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EDITORIAL ADDRESS

All correspondence should be addressed to:

Reghina Dascăl, Women's Studies Centre, The English Department,

University of the West Timişoara

Blvd. V. Pârvan, no. 4-6, 1900 Timişoara

Phone/fax (+ 40) 256 152 224; e-mail: rdascal@mail.dnttm.ro

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Performing Her Disempowered Self

MADNESS AND/OR LANGUAGE — OR WHY DOES 'THE YELLOW WALLPAPER' HAUNT US?

NÓRA SÉLLEI

University of Debrecen

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is a *haunted* and *haunting* text. It is haunted not only because of the narrator's creepy feeling that she is in a haunted house; not only because of the ending, i.e. the ghostly and ghastly madwoman tearing off the yellow wallpaper, shaking the bars of the attic room, and climbing over her fainted husband; or not only because of the other women creeping all around the house; and not only because of the mechanism of how the plot and the symbolism of the text can be described in the Freudian term of "the uncanny effect". This is "often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality" (Freud, 1990:367), and, as Freud goes on to argue "the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (368) - quite like in the case of the maddened narrator of the story, who is haunted by the imaginary, and long-repressed double of herself, revolting behind the vertical pattern (the equivalent of the bars of the attic room) of the yellow wallpaper.

It is, undeniably, a haunted text for all these reasons, but it is also haunted *as a text* -"a verbal landscape which is both strange and familiar" (Horner, 1990:33). In a genuinely uncanny (homely and 'unhomely') way, it is haunted by all kinds of intertextual presences from literary history: by 19th-century Gothic texts, and Bertha Mason in particular (as Mary Jacobus points it out [1986:240]), but also by Jane Eyre in the sense that the anonymous narrator of the story can be understood as the combination of the two selves of Jane Eyre (i.e. Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason) in one character; it is haunted by another text of Charlotte Brontë's as well: *Villette*, inasmuch as the attic functions as an alternative space of uncanny appearances of all kinds, and inasmuch as Dr. John, a potential lover and husband to Lucy Snowe, represents authority both as a doctor and as a man (just like the narrator's John-doctor-husband). Furthermore, 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is haunted by Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* - perhaps in a slightly ahistorical and achronological way,

but in the spirit of T.S. Eliot's argument concerning "the presence of the past" and that "when a new work of art is created … something … happens simultaneously to all the works that preceded it" (1972:85,86) - since in Woolf's text another ominous doctor's (Bradshaw) basic principle of "curing" the patients - i.e. his notion of "the sense of proportion" (1976:105) - can easily be compared to, and even identified with, the husband's concept in Gilman's text that getting better is only a question of will and self-control ('The Yellow Wallpaper', 1985:1149). In terms of space, 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is haunted by all those stories that take place in "a haunted house," "a colonial mansion," or "a hereditary estate" (1148), particularly those with female housekeepers who act as surrogates for the master (like Mrs Fairfax in *Jane Eyre*, and the husband's sister in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'); and it is haunted by all those gothic novels that can be described in Tania Modleski's terminology as paranoic texts epitomising women's hidden fears of patriarchal marriages, of husbands and fathers (1990:20, 59–84), or, to reformulate it, of husbands *as* fathers.

Considering all this, the text is almost a collection of commonplaces for feminist readings, thus a text which could, or, perhaps even should, be passed over. Yet, it is the nature of clichés and commonplaces that we need them for our language, for articulating ideas - and for these very reasons, they keep haunting us. This is how it is a haunting text, which keeps recurring, and resurfacing, no matter if one discusses the rest cure, the hysterisation of women, the issue of women and madness, autobiographical writings, the subjectivity of women, writing as a woman, writing the woman, or woman writing or reading woman or as a woman. But it is a particularly haunting text if the incessant question of feminist literary criticism of whether women's madness is subversive is allowed to arise, a question kept alive by the closing scene of the text: the narrator crawling around the room when her husband enters, then faints, only for her to keep crawling over his unconscious body.

