writing creatively. My experience is that many Indigenous people, not only Aboriginal Australians, are interested in the way that language exposes our ideological values.

TPA: There is a lot of debating on the issue of appropriation in local Australian literocritical discourse. Obviously Indigenous writers use Western literary techniques and devices, extending and innovating them, developing new narratives and poetics, incorporating Indigenous languages, accommodating Standard English to convey Indigenous culture-bound specifics and meanings. How do you see this problematic? Also, the editing and publishing discourses seem to be associated with the usage of language and narrative, but is there a political censorship in Australia in regard to Indigenous literature? In Poland

writers of the socialist/communist era had to use specific codes and literary devices for their messages to be decoded by readers.

JT: Without a doubt, Aboriginal writers and people generally colonize and use English words in unique ways. There are many words that exist within the Aboriginal vernacular such as *maial* meaning “native” or used to imply a backwardness, and *gammon* meaning “humbug” or “deception” that are today only used by Aboriginal people. These are old English words that many Aboriginal people believe to be Aboriginal words. “Deadly” is such a commonly used word, which is used to mean very good, impressive or excellent. My friend and fellow playwright Cathy Craigie believes Aboriginal Australia adopted this application of the word from the Irish.

In regard to censorship of Indigenous language and culture, my experience is that when working with mainstream agents and editors, Aboriginal writers can have a battle on their hands to convey meaning. Some things just don't make sense to non-Aboriginal readers unless you live within the culture. For example, in the novel that I am writing, my agent finds it odd that the main Aboriginal character Calypso has never had a relationship with an Aboriginal girl. However, it is common for many Aboriginal families to be cautious of their children having sexual relationships with other Ab-

original people. Traditionally, marriages were based on a strict social organization and, with the effects of the Stolen Generations, it becomes much more difficult to ascertain who is and isn't related to you.

I'm interested in writing another play in collaboration with an Aboriginal theatre company. This time I want to ensure that the message is targeted at an Aboriginal audience rather than striving to educate non-Aboriginal people about our issues and interests. I imagine this will provide me with a sense of liberation that I haven't experienced through my writing to date.

TPA: Given Indigenous writers' opinions on Indigenous literature as mirroring the truths of Indigenous communities' reality,⁶ in what way should one read Indigenous literature, through what paradigm or prism? What does this "reality" mean in a literary work?

JT: Aboriginal people are so diverse and, like in all communities, there is always a range of opinions in relation to certain topics amongst people. I certainly don't agree with the viewpoints of all Aboriginal people. In terms of looking at reality and truth in literature, this is a very difficult task. In addressing any type of question, I'd encourage people

to check facts, bias and agenda and see if there is some type of consensus among people on certain issues rather than assuming that a text is a construct of a particular individual's "reality."

There are those non-Aboriginal historians and commentators that assert that colonization of Australia was devoid of massacres and that the Stolen Generations didn't exist and a debate on this issue is termed the "history wars."

It is so important that Aboriginal people and their writers and artists speak back to this view and that those stories known amongst the mob about early and more recent acts of injustice are shared.

TPA: Can you tell what is the picture of the Indigenous person in Aboriginal literature? How do you portray the indigene, in your literary and academic work? How does the literary Indigenous change the stereotype of the native that we know from Australian literature and art?

JT: My characters usually possess characteristics of a range of people that I know. Again, Aboriginal people are so diverse today and many participate in a range of subcultures. For instance, there are Aboriginal surfers, punks and business women. There is no one homogenous group. The thing that we all have in common is the experience and effects of colonization. And then I'd

⁶ Explicit in Alexis Wright's, Anita Heiss', Denis Walker's and Jack Davis' public addresses, just to name a few.

say that the second most prevalent commonality between Aboriginal people is that many of us share a belief in the Dreaming from which a respect for the environment and people flows.

TPA: Indigenous cultural roots were cut drastically. How does written literature and art attempt to find and pass on something else, traces of the oldest world? From where/what is writers' and artists' knowledge obtained? Can one recreate roots? Obviously, there are cave drawings, songs, (hi-)stories, but are they enough to reconstruct what was lost?

JT: There are many Australians that love to remind Aboriginal Australians of how much we have lost because it legitimizes further taking of land and resources, etc. It eases people's guilt. My experience is that even amongst the Aboriginal groups' earliest dispossessed, there still exists a very rich cultural knowledge evident through the proliferation of traditional stories written in language and rich visual arts practice. In all Australian capital cities, Aboriginal people of the area possess traditional stories and practise dance and art. So despite the huge changes that have happened to the landscape, story and knowledge has survived.

The last thirty years has seen a revitalization of Aboriginal culture because people are no longer

subject to policy and legislation that prevents them from engaging with family and therefore culture. A new cultural pride is emerging and many non-Indigenous people are supportive of this development realizing that Aboriginal culture is the one truly unique thing about Australia.

In terms of recreating roots, I think this is possible. For example, one can learn to speak another language at any time in their lives if a speaker of the particular language exists to teach the student. However, it takes much time to become acculturated. Both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous recordings of Aboriginal culture and language can be a very useful tool in the revitalization of cultures.

TPA: Can we concentrate on myth for a little while? There are so many things I would like to ask you about, and so small the space we can share with others on the pages of a periodical! Naturally, a reader can only read a literary myth, as known for example from Wright's or Watson's novels. This is so because myth always touches these areas of cultures that are best represented by the concept of sacred/secret. Both authors widely call upon myth as a constructing element of the presented worlds of their novels. I understand that Indigenous myth is living; it is believed in, lived by Indigenous people today. Don't you think that this can cause a bit of confusion to the outside culture reader? How would they recognize that

the myth is real, that it is not fiction but the way of living? The same question would apply to, for example, Dreaming or Walkabout . . .

JT: I always find this question a bit perplexing because it is so easy for me to understand the role of myth in other cultures and their literature and to respect it as a framework from which people live their lives. Dreaming or *Yura Muda* in the Nukunu context forms the framework for how Nukunu people live. Whether or not giant mythological characters formed the Australian landscape is irrelevant, what is important is recognizing that the values inherent in the stories provide a very important framework for looking at and engaging with the world.

The term “walkabout” is commonly used in an insulting manner by Australians. Many Australians use the term to describe someone who acts in a reckless or aimless fashion. However, Walkabout is similar to a pilgrimage whereby Aboriginal people would learn and reinforce spiritual values by visiting and paying homage to sacred sites. The act was given negative connotations to support slavery. Walkabout was a spiritual duty but it was ridiculed because it was seen as an activity that diminished servitude to white station owners or “employers” and therefore slowed Australia’s “growth.”