Undeniably, this is not a very attractive, empowering and emancipating image of (a) woman. Yet, this is how it was intended to be, at least in Gilman's testimony. She claimed that the writing "was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy" and she even adds that "it worked" ('Why I Wrote', 1995:331). It is quite a telling indication of the power of the text that readers seriously asked the question "if such literature should be permitted in print" and whether such stories should "be allowed to pass without the severest censure" (both cited in Ammons, 1992:35). Similarly,

doctors articulated all kinds of responses, one claiming that "it was the best description of incipient insanity he had ever seen" whereas another Kansas doctor warned that "[s]uch a story ought not to be written […] it was enough to drive anyone mad to read it" ('Why I Wrote', 1995:330). Gilman's own famous - or rather infamous - doctor, the inventor of the "rest cure", Silas Weir Mitchell's response is duly ambivalent: Gilman sent him a copy, which "he never acknowledged," but, in Gilman's account, he "had admitted to friends that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia" since reading the text. ('Why I Wrote', 1995:331)

Is 'The Yellow Wallpaper' about sanity, then, or insanity? Is it about driving mad or saving from madness? Is it about the loss of consciousness or about self-recognition? These are the questions that are raised not only by critics interpreting this particular short story, but also by anyone "reading" women's madness, and the positions taken are quite contradictory. The madwoman has been a haunting image that feminist criticism has endowed with a subversive power, at least since the publication of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. In this sense, madness is read as the rejection of masculine reason and rationality, as the rejection of man-made language, replaced by the body language of the hysteric, or by Cixous's laugh of the Medusa, and by her concept of "writing her self", with which "woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned to the uncanny stranger on display" (1984:250) - an issue that is also provocatively formulated by Jane Ussher in the title of her book *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*

In opposition to this position, Shoshana Felman in her 'Women and Madness: a Critical Fallacy' discards this powerful image, and argues that "madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation" (1997:134), and thinks that madness reinserts women in the "metaphysical logic of dichotomous oppositions which dominates philosophical thought [which implies] the repressive subordination of all 'negativity', the mastery of difference as such." As she goes on to argue, "theoretically subordinated to the concept of masculinity, the woman is viewed by the man as *his* opposite, … *his* other, the negative of the positive, and not, in her own right, different, other, otherness itself." (1997:135, 136) Thus, in her view, "[m]adness and women … turn out to be the two outcasts of the establishment of readability" (1997:142).

On a similar basis, in her monograph, *The Madwoman Can't Speak or Why Insanity is Not Subversive* Marta Caminero-Santangelo rejects madness as "a willed choice and a preferable alternative to sanity for women" even though she acknowledges that the idea persists very powerfully in French feminist thought. She sees the point in Hélene Cixous's advocating "a language of non-reason for its disruption of oppressive patriarchal thinking and, thus, its enactment of a peculiarly feminine power" (1998:1) but she claims that "an ultimately more productive move in feminist literary criticism might be to trace the symbolic rejection of hopelessly disempowering solutions in fictional and nonfictional narratives of madness by women" (1998:4) - because the madwoman can't speak.

This is the binary opposition, or confluence of madness and/or language, however, that makes 'The Yellow Wallpaper' a haunting text: its very lack of clear resolution in terms of language and madness, which is all the more significant because both madness and writing have been interpreted by critics in ambiguous ways. Language and writing in the text, on the one hand, are understood as not "a place for self-expression or a safe domain" for the narrator's newly emerging sense of self (Golden, 1989:194); whereas, on the other hand, Susan Snider Lanser proposes the argument that writing "constitutes a kind of sanity in the face of the insanity of male dominance" (1989:418). In a similar fashion, madness is attributed quite opposite readings since the husband's fainting at the sight of the crawling narrator is interpreted as "the male mastery … tipped over into nightmare parody, as total abdication of power transforms itself into another form of power" (King, 1989:31), whereas another critic claims that "crawling on one's hands and knees is emblematic of the crudest form of servility" (Knight, 1992:290). Furthermore, tearing off the wallpaper as an enigmatic, or "mad" act gains various meanings: in one way, in this act, the narrator "assists the double to break free from the forms that confine her," yet this act can also be viewed as "not intended … to free her from male repression, as has been suggested, but to eliminate the rebellious self which is preventing her from achieving her ego-ideal" (King, 1989:25, 30).

My argument in this maze of sign reading is that all these ambivalent, even opposing and contradictory interpretations can be attributed to what Marty Brooks calls "the atypical style of Charlotte Perkins Gilman" by which the critic means that the text:

> anticipates a series of literary experiments with style that would be introduced ten years later in the modernist movement. With its emphasis on the confused and often

> contradictory thoughts of a first-person narrator, the story anticipates the stream-of-consciousness writings and experiments with unreliable narrators, […] and finally, with its use of a journal format and its ambiguous ending, it reflects a self-conscious literary style and a rejection of didacticism that would come to define the modernist movement.

In my reading, out of all these elements I will put the emphasis on how the various elements of the text pull each other apart, how they contradict each other, and more particularly: how the emerging self that is constituted in language, in self-expression and self-articulation is partly contradicted by the image of the crawling madwoman. On the other hand, I will explore how the discourse of "self-articulation" remains fragmented even at the end of the text, and is balanced, and at the same time, "tipped over", by the powerful image of the wallpaper deciphered, torn, and peeled off, and by the revelation of what is behind the surface pattern, and what the surface pattern is, and by the image of the fainted husband, who is only a lifeless obstacle that can be surmounted (even though partly horizontally) by the narrator at the end. Thus, both the linguistic level of self-expression and the level of the closing imagery are ambivalent, and pull not only each other, but also themselves apart, and into various dimensions of associations and interpretations. This is how, to use Beverley A. Hume's concise sentence, the narrative becomes "a disturbing, startling, and darkly ironic tale about nineteenth-century American womanhood" (1991:477).

Catherine Golden, in her powerful and convincing essay of the language of the short story, analyses the significance of the personal pronouns, the emphatic naming of the husband, the namelessness of the narrator, and, in general, the absence and presence of names in the text, and comes to the conclusion that "creeping into madness and into her fictionalized self, the narrator writes in a defiant voice, circumvents John's force and banishes 'him' to the outer boundaries of her own sentence" (1989:200). What we can trace in the text, however, is not only a change in respect of the use of pronouns and names, but practically all the linguistic levels of the text are rewritten, revised and reversed by the narrator by the end of the short story, yet, paradoxically, language as a means of communication and interaction between husband and wife remains dysfunctional throughout.

Nevertheless, in one way: as a means of the articulation of the "I", language starts functioning. A typical feature and structure of the text on the level of discourse is what I

would call an internal dialogic pattern - no matter how contradictory this phrase may sound - which expresses how one, the more rebellious self of the narrator argues with her obedient, other self, which has internalised and accepted the husband's patriarchal inscriptions and instructions. This pattern consists of a relatively personal statement followed by a sentence starting with a "but", only to be concluded in a "so", then comes a switch of topic, which articulates the following statement or thesis, and the recurrence of this pattern provides the dynamism to the first part of the story as we can see in this example:

> "I sometimes fancy that in my condition, if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad. So I will let it alone and talk about the house. The most beautiful place!" ('The Yellow Wallpaper', 1985: 1149)

This excerpt clearly shows how this internal dialogic pattern can represent the iconic image of the wife, hovering on the verge of obedience and disobedience, in a serious conflict, not only with the husband, but also with herself, at the same time taking pains and serious efforts to identify with the husband's position and with her own obedient self. This discourse is built on practically irreconcilable opposites, and defines the split, divided position and potential articulation of the "I", in which one aspect of the self is repressed and taken over by the other half dominated by the husband's views.

It is significant to analyse, however, how the two positions are defined. As frequently mentioned by critics, John as a doctor, a husband, and a man belongs to the professional, nonrelational, and apparently nongendered authority of the public realm. What is less emphasised, though, is that the narrator very consciously takes the position of "the personal" as two emphatic sentences at the very beginning of the text clearly show: "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change would do me good." ('The Yellow Wallpaper', 1985:1149)

Here, at the beginning of the story, however, these clear articulations of the personal needs are very rare instances - only to be followed by the "but", or to put it in another way, they function as theses to be followed by an antithesis, without any chance of having a synthesis based on a mutuality. At this stage, the dominant discourse completely silences the discourse of the other, or rather, that of the *Other*.