TPA: At the beginning of our conversation I said I’d come back to the

gloomy/shocking element of the presented reality of “The Healing Tree,” the one that does not stop striking me, namely, a mission being called home. Given the history of Indigenous people in Australia, I understand it, as I can comprehend orphanages being called home. But it still shocks me that such places may ever be called home! Anyway, what else is being pictured as home in Indigenous literary and art works?

JT: Home to me is the country from which thousands of generations of my ancestors were born and lived. The country nurtured and provided everything that one needs.

There are many “returning home” narratives being written by Aboriginal people such as Terri Janke, Larrissa Behrendt, Fabienne Bayet-Charlton. Even the film version of Jimmy Chi’s *Bran Nue Dae* directed by Rachel Perkins can be viewed as a “returning home” narrative.

There are also many representations of home not being places but rather family and people and I certainly feel like I am home when I am with family, whether we are on country or not.

TPA: Some say that the true homeland of people is language. Isn’t this true that the true motherland for Indigenous persons are their Land, Dreamtime and Walkabout?

JT: This is a problematic concept because many Aboriginal people do

not speak their native language, at least not fluently. However, not being able to speak language does not diminish one's Aboriginal identity. I feel very proud that I can name country in my traditional language and it does make me feel more connected to place. It's a good feeling to be able to name country in the same way that my ancestors did thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans to Australia.

TPA: Many Indigenous writers/artists, as you, are lucky to entertain crosscultural family, social, professional, creative relations. Can you tell how Indigenous visual images, knowledge, movement/dance, sound/music/silence converse in your work and life? I refer to a concept of oneness of an act and acting, a person with a being. Does “to see” mean “to hear, paint, and speak”? Or perhaps “to hear” means “to speak, paint and see”? In other words, where is there for you a separating line between a drawing and a word, acting and being/existing in art and literature? And in (Aboriginal) literature and life?

JT: I've had moments to really consider who I am and how I live, knowing that I could change these things if I desired. I feel blessed that my passion for Aboriginal culture and how I approach life has never wavered. My engagement isn't habitual; it's innate. I am a writer but I can't separate other forms of Abo-

riginal art and culture from the way I see, understand and experience. I believe that Nukunu culture provides a good basis also to venture out into the world and interact with people of other cultures because it teaches reciprocity, that worldviews differ between groups, this is acceptable and something that one can benefit from.

I have faith in my dreams that Nukunu and other Aboriginal people will again live our lives to the fullest.

TPA: Thank you, it has been a fascinating trajectory. We could certainly say “a very intense but short relationship,” but for sure a crosscultural one! *It taste good iny?*

JT: Hope that my insights have been inspiring to you to further read and engage with Aboriginal Australia and I hope to one day visit Poland and experience first hand Poland's rich artistic and literary tradition. For now, *nbakadja, widzenia i dziękuję.*

Engaging the “Forbidden Texts” of Philosophy

Pamela Sue Anderson Talks to Alison Jasper

AJ: In reference to your work in feminist philosophy of religion, Tina Beattie implied that you were perhaps less willing to explain the “particularity” of your “own religious positioning” (Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism* 76–80), or I might say, feminist genealogy than your critique of “male-neutral” would seem to require (cf. Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 13, 142–48). Would you be prepared to say something about your own background and the relationship of what you see as your philosophical project to, for example, Christianity?

PSA: Yes. In the course of this interview I will position myself in relation to my own religious background, or if you like, my “feminist genealogy.” Yet, if you don’t mind, it is important to admit that over the years I have found theologians who object to the lack of any explicit religious positioning given to my own yearning, very frustrating! Generally, this objection has seemed to either misunderstand or dismiss the nature of my feminist struggle. In particular, this has obscured my struggle against an intransigent epis-

temological obstacle which blocked women’s claims to think, to know or—simply—to have ideas of their own in philosophy.

For example, Beattie recognizes that the heart of my feminism is philosophical; and yet she challenges my philosophical method for being blind to my own religious positioning (Beattie 78). Her challenge is clear: it is that I do what I accuse male philosophers of doing when I employ philosophical methods as if these methods are neutral of my own presuppositions and, in particular, my religious positioning. Beattie also recognizes my determination to uncover and to struggle with the myths of gender identity embedded in the texts of philosophy of religion; and yet she objects to my bracketing off the specificities of my own religious desire, in order to explore the resistance to gender-oppression within other religious traditions, notably in Hindu practices of *bhakti* (Beattie 77; cf. Mukta, *Up-holding the Common Life*).

After having been trained to read philosophical texts in the 1980s with the hermeneutic insight of Paul Ricoeur, I began to see the vital need

in the early 1990s for more than Ricoeurian hermeneutics. The need was for a method which enabled feminists to learn from the gender practices of other cultures, especially through the religious matters of texts. While Ricoeur’s hermeneutics had already made me a thinker sensitive to damaging presuppositions, or “prejudices,” in philosophical and theological thought, I became explicitly aware of the serious and generally hidden obstacle to recognizing oppressive gender-bias not only in reading Hartsock’s “The Feminist Standpoint,” but in both reading and discussing Sandra Harding’s “feminist standpoint epistemology” (Harding, *Whose Science?*). As a result, I worked to develop an epistemological method, employing Harding’s “strong objectivity” and “self-reflexivity” explicitly for a feminist philosophy of religion (Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 70–80).

Harding argued that objectivity in epistemology remains “weak” as long as we are unaware of our own privileged positions in making claims to knowledge but, equally, of our reasons for action and religious practices. We can only acquire more objective knowledge by “thinking from the lives of others” who occupy positions on the margins of the dominant epistemology (Harding, *Whose Science?* and “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology;” cf. Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 67–87). The feminist task is not thinking that we have neutrality, but instead is strug-

gling to see ourselves reflexively and less partially; that is, to see an alternative account of oneself as another. We gain less partial knowledge both of ourselves and of others not by claiming absolute objectivity but by working towards the engaged vision of a feminist standpoint.

In the first instance, of course, Hartsock and Harding were articulating the standpoint of women in philosophy. But to uncover gender oppression in the social and epistemic relations of philosophy, each of these feminist philosophers sought “a feminist standpoint” which was not simply that of being born a woman. Questions of sexually specific desire were not generally raised by the feminist standpoint epistemologists. Instead such questions were often left to feminist psycholinguists (like, for example, Luce Irigaray who was read by Beattie) and to queer theorists. As a feminist philosopher of religion, I gained much from considering these different sorts of feminist questions, while working to avoid contradictions. However, my readers did not always agree with, or follow, this ambition.

AJ: Perhaps, nevertheless, readers might be as interested in the context within which you have come to this philosophical position as in its nuances.

PSA: I grew up in the Lutheran “mid-west” of the United States,

in a suburb of Minneapolis. I won a scholarship to study Mathematics at St Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. In fact, by the time I arrived at St Olaf, my real passion was French language and literature, but I was told that I needed more than “French.” When I arrived in Oxford, having spent some time in France, my plan was to combine my interests in French with Philosophy by working on the French philosopher, Ricoeur, whose hermeneutic philosophy I’ve already mentioned.

In the 1980s, Ricoeur was very little read by Oxford philosophers, and I had to struggle to persuade my tutors in Philosophy to take my interest in his writings seriously (while today international societies for Ricoeur studies flourish). On the one hand, Oxford analytic philosophers were suspicious of Ricoeur’s apparent sympathies with theology and literature; on the other hand, Christian philosophers of religion did not see Ricoeur’s philosophy meeting the rigorous standards of philosophical argumentation for Christian theism.

To make matters worse for my dual interests in French and in Philosophy, many of those people close to me within the Lutheran tradition which linked St Olaf College (as a very highly respected Lutheran liberal arts college) and Mansfield College (as the only Oxford college which had a Fellow’s post in Lutheran Theology) would never recognize my intellectual passions

as suitable for “a girl” from Minnesota, suitable for the heartland of Lutheran Protestantism! Looking back what made this negative judgement of unsuitability clear to me were dismissive comments about my enigmatic behaviour, puzzled expressions, teasing, general lack of understanding of, or conversations about, my goals. I became used to expecting disapproval and accepted the lack of support I found from the religious authorities in the colleges which, in turn, obscured other personal and intellectual support.

In the light of this religious background, you could say that I came, eventually, to feminist philosophy of religion via my consistent experiences of resistance to having “ideas of my own” as a woman who sought to think philosophically rather than conform to the mid-western Lutheran image of theology and of Christian gender stereotypes; for example, being “a good girl” as both a wife and a mother was never my gender ideal. Even if this ideal could have been combined with a career, I did not see things that way. The attraction of French language, culture and literature provided me with the freedom to question my upbringing (perhaps, another language or culture would have served a similar purpose). Confronting cultural differences provided an opportunity to think beyond the perspectives which had been imposed in being brought up Lutheran in Minnesota. It could not be true that the best life was to

be Lutheran and to “settle down” in the Twin Cities (i.e., Minneapolis-St Paul, Minnesota and Mansfield). The attraction of philosophy lay in the possibility of thinking for myself, while also reflecting on life together with other people.

So, in reply to your question and Beattie’s request to be honest about my religious positioning, I admit that this background has been an obstacle and a problem for me as a woman and a free thinker. Philosophy and European culture provided a framework for the reflexivity of both my philosophical and my personal thinking. Feminism added to the intellectual task of philosophical self-reflection the possibility of empowering women (including myself) to not accept epistemic injustice; that is, to not exclude subjects on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or religion. Feminist philosophy continues to offer an antidote to certain kinds of dishonesty and self-deception, especially to excessive piety.

AJ: So what was it like for a young woman philosopher in those student and early career years?

PSA: I would say, in the philosophical terms of Michèle Le Doeuff, “the primal scene”¹ of my education

as a woman in philosophy arose in resisting the Lutheran norms of piety which I found burdensome at St Olaf and Mansfield Colleges. My primal scene came when a voice inside my head paralyzed my well-warranted confidence, saying, “Lutheran girls don’t have ideas of their own, they are respectful of (male) authority!” To silence this inner noise, I fled that “sacred” scene to a different place, even though I would find other forms of patriarchy in philosophy. Yet the oppositional voice in my own head would keep me running defiant of the gender norms of a pious upbringing, “. . . and girls don’t ‘go off’ to European cities, foreign institutions and other cultures, searching in libraries and hiding away in impenetrable books.”

Nevertheless, some sense of belief that I could think for myself and make a valuable contribution in life to women and men in philosophy (of religion) remained. My desire to make a critical contribution as a woman in philosophy would grow gradually stronger. But I have never had an easy relation to the branch of philosophy to which I am most often associated: that is, to the philosophy of religion. I am constantly uncovering problematic norms such as the omni-attributes of the traditional theistic God which still dominate the field. The world of Oxford

¹ For my more detailed discussion of “the primal scene” in Le Doeuff, see Anderson, “Michèle Le Doeuff’s ‘Primal Scene:’ Pro-

hibition and Confidence in the Education of a Woman.”

philosophy had prepared me for the resistance I would continue to experience in the search for my first permanent job in teaching philosophy. I gave tutorials in modern philosophy at Mansfield, but to appease my parents I went on the job market at the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division meetings in 1990 and 1991. In retrospect, it is predictable that I would have been competing with other philosophers of religion and especially, in the USA, from Notre Dame University where philosophers are trained in the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy of religion; that is, trained specifically and rigorously in the Christian philosophy of religion which remains the privileged tradition in Oxford.

An ongoing failure to be recognized as a woman philosopher—and not merely as someone from St Olaf College doing Christian philosophy of religion—was palpable and predictable. In any event, it was, then, a matter of the very highest significance to me at the beginning of my career that I defend myself and succeed from the beginning in this world which remains not only highly competitive (and elitist), but often very hostile to women. There was a need to convince these men and myself not only that as a woman I could be “up there” with the very best of philosophers, but that my choice of Ricoeur, with his, to some, unconventional literary, theological and scriptural interests,

was fully worthy of the philosophical attention men were lovingly devoting to a canon of dead male philosophers who, in comparison with Ricoeur—to say nothing of Hartsock, Harding and Le Doeuff—had far less to say to me at that point.

Already during those early years in Oxford, I learned to compromise my passions in order to achieve my goal of becoming a professional philosopher. For instance, Ricoeur as a living French philosopher could not be studied on his own, but only with the legitimation of the canonized figure of a dead male philosopher: Kant who would—and ironically to my mind—become a highly contentious figure, courting the disdain of all postmodern theorists, as well as that of the radically orthodox, the conservative and the neo-Barthian theologians. However, if the Oxford tutor’s intention in having me study Kant was to curb my ambition or demonstrate that I wasn’t up to the task of philosophy, his aim failed: and I took on Kant with a will to prove any philosophical doubters wrong!

It was this sort of academic climate that did eventually facilitate my encounter with feminism; first, through Harding during the short period of time I spent teaching at Delaware and second, through Le Doeuff for years right up to the present time. I was a woman in philosophy, engaging the “forbidden texts” of the male philosophers, but also going beyond this to read and un-

derstand the critical work of women like Harding herself who introduced me to the writings of Alison Jaggar, Seyla Benhabib and the early work of Judith Butler on issues of the self. The latter two feminists, along with Harding, gave me a first taste of the debates over the postmodern “death” of the self, of metaphysics and of history. The timely question was: can feminism be compatible with postmodernism?