One can notice a slight change in this pattern when the use of free indirect speech appears in the argument about which room to take, the one downstairs, or the one upstairs:

> "But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things. It is as airy and comfortable a room as anyone need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim." ('The Yellow Wallpaper', 1985:1151)

What we can observe here is the apparent persistence of the statement-but-so pattern, but in reality it is revised. The sentence beginning with "[i]t is as airy…" can still be read as a direct statement or the appropriation of the husband's position, but the rest is clearly free indirect speech, which creates a dubious relation between the narrator/speaker and the voice of the husband since a basic mechanism that works in free indirect speech is the confluence and the (ironic) distancing of the two speakers. In this mode of speech, full identification of the two positions is no longer possible, not even for a momentary phase of "statement" or "but", and as a result there comes about an oscillation and uncertainty of identity in the speaker (which, actually, has an impact on, and opens up a possibility to reinterpret, the status of the previous clause as a direct statement or the appropriation of the husband's position as well).

What follows destroys the original pattern even further: there is a statement followed by a "but John says", but without any response to that antithesis at all, the "so" phrase is missing, and then comes something absolutely different, a new topic is introduced:

> "I wish I could get well faster. But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!" ('The Yellow Wallpaper', 1985:1151)

This change could even be read as a confirmation of John's power since it could also imply the absolute annihilation of the "I", as a sign of giving up even the attempt at integrating her own ideas and consent into the decision-making process, yet, in my reading, it rather points forward to a more fundamental change in the discourse that fully disregards the husband's claims, arguments, and instructions.

The most revealing aspect of the text in this sense is that ultimately, the positioning of the "I" in the "but" clauses changes, so these clauses function as self-assertions of the "I". What we can see, first of all, is the assertion and appropriation of a self-created space

as opposed to the outside: “But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way” (‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, 1985:1161). Secondly, the positioning of the “I” in the “but” sentences can be read as a claim for the gaze (and for the significance of the gaze see Beth Snyder’s article): “I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder” (1161). Significantly, this is a sentence followed by the most emphatic articulation of the self in opposition to the husband and his sister, his devoted housekeeper: “‘I’ve got out at last,’ said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back.’” (‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, 1985:1161)

Yet, the positioning of the “I” in the statement-but-so pattern functions in the most complex way in the closing sentence of the text: “Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! (1985:1161) What we can see here is the reinsertion of the statement-but-so pattern, but in a basically different meaning. Apparently, even here it is John who is the agent of the sentence, but on second sight it is more than obvious that he loses his agency and (self-) consciousness. And similarly, the “so” sentence seemingly introduces the response of the “I” to “that man’s” act, what is more, it exposes her compliance with the situation, i.e. it can be read as her “obedience” and basically not agent-like but responsive role. Yet, primarily, this clause as well can rather be interpreted as the assertion of *her* dominance over *him* - emblematically expressing, on the level of language that the narrator has become an agent of her own text by overcoming all the obstacles posed by all the “but”s at the beginning of the text, as expressed in the internal dialogic pattern. This is the moment when she becomes the agent of all her clauses - of the statements, of the “but”s, and of the “so”s, and appropriates the right to act and to speak, or rather, to speak out.

This is the moment when, in my reading, the repressed and muted female voice, the silence, is turned into a subversive discourse - perhaps even a dominant one, if we consider the significance of verticality and horizontality all through the text - and this is why I seriously doubt Beth Snyder’s claims and final conclusions that “‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is, in some ways, a male text punctuated with female silences, a powerful discourse that allows itself to be interrupted with margins, so that its dominance can be affirmed in a silencing of the other” (Snyder).

This is a conclusion that can be, on the basis of the examination of the statement-but-so pattern, disclaimed, as argued above, and one can rather come to the conclusion that

at the level of language (which *is* the journal) the narrator takes full possession of her language, leaving no space for agency or activity for her previously so-powerful husband, the major speaking and acting subject of the beginning of the short story.

Is the ending so evidently victorious and glorious, then? What about the ambivalence and ambiguity of the ending, what about both the linguistic level of self-expression and the level of the closing imagery pulling not only each other, but also themselves apart, and what about the story as "a disturbing, startling, and darkly ironic tale about nineteenth-century American womanhood" (Hume, 1991:477)? Is it, then, a fully celebratory story of women's finding a voice and gaining agency and emancipation?

Obviously the answer cannot be anything other than negative since we can never disregard the fact that the narrator is actually "creeping over him", which very powerfully epitomises the ambivalence of the ending, and exposes the contradiction (or, in this case, rather the paradox) between madness and language, which is the starting point of this paper since in this story, actually, the madwoman *can* speak, or, to put it the other way round, the speaking woman (the agent and the subject of her sentences and actions) *is* mad.

This paradox is further reinforced on the level of the imagery: the narrator has peeled off the wallpaper, as a result of which she can clearly see what is behind the patriarchal facade of the "haunted house," "colonial mansion," or "hereditary estate", and can liberate her own double, or her own, real self from behind that disgusting yellow *wall-paper*, i.e. the inscription as spectacle, but it only results in a final confinement into her own, self-created space of madness. Furthermore, even the act of "creeping over" reproduces the irreconcilability and ambiguity of the metaphysical qualities (of dominance/power and submission/subjection) attached to verticality and horizontality so powerfully at work all through the text.

As result, one cannot even decide which one is the subtext, which one is the dominant, or cover text, which one is the story-level, which one is the level of imagery and hidden meanings, thus, there is a reverberation of contradictions on several levels of the text - which makes it a haunted and haunting text, and the more one gets involved in it, the more one gets entangled in its maze, which is a maze created by the metaphysics of binary oppositions as well. In this way, the text functions as "a labyrinthine intricacy [and] the risk of self-loss" (Jacobus, 1986:229) not only for the narrator but also for the reader, in a way similar to that in which Freud describes the process of psychoanalytic interpretation:

> I may here be giving an impression of laying too much emphasis on the details of the symptoms and of becoming *lost in an unnecessary maze of sign-reading*. But I have come to learn that the determination of hysterical symptoms does in fact extend to their subtlest manifestations and that it is difficult to attribute too much sense to them. (Freud cited in Jacobus, 1986: 229 - emphasis added).

This "unnecessary maze of sign-reading", however, is almost as maddening as crawling and circling around the room of the yellow wallpaper. Thus, we can repeatedly ask the question if "The Yellow Wallpaper" - both as an image and as a text - drives us mad (as some contemporary readers thought), or saves us from madness (as Gilman's intention was). And that is why, I suppose, it is a mad and maddening, a haunted and a haunting, text.

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VIOLENCE, SILENCE AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE IN EDWARD BOND'S *THE WOMAN*, AND TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER'S *THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE:* TRANSFORMATION OF GREEK MYTHS FOR OUR TIME

HILDEGARD KLEIN

University of Málaga

> Myth is "*the oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time.* (Wertenbaker, *The Love of the Nightingale, Plays I,* 1996:315)

The contemporary playwrights Edward Bond and Timberlake Wertenbaker have repeatedly expressed their admiration for the Greeks, their myths and culture. Bond has pointed out the repercussion of Greek culture on Western civilisation. In this sense he has declared that "Greek society created us. We still live in the world of the Greeks" (*Observer,* 6 Aug 1978). He wants the audience to be able to rationally analyse the truth about Greek history, the birthplace of capitalism. The author feels that the capitalist society justifies its repressive methods through a recourse to sacred myths to perpetuate an unjust society. Bond's artistic form - a rational, socialist theatre - is conceived as a medium to expose the self-destructive force of our sacred myths maintained by a repressive system. By exploring Greek myths in his play *The Woman* (1979), he draws attention to the absurd cruelty of the political belligerence of Greek society, at the service of an ambitious and irrational masculine world, indifferent to the suffering of more enlightened and more rational women.