Le Doeuff would become more significant as I continued to read and be shaped by the subtle and witty insight found in her *Philosophical Imaginary* and *Hipparchia’s Choice*. From her texts, I’ve gained many skills as a philosopher but in particular Le Doeuff’s incisive readings of the history of philosophy gave new confidence to think and have ideas. Her third book, *The Sex of Knowing*, offers additional ground to discover those women whose ideas have been “disinherited” by the tradition of philosophy excluding women. The image of the female Alexandrian philosopher and astronomer, Hypatia, who fell victim to a murderous Christian mob for celebrating her knowledge and intellect too publicly as a woman, was first introduced to me by Le Doeuff (*The Sex of Knowing* 112–14). Le Doeuff’s text on female disinheritance in philosophy appeared well before *Agora* became a popular film about the female philosopher and martyr Hypatia in the cinema of Europe and the USA. In spite of

many similar cautionary tales, none of the inspiring women uncovered by Le Doeuff in the history of philosophy are daunted by the task of challenging men on their own intellectual turf.

AJ: In 1993 you took up a post at Sunderland University. How did you find working in a new university in the NE of England?

PSA: My particular approach to philosophy—through Kant and Ricoeur—marked me as unconventional and difficult to place before I went to Sunderland. My goal in working in the NE of England was to gain the freedom to write, teach and publish in feminist philosophy. It was also to work on that personal positioning and feminist philosophical consciousness that your opening question about Beattie’s criticisms of “my [non-neutral] standpoint” raised. I still owe a debt to Sunderland for that freedom and that self-reflexive work! It was a new university and not hidebound by conservative traditions in philosophy—there was scope for more radical thinking—which was good for feminist scholars generally and also for me as a woman in the field of philosophy. So, for my scholarship, this period was liberating and productive, giving me the opportunity to respond to Harding’s suggestion that there had never been a feminist critique of the philosophy of religion; I published my first major

monograph, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1998). Sunderland also gave me my first opportunity to invite Michèle Le Doeuff to speak to my colleagues and students. And this became a tradition which I've carried on in Oxford, inviting Le Doeuff regularly to inspire feminist and non-feminist philosophers alike with her political wit and philosophical scholarship.

AJ: *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* was your first manifesto as a feminist philosopher (of religion); this monograph presented a critique of and challenge to Christian male epistemic privilege.

PSA: Yes. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* aimed to expose the weaknesses of building male knowledge on the self-aggrandizement of the male philosopher who is propped up by the blind infatuation of the student and/or lover. Le Doeuff's critique of the Héloïse complex² helped me to expose the weakness of both the (female/male) lover and the (male) beloved: the one lover

lacked confidence and the other suffered from over-confidence. Le Doeuff's critique supported my view that knowledge as "male" could never be anything but "weak" as long as blinded by false confidences. Moreover, the false consciousness of both the lover and the beloved not only applied to the pattern of disciple and master, female and male, but to human and divine. This implicit critique of apotheosis—or, self-deification as self-aggrandizement—became even more central to Le Doeuff's later critique of sexism in *The Sex of Knowing* and in her Weidenfeld Lectures (Le Doeuff, "The Spirit of Secularism;" cf. Anderson, "Liberating Love's Capabilities").

AJ: *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* also brought you into relationship and often contention with a number of other feminist theologians and philosophers of religion, including Grace Jantzen, Tina Beattie, Luce Irigaray, Sarah Coakley. Some of these relationships seem to take on a rather adversarial character. Would you agree and how would you explain that?

PSA: This is a very good question. Immediately, after its publication I did not understand terribly well why these feminist theologians and feminist philosophers of religion seemed to misunderstand the arguments in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. I have been frustrated by their failure as feminists

² "Héloïse complex" is diagnosed by Michèle Le Doeuff (*Hipparchia's Choice*, 59–60 and 162–65) as the tendency of women in philosophy to idolize either a male colleague or teacher (as did Héloïse and Beauvoir). This idolization could be of a "great" living or dead philosopher whose name they carry, e.g. "Kantian," but the Héloïse complex benefits the man who is named and destroys the woman by removing her intellectual independence and ability to create philosophy herself.

to understand my text. Perhaps this should have been expected because my academic formation as a philosopher had not been with other women (neither with female theologians nor female philosophers of religion). This formation had not been typical in terms of either my context or my background. Yet my greatest perplexity was with other feminist philosophers of religion not following my lead to Harding and to Le Doeuff.

In addition to feminist theologians asking for clarification of my religious desires, a common thread in their impatience with my text is an assumption, roughly, due to Irigaray and other psycholinguists that “feminist” thinking equals expressing “feminine” language and values; sexually specific self-expression is thought to be possible in becoming a woman or becoming divine as a woman. But female apotheosis had never been my vision for feminist philosophers or for women generally, especially insofar as suiting patriarchal idolizations of femininity. Instead I hold an Enlightenment view of philosophical thinking as rational and embodied, but not a psychological or theological view of women as generically different from men.

A Feminist Philosophy of Religion is a provocative and contentious text on two counts for those feminist theologians and psycholinguists who were advocating a “feminism of sexual difference;” the latter is unlike either the Marx-

ist or the liberal feminists who had influenced my own feminist struggle to transform philosophy in order to include women as equals. First, the text does not equate feminist with being or becoming a woman and especially not with self-expression in feminine language. Second, the text does not advocate any particular conception of God or theology which, in 1998, I left explicitly to theologians. Perhaps, though, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* reads (to some) as if I am ambivalent about psychoanalysis and theology, generally. Ironically, I am more ambivalent about the Lacanian preoccupations of many contemporary, sexual-difference feminist theologians than Freud or Lacan themselves. I tried to give other feminists the benefit of doubt when it came to their theology. But I was not and can never be in agreement with feminine psycholinguistics enabling Christian women to become divine. I remain a philosopher and an equality (rather than sexual-difference) feminist, but not a psycholinguist or strictly speaking a theologian interested in sexual difference, or sexually different desires as the way to (knowledge of, or intimacy with) God.

A Feminist Philosophy of Religion treats religion as both an academic subject and a socially constructed reality. I never equate religion with desire for or knowledge of God. Nor do I equate feminist philosophy of religion with feminist theol-

ogy or feminist spirituality.³ I don't think that for the sake of women themselves feminists can allow "religion" to play on women's own insecurities about inordinate desire—or, roughly, on "Eve's sin"—without generating epistemic injustice. Reassuring women of their own separate sphere of spirituality as, for example, in Coakley's intimacy with God (Coakley, "Feminism and Analytic Philosophy" 516–20) may enable a gendered (or, a woman's) way of doing theology. Yet the constant danger of this different sphere for women's intimacy and desire will be to reinstate gender injustice and patriarchal forms of sexist oppression. Feminist philosophy and women's intellect address this critical danger.