Bond's *The Woman* is a strong indictment of the Trojan War and the mythical ideal of heroism that sanctioned unbridled violence against innocent victims, including women and children. The play is given the subtitle "Scenes of War and Freedom", which both provides an indication of content and reflects the formal structuring of the play's twenty-five scenes into two distinct parts. Part One (War) consists of fourteen scenes set in a range of locations in the Greek camp outside Troy and in the city itself. The action encompasses

the final stages of the siege laid by Heros, the Greek commander, and the destruction of Troy. Priam is already dead, and power passes briefly to Hecuba until she is violently supplanted by her unnamed *Son*. Part Two (Freedom/Peace) comprises nine scenes and centres on the arrival of Hero and the Greeks on an Aegean island, where the Trojan prisoners of war, among them Hecuba and Ismene, have taken refuge after their fortuitous survival of a shipwreck. We witness the liberation of the islanders from Hero's oppression through Hecuba's combined heroic action with a proletarian, *Dark Man*.

The play is a political fable on an epic scale where the author proceeds to demystify the most classic of myths, the Trojan War and the Greek Heroic Age. The play comprises the whole cultural heritage of fifth century B.C. Greek Drama, being based on the work of Homer, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Athenian dramatists, especially Euripides' two Hecuba plays, *The Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* and *Antigone*. Bond - like Wertenbaker - disposes of his literary and historical source material with freedom, conflating characters and re-ordering events. Greece is represented by Athens, yet the action is not set in the Mycenaean period, but in the fifth century polis of Pericles. Figures of chivalry and order from Homeric myth, such as Hector, Aeneas, and Diomedes are absent in Bond's play, while the valiant Achilles, Agamemnon, and Odysseus are amalgamated into the person of the Greek commander. He is given the ironic name Heros, being the typical *hero* of Greek myth, young, attractive, and conceited. Thus, Bond has transferred Helen's fabled beauty to Heros, who has an ambitious and desperate desire for fame and fortune, which he justifies by appeals to honour, duty, and the common interest. Heros wages war against Troy, not because of the abduction of Helen, but for the possession of a grey stone statue, the Goddess of Good Fortune. The ten year siege of Troy is shortened to five, and Priam's death precedes the sacking of the city. Religion is not represented by the Olympian Gods, but by cynical Greek and Trojan priests, who seek political influence and manipulate the masses. As a counterpart to Homeric myth, Bond turns to Sophoclean myth to select the rational Ismene as a wife for Heros, named after one of the daughters of Oedipus. Ismene, like Helen, deserts the Greeks for the Trojan Camp, though for quite different reasons. She is immured alive, like Antigone by Creon, for the crime of challenging her husband's masculine power and disobeying his impious orders, and for speaking the truth.

It is of interest to note that for the first time, since the performance of his first play *The Pope's Wedding* in 1962, Bond has given the leading parts to women. The author explains:

> I've tried in this play to look at the world from the point of view of women. Not because they are inhabiting a different world, but because it enabled me to get away from my own sexist prejudices by trying to put all the moral responsibility, all the moral development, into the character of women. (*Observer* 6 Aug 1978).

The woman in the title is Hecuba, queen of Troy, who presides over a dying culture. Bond shows how the Trojan queen and Ismene, the wife of the Greek commander, undergo a moral development through suffering that enables them to analyse rationally the irrationality of the inhuman masculine world of their respective societies, Trojan and Greek. In contraposition to this warring society, the two women take on the role of messengers of peace. Interestingly, Bond has transformed the classical representation of women as symbols of inconsolable desolation paralyzed by bereavement (such as in Euripides' play *Hecuba*). Bond presents the women as figures of energy and consciousness resolved to proceed to action.