AJ: *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* proposes a rational passion, or yearning, for justice, employing mimetic reconfigurations of our mythic inheritance in the west as a form of imaginative variations. This imaginative form of mimesis, or "philosophical imaginary," aims to be compatible with thinking from women's lives. But is it incompatible with a psycholinguistic—feminine—imaginary?

³ To qualify this claim, I must agree with Dorota Filipczak's conception of "divining a self" which is a significant alternative to a spirituality of "becoming divine." In contradistinction to the latter, divining a self aims to locate and reclaim the autonomous female self in her own political and religious context, see Filipczak 210–12.

PSA: Yes. Here it is crucial to be clear. After discussing Le Doeuff and Harding, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* brings in Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to raise the question of female desire—as a fundamental dimension of that which has been excluded by male social, material and epistemic privileges in philosophy of religion. I also look at how a mimetic strategy has to be disruptive and criticized Ricoeur's threefold form of mimesis for not being disruptive of patriarchal myths. However, I never give up my alliance with Le Doeuff's conceptions of the philosophical imaginary, of reason and of "a feminist" as a woman who "allows no one to think in her place."

AJ: In an extended review of *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Sarah Coakley criticized the Kantian account of reality you tried to align with forms of feminist standpoint epistemology as drawn from Harding (Coakley, "Feminism and Analytic Philosophy"). Her critique, interesting though it was in some ways, was also clearly framed by her own desire to legitimize a distinctly more realist (less Kantian) account of God. Where do you feel you now stand on this debate?

PSA: Allow me to try to explain what may be meant by this alignment. I am a Kantian and I see Kant as both an empirical realist and a transcendental idealist. I am

also a feminist philosopher who has criticized Kant and Ricoeur on the grounds of gender bias from a feminist standpoint. But this critique is not decisive or a rejection of Kant and of all Kantians. Instead it reflects the influence of feminist Marxists and such post-Hegelian Kantians as Jurgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib. To understand my own position on Kant today, my readers can turn to *Anderson and Bell, Kant and Theology*; this co-authored book is especially useful for understanding (my) Kantian views of realism and of God.

I also argue that feminist standpoint epistemology derives from a feminist Marxism which has strong affinities with Hegel's master/slave dialectic. But this argument is in Harding and in my discussion of Hegel (Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy* 87–92). It is essential to understand the social and material reality which is Harding's concern. To gain this understanding, it helps to read such post-Marxist rationalists as Hartsock, Habermas and Benhabib.

So, my reply to your question about “reality” suggests an apparent lack, amongst contemporary Christian theists, of any firsthand understanding of the history of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy and, in particular, philosophical knowledge of the history of Kant, Hegel and Marx. In contrast, a feminist standpoint epistemologist would have read the Frankfurt school

philosophers whose post-Hegelian Kantian philosophy is German analytic Marxism. Their view(s) of reality would have to include social and material dimensions and not just a naïve conception of empirical sensations and “evidence,” or, even, of more profound psychological and spiritual intimacy with the divine. Making the naïve empiricist view of “reality” less naïve by encompassing a personal encounter with the theistic God is highly problematic for philosophers, including contemporary feminist philosophers. Claiming to find knowledge of the divine in deeply subjective, sexual and spiritual encounters with a personal God does not necessarily reassure a philosophical realist.

Otherwise, there is no better way to understanding than for readers to explore the debates about feminist epistemology, Hegel, Kant and so on for themselves. If they merely go by Coakley's account of my position, then they should be aware of her distinctive theological prejudice against socialist or Marxist feminists which inhibits careful understanding of post-Hegelian Kantians and of feminist standpoint epistemology. The danger is to reduce “reality” to a false “purity” of religious experience grasped with a naïve empiricism or psychologism. A falsely conceived real or pure experience would ignore the material and social dimensions; in turn, this obscures the possibility of a reflexively informed gender

perspective on reality. Without the latter, gender can hide unjust empirical and psychological relations.

Coakley writes as a philosopher of religion in the analytic tradition of Christian theism, but she does not explicitly and fairly assess analytic philosophical debates about reality which are more wide-ranging than Christian theism or Christian mystical experience (Coakley, “Dark Contemplation” 292–95, 311–12). Lamentably she leaves out textual analysis of debates in feminist epistemology, Marxist feminism and Frankfurt School philosophies. The highly substantial socialist debates in philosophy cannot be ignored or dismissed by feminist theologians without their missing decisive issues in feminism.

For example, I have in mind the debates of Benhabib as a feminist political philosopher and as a Habermas scholar, but also those of Angela Davies as a feminist and militant philosopher shaped by Marcuse; and the issues of Nancy Fraser as a feminist political philosopher shaped by both Foucault and Habermas. Such feminist philosophers confront political culture, issues of social justice and debates over recognition which necessarily inform our conception of reality. Feminist realists may claim different things about (the same) reality, but this is not necessarily incoherent in a debilitating sense. Instead this sort of disagreement reflects the democratic nature of

the growth of knowledge—for example, as found in Harding’s feminist standpoint epistemology—through a struggle for truth. The range of feminist challenges to what we know about reality forces us to ask whether those who believe in “God” are themselves in touch with “reality,” especially the reality of social injustice. Without a hermeneutic of suspicion and a self-reflexive critique, feminist claims about reality and God run the danger of their own theological mystification (Anderson, “Feminist Philosophy and Transcendence” 37–44; cf. Hollywood 173–241, 329–45).

AJ: Coakley criticized your feminist challenge to analytic philosophy of religion. She acknowledged with some approval your continuing commitment to truth, objectivity and rationality, even though you and, to be fair, she as well—were critical of past definitions of these terms. However, Coakley was a good deal more confident than you had been that analytic philosophy was capable of cleaning up its own act in relation to gender consciousness (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 517–19; 2005, 282–95).

PSA: Let me break in at this point and respond to make things more clear; and then, I will pick up on the rest of this question about Coakley and analytic philosophy (below). Yes. You are correct Coakley and

I agree on a continuing commitment to truth, objectivity and rationality. But you are not correct in believing Coakley is right in everything she says about what I think. I have never dismissed analytic philosophy or its method: I teach it to my students and employ analytic tools in my conceptions of truth, objectivity and rationality! What you are picking up is a reduction of “analytic philosophy” to “Christian philosophy of religion” as written by Richard Swinburne, William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Alvin Plantinga and Caroline Franks Davis. But an analytic philosopher could easily think that “Christian philosophy of religion” is a mere game of logic with nothing to do with reality—let alone God as (a) reality. The problem for Christian philosophy of religion is, then, how to demonstrate philosophically that their “God” is real. In other words, it is not clear to me either how Coakley can “align” herself “with” analytic philosophy without far more qualification in the analytic terms of her theological position and of philosophical realism.

AJ: It was clear too that Coakley wanted to defend the possibility of a conventional view of metaphysical reality that could not be dismissed as the simple outcome of masculine epistemological privilege (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 514, 519). In her view, to some extent, you had conformed

to this secularizing trope, by laying your emphasis on the material reality implicit within power relations between women and men as the lynch pin in an argument under the title of the philosophy of religion. In any case, she was circumspect about your materialist account of standpoint epistemology, arguing that the account of truth and objectivity it proposed was ultimately incoherent (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 507–09). In soliciting all perspectives—marginal, privileged and everything in between, truth and objectivity are necessarily ruled out.

PSA: Yes. You are correct that Coakley picks up something about metaphysical reality and defends it as more than a masculine privilege or projection. But the problem is that her argument(s) against the specific critique of Feuerbach and against the many other feminist and philosophical critiques of the concept of the omni-attribute God are not explicit enough. Coakley proposes an alternative to “the more anthropomorphic or explicitly Feuerbachian projectionism” in which “divine reality” is “encountered” in an intimate or deeply “feminine” way (Coakley, “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy” 518–19); the latter takes up subjectivity and direct perception of the divine as the “feminine” alternative to the objectivity and indirect perception of the divine of the dominant “masculine” conceptions

of the theistic God in philosophy of religion (517–18). Yet I simply don't see this as a "feminist" project—and certainly not a "feminist standpoint" which would reject the feminine and masculine binary of Christian theism as hierarchal, exclusive and so, oppressive for those excluded and/or subordinated.

Moreover, it is not enough to simply accuse me of picking up something "secular." How do we know what aspects of reality are secular and what aspects are sacred? I may agree that personal reality as we encounter it is sacred. But then, I would not be able to separate off easily what in reality could be secular. Is physical matter, or certain aspects of the sensible world, secular? Basically, my philosophical reasoning does not divide reality into secular and (Christian) sacred, or think that secular is an aspect of reality to be avoided. "Secular" is more likely to function as a local or culturally relative term which has been inherited from certain Christian forms of oppositional thinking.

Note, however, that my points about the term "secular" do not imply that philosophical reasoning is neutral and non-local. But they do mean that philosophical arguments must be expressed clearly enough that we know what terms are being employed and what metaphysical baggage is being assumed in any discussions using such terms as God, reality, Christian, secular, analytic and so on. From my philosophical position and personal background,

the danger for those seeking to put an end to domination and oppression is to be trapped inside a box, the outside of which is secular and the inside is Christian. If we claim to live in such separate worlds, then we are in any case not seeing reality.

As for my account of "points of view" being incoherent, admittedly I face a philosophical danger in saying that feminist subjects are "multiple" and "diverse" due to living in different locations. However, my position is not ultimately meant to be incoherent as long as the goal of feminist standpoint epistemology is "less partial" knowledge and not "absolute" knowledge. I am not trying to bundle up incoherent positions and then claim to have coherent knowledge of reality. The process of gaining knowledge never achieves its ultimate goal, that is, never complete or absolute knowledge of all aspects of reality as a whole. It is impossible to achieve absolute truth or absolute objectivity. Instead, we can only seek to achieve less partial knowledge, doing so on democratic grounds (those inclusive of many perspectives) which aim at justice, goodness and at as much truth as we can fairly and honestly expect.

AJ: James Carter has recently argued that Coakley seems to confuse the aspiration towards universalism with an idea of uniformity that still fails to take into account her own epistemic privilege as western Christian theologian and senior Cambridge academic. In defending your per-

spective, Carter reads your view of strong objectivity as the struggle itself continually to represent subjects of knowledge that are unavoidably multiple, heterogeneous and complex (Carter 17).

PSA: Thanks for the second half of your point (above) about Carter on Coakley. James Carter is very insightful—and he does understand the argument concerning “a feminist standpoint,” in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. I also agree with what Carter says about Coakley, since it is based on the facts of the reality of our material and social perspectives. These are crucial.

Basically I continue to build on *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*—both clarifying what is there and developing what is now more than a prolegomena to feminist philosophy of religion—that is, my project claims to be a “gendering” (Lovibond 151–58) of philosophy of religion. This gendering gets away from some of the confusions of the label, “feminist,” in order to tease out what actually is assumed as the gendered identity in philosophical conceptions of human being or humanity. Thus, I would hope more people would read or reread *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* before merely accepting the various kinds of theological criticisms of my position which we have discussed today. Moreover, I recommend my forthcoming replies in *Gendering Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Our Epistemic Locatedness*.

AJ: In relation to feminist and women’s scholarship apart from Harding, Le Doeuff’s work has figured even more strongly in your recent projects than the early one, and you have in many ways tried to promote her work here in the UK. How would you characterize the particular appeal of this thinker for you?

PSA: As already suggested (above), Le Doeuff informs me as a brilliant reader of texts. Meticulous in her scholarship she has an extraordinary ability to uncover fascinating and significant asides that have been missed in conventional readings, and so, to see things in a different way. The breadth and intellectual grasp of her scholarship is also inspiring. In her three main books—*The Philosophical Imaginary*; *Hipparchia’s Choice*; and *The Sex of Knowing*—she shows a profound understanding of topics from Gabrielle Suchon, Shakespeare, Bacon, Locke and the early Enlightenment, through the nineteenth century with Harriet Taylor and Kierkegaard’s abandoned fiancée, and into the twentieth century with Beauvoir, Bergson and Deleuze to mention only a few of her favourite philosophers. In each period of philosophy, Le Doeuff goes to the heart of cultural myths about women that colour the most intellectual seeming of scholarly texts written by men.

Highly significant for my perspective (as indicated above) is that Le Doeuff demonstrates how women come to lack confidence in their ability to argue and debate alongside

men but rather than retreat to any sphere for women, bracketed off from the world of men, she leads the way forward, speaking out clearly and defending women's cases always to be included as equal partners in philosophical and political debates. I applaud her—and wish that each of us could be as subtle, witty and confident a woman in philosophy as Le Doeuff is. In addition, the distinctive virtues of ethical confidence, firm calmness and just the right amount of relational charm would be crucial features of an engaged vision for doing feminist philosophy today!

AJ: To conclude, would you like to say something about the work which you have done to carve out a new space in the field of philosophy of religion for feminist philosophers who are raising new and distinctive questions?

PSA: Yes. I am grateful for this opportunity to reflect on my own struggle to open new space for other women and men in philosophy. I have worked hard to generate space for conferences and ongoing research since I published *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. This work began with a lively “Author Meets Critics” day conference at Sunderland University on 18 April 1998; that experience was formative not only for me but for other philosophers of religion who gave critical responses to what I had written. It was a sobering experience to have my book crit-

icized, but also an energizing time. I went on to co-edit with one of my critics, Beverley Clack, *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*. Later with the help of postgraduates, “Transcendence Incarnate,” the first-ever Continental Philosophy of Religion conference at the University of Oxford took place on 10 September 2007 (Somerville College). Several of the papers delivered at that conference were revised and published, along with other commissioned essays, in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate*. The feminist dimension in the field of philosophy of religion continues to be open to contestations—but this is not my only philosophical area of research and publication.

Overlapping with this feminist work are the research activities which I have developed and carried out in contemporary French philosophy with Le Doeuff, and before this, with Ricoeur whom I first met in Oxford in 1980 and whose legacy now results in invitations to a wide-range of international conferences. Last but not least, the moral and religious texts of Kant continue to challenge my conception of a feminist standpoint. In the end, the texts which matter most to me in philosophy have come together to create the person I am today. It is great to have been able to review my personal and philosophical formation with you, Alison, in this interview. Thank you!

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Pamela Sue. “Feminist Philosophy and Transcendence.” *Women and the Divine: Touching Transcendence*. Ed. Gillian Howie and J’annine Jobling. New York: Palgrave, 2009. 27–54.

---. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

---. *Gendering Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Our Epistemic Locatedness*. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2011.

---. “Liberating Love’s Capabilities: On the Wisdom of Love.” *Transforming Philosophy and Religion*. Ed. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007. 350–94.

---. “Michèle Le Doeuff’s ‘Primal Scene’: Prohibition and Confidence in the Education of a Woman.” *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture* 1 (2011): 11–26.

Anderson, Pamela, and Jordan Bell. *Kant and Theology*. Philosophy for Theologians Series. London: Continuum, 2010.

Beattie, Tina. *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Carter, James. “Power and Knowledge: Challenging Theology from a Feminist Standpoint—A Response to Sarah Coakley.” Unpublished Essay Submitted for the M.St. in *Modern Theology*. University of Oxford, 2008.

Coakley, Sarah. “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy of Religion.” *The Oxford Handbook for Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. William Wainwright. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 294–525.

---. “Dark Contemplation and Epistemic Transformation: The Analytic Theologian Re-Meets Teresa of Avila.” *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*. Ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 280–312.

Filipczak, Dorota. 2004. “Autonomy and Female Spirituality in a Polish Context: Divining a Self.” *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*. Ed. Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. 210–22.

Harding, Sandra. “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is ‘Strong Objectivity’?” *Feminist Epistemologies*. Ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 49–82.

---. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women’s Lives*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Hartsock, Nancy. C.M. “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism.” *Discovering*

Reality. Ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1983. 283–310.

---. "The Feminist Standpoint Revisited." *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*. Oxford: Westview, 1998. 227–48.

Hollywood, Amy. *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Le Doeuff, Michèle. *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc.* 1991. Trans. Trista Selous. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

---. *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Trans. Colin Gordon. London: Continuum, 2002.

---. *The Sex of Knowing*. Trans. Kathryn Hamer and Lorraine Code. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

---. "The Spirit of Secularism: On Fables, Gender and Ethics," *Weidenfeld Professorial Lectures*, University of Oxford, Trinity Term, 2006.

Lovibond, Sabina. "'Gendering' as an Ethical Concept." *Feminist Theory* 2:2 (Aug. 2001): 151–58.

Mukta, Parita. *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Tomasz Dobrogoszcz teaches British literature and literary translation at the University of Łódź. He is the editor of *Contemporary British Literature in Poland* (2008), for which he wrote about Polish translations of Sarah Kane's plays. He has published articles on contemporary British and postcolonial literature, e.g. on Kazuo Ishiguro and John Banville. He has translated Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* into Polish.

■■■■■ tomaszdobrogoszcz@tlen.pl

330

Dorota Filipczak teaches British and postcolonial literature in the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. Her monograph on Malcolm Lowry was published in *The Malcolm Lowry Review* (Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, 1998/99). Her recent publications are *Unheroic Heroines: The Portrayal of Women in the Writings of Margaret Laurence* (Łódź University Press, 2007) and "Is Literature Any Help in Liberating Eve and Mary?" in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson (Springer, 2010). Together with Agata Handley, she co-edited *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart* (2010). She is a translator and a poet.

■■■■■ dorfil@uni.lodz.pl

Tomasz Fisiak is a doctoral student at the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. His main interest is Gothicism, especially its evolution as a literary genre. He is currently working on his PhD, in which he analyzes the portraits of female tyrants in contemporary Gothic novels.

■■■■■ tomasz.fisiak@gmail.pl

Alison Jasper is Lecturer in Religion in the School of Languages, Cultures and Religions at the University of Stirling, Scotland. She is the author of *The Shining Garment of the Text: Gendered Readings of John's Prologue* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Her recent article is "Contesting Memory: Maude Royden, a Case Study in Female Genius" in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson (Springer, 2010). A book on the subject will be appearing in 2012. She is

Contributors

the reviews editor of the international journal, *Literature and Theology*, published by Oxford University Press.

■■■■■ a.e.jasper@stir.ac.uk

David Jasper is Professor of Literature and Theology in the University of Glasgow and Changjiang Chair Professor at Renmin University of China, Beijing. He holds degrees from the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Durham and Uppsala. The founding editor of the journal *Literature and Theology*, his most recent books are *The Sacred Desert* (2004) and *The Sacred Body* (2009). He is currently working on a third volume in the series, to be entitled *The Sacred Community*. He is also editing a volume of nineteenth-century biographies in the *Collected Works of Margaret Oliphant*.

■■■■■ d.Jasper@arts.gla.ac.uk

Joanna Kazik is a graduate of the University of Łódź, Poland, and the University of Glasgow, UK. She teaches literature in the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature, University of Łódź. She edited the first volume of *Studies in English Drama and Poetry* (Łódź University Press, 2007). Kazik was one of the authors in *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities* (Palgrave, 2006). She is currently writing a book on medieval carols.

■■■■■ jkazik@uni.lodz.pl

Joanna Kosmalska is a Ph.D. student in the Department of British Literature and Culture at the University of Łódź. Her research focuses on migration and contemporary Irish literature. She teaches literary translation, and has translated *The Day of Chocolate*, the ScripTeast Award winner at the Cannes Film Festival 2010.

■■■■■ a_kosmalska@poczta.onet.pl

Grzegorz Kość teaches at the English Institute, University of Łódź and at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw. He published *Robert Lowell: Uncomfortable Epigone of the Grands Maitres* (Lang, 2005) and co-edited, together with Krzysztof Majer, *Tools*

of *Their Tools* (Cambridge Scholars, 2009). Kość has written on modernist and recent American poetry, on American photography and portraiture. He is working on a book on Robert Frost and the body politic.

■■■■■ grzesiek.kosc@gmail.com

Joanna Kruczkowska is a senior lecturer at the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature, University of Łódź. She completed her PhD dissertation on contemporary Northern Irish poetry at Université Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle and University of Łódź (*thèse en co-tutelle*). She has devoted her later research to comparative study of contemporary Irish and Modern Greek poetry, about which she has published a number of articles.

■■■■■ jkruczkowska@poczta.onet.pl

332

Agnieszka Łowczanin teaches in the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. Her doctoral dissertation was a monograph on the deployment of death in the early stages of the development of the novel and in Gothic fiction. Her main areas of academic interest are the diversities and paradoxes of the 18th century, and the potentialities of the aesthetics of the Gothic genre in literature and film. She is one of the editors of *Dekadentzja*, an international literary journal based in Poland.

■■■■■ ałowczanin@yahoo.com

Małgorzata Myk teaches in the Department of American Literature and Culture, University in Łódź, where she earned her PhD. She holds two MA degrees in English: one from the University of Łódź and one from the University of Maine. Her most recent article is "The Immemorial Waters of Venice: Woman as Anodyne in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*", *The Explicator* 67.3, 2009. Her interests include women's writing in the US, gender studies and feminist literary studies.

■■■■■ goskamyk@gmail.com

Katarzyna Ojrzyńska is a doctoral student at the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature, University of Łódź. Her current project focuses on dance

Contributors

in contemporary Irish drama. She has published several articles on the works of Irish playwrights such as William Butler Yeats, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel.

■■■■■ k.ojrzynska@sens.net.pl

Teresa Podemska-Abt is a PhD candidate at the University of South Australia, School of International Studies. She also holds MA, BEd & MEd (course work) degrees from Universities of Wrocław and Adelaide. She has published two books on Aboriginal culture in Australia, as well as articles, essays, poems and interviews. *Connecting Literatures* (on Australian Indigenous Literature) is her work in progress.

■■■■■ terapa@gmail.com

333

Małgorzata Poks teaches courses in American literature and culture at English Teacher Training College in Sosnowiec. In 2009 her monographic study *Thomas Merton and Latin America: A Consonance of Voices* received the biennial award of the International Thomas Merton Society for a publication that opens new perspectives in Merton studies. Her academic interests concern modern American poetry and prose.

■■■■■ gosiapoks@gmail.com

Katarzyna Poloczek is a senior lecturer in the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. In her doctorate she analyzed the works of selected Irish women poets. Together with Marta Goszczyńska, she co-edited: *Changing Ireland: Transitions and Transformations in Irish Literature and Culture*. eds. Katarzyna Poloczek and Marta Goszczyńska. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010 and *The Playful Air of (Light)ness in Irish Literature and Culture* eds. Marta Goszczyńska and Katarzyna Poloczek. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011. She is working on female empowerment in the poetry of recent Irish women authors.

■■■■■ poloczek@uni.lodz.pl

Richard Profozich is a lecturer at the Department of American Literature and Culture, University of Łódź, Poland. His recent articles include "New Media: Internet Effects on American News

Reporting” in *Tools of Their Tools: Communication Technologies and American Cultural Practice*, eds. Grzegorz Kość and Krzysztof Majer (Cambridge Scholars, 2009), “The Commercialism of American Media” in *The Media and International Communication*, eds. B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, T. Płudowski, and D.V. Tanno (Lang, 2007).

■■■■■ profozich@uni.lodz.pl

Alex Ramon teaches in the School of English at Kingston University, London, UK. His publications include the book *Liminal Spaces: The Double Art of Carol Shields* (CSP, 2008), the ficto-critical response to Shields’s work “Gertrude, the Fourth” in *Carol Shields: Evocation and Echo*, eds. Aritha van Herk and Conny Steenman-Marcusse (Barkhuis, 2009), and the essay “A Literary Foremother: Iris Murdoch and Carol Shields” in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. Anne Rowe (Palgrave, 2007). He also regularly reviews books for the *British Journal of Canadian Studies*.

■■■■■ alexramon1@yahoo.co.uk

Monika Rogalińska is a lecturer at the Academy of International Studies in Łódź. A graduate of Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź and the Dyslexia Institute, University of York, she has written articles on Muriel Spark and John Fowles. She is now working on her doctorate on Muriel Spark.

■■■■■ monika1mr@gmail.com

Agnieszka Salska is the author of *Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson: Poetry of the Central Consciousness* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). She wrote the chapter on Dickinson’s letters for *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), published numerous articles, mostly on American poetry, and is one of the authors as well as editor-in-chief of a two-volume history of twentieth-century American literature for Polish readers (Universitas, 2003). Dr Salska retired from the Department of American Literature and Culture at the Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź where she taught courses in American literature and served as Chair. She also served as President of the Polish Association for American Studies from 1990 to 1996.

■■■■■ salska@uni.lodz.pl

Adam Sumera is a senior lecturer at the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź. His publications include *Muriel Spark's Novels* (Łódź University Press, 1996), "Intertextuality in Literary Translation" in *Translation and Meaning*, eds. Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk and Marcel Thelen (Maastricht, 2002), "Ian McEwan's *The Innocent*: The Novel and the Movie" in *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, 21.2, 2010.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **asumera@uni.lodz.pl**

Jared Thomas is a Nukunu man of the Southern Flinders Ranges. He works extensively in the arts. A lecturer at the University of South Australia, he teaches visual art, communication and literature. His novel *Sweet Guy* was shortlisted for the 2009 South Australian People's Choice Awards for Literature. Initially beginning his writing career as a playwright, his work *Flash Red Ford* toured Uganda and Kenya in 1999 and his play *Love, Land and Money* featured during the 2002 Adelaide Fringe Festival. He is soon to graduate with a PhD from Adelaide University and his two new novels are just about to be released.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Jared.Thomas@unisa.edu.au**

Paul Tiessen teaches English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada. He is the founding editor of the *Malcolm Lowry Review* (1984–2002). His recent work includes the introductory text for *After Green Gables: L.M. Montgomery's Letters to Ephraim Weber, 1916–1941* (University of Toronto Press, 2006) and the art-historical text for *Woldemar Neufeld's Canada: A Mennonite Artist in the Canadian Landscape, 1925–1995* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), both with Hildi Froese Tiessen. He is writing a book on McLuhan and Modernism, with emphasis on work by Sheila Watson and Wilfred Watson, and co-editing a trilogy of novels by Malcolm Lowry.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **ptiessen@wlu.ca**

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego
2011

Wydanie I. Nakład 150 egz. Ark. druk. 21,0

Zam. 139/4943/2011. Cena zł 34,- + VAT

Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego
90–131 Łódź, ul. Lindleya 8