Timberlake Wertenbaker exploits Greek mythology in her play *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) in response to her self-confessed passion for the myths and culture of the Greeks (Introduction to *Plays I* (1996:viii)). The author has based her work partly on Ovid's version of the Greek myth, and partly on fragments of Sophocles's *Tereus*. For the subtext of the play, following the technique of a play within a play, she presents an ancient Greek dramatization of the myth of Hippolytus and Phaedra about illicit love as conceived by Euripides. This is watched by the Court of the King of Athens in the company of his guest, Tereus. Wertenbaker's reading of the Greek myth of Procne and Philomele is used as a template to put forward an eloquent protest on behalf of female victims of male violence, symbolized in the play by rape. As an extension, Wertenbaker shows the destructive forces of a repressive society where people are brutally condemned to silence as a means of security for the autocrat.

The story told by Wertenbaker of this Greek myth concerns Tereus, King of Thrace, who, after helping the Athenians in their wars, claims for his bride Procne, daughter of Pandion, King of Athens. Isolated in the repressed, culture-less Thrace and contemplating a loveless marriage, Procne pines for her beloved sister, Philomele, to join her, despatching her husband to fetch her. On the long sea-voyage back from Athens to Thrace, Tereus

indulges his lust for his sister-in-law. Reporting her sister to be dead, he tries to seduce Philomele, claiming her for himself. When reviled, he rapes her. Philomele threatens to tell the truth about his violent action. To silence her taunts for ever, Tereus cuts out her tongue. He reports her death to Procne. Following five years of secret imprisonment, at the Bacchae revelries Philomele acts out her drama in a dumb-show using life-sized dolls. Procne recognizes her. The two women slay Tereus' son Itys in revenge for his father's violent deed. Philomele is then transformed into a nightingale, Procne into a swallow, and Tereus into a hoopoe.

In the original tale, Philomela embroiders her rape on a peplos; she is avenged by her sister Procne, who, after killing her own son, serves up the flesh to her husband. Philomele is transformed into a swallow, Procne into a nightingale. Philomele is one of the major symbols of T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, waste because of actions such as that of Tereus and suffering such as Philomele's. (cf. Grant, 1995:391). This potent fable has also aroused the interest of other great writers, such as Chaucer in *The Legends of Good Women* and Shakespeare, who invoked the story in *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline*.

Both Bond and Wertenbaker present female characters in search of a voice and a rational understanding to account for the use and abuse of male power which leads to violence. We are shown how these women acquire the ability and courage to express themselves and to analyse the causes of civilization's decline. In the plays dealt with here both authors explore the importance of language and its potential. Language is presented as an expression of personal maturity and freedom; language is a necessary instrument to accuse and to confront the oppressor. Bond and Wertenbaker also dramatize the cruel violence shown to the women protagonists, and to people in general, who raise their voices against the system, telling the truth about the abuse of power and the false image maintained by the governors.

In Bond's play, the two women figures Hecuba and Ismene have the function of analysing the causes of the leaders' violence and abuse of power, and tracing a path towards peace. As previously mentioned, the Greeks wage war against Troy for the recovery of a stone image of the Goddess of Good Fortune. The statue had been seized together with the eastern mines by Heros' father twenty-five years earlier. It was then taken by Priam who believed that Troy would be saved if he owned it. Ironically, the image has not brought fortune to the city, but rather plague and utter destruction. Heros does not succumb to this paradox, but insists on possession of the statue to please the

Greeks. His attitude symbolises the sinuous strategies of politicians who try to increase their power with veiled arguments: “If I left Troy tomorrow, Troy would attack us - or someone else would attack Troy” (Bond, *The Woman*, 1979: I, xiii, 54). Heros’ irrationality is strengthened by his people’s superstitious conviction that the statue will bring good fortune to Athens. The following argument reflects the absurdity of power politics:

> HEROS. ... The statue brings good fortune only to those destined to own her. But how can we win the war and capture the statue of Good Fortune when we haven’t got the statue to give us the good fortune to win the war? (I, i, 15)

In the struggle for power, the Goddess plays a central ideological role, representing the same objective for both Greek and Trojan rulers - economic and military strength on which their existence depends. Significantly, the Goddess, being a religious icon, never speaks for herself, but through the men who worship her. She is safer than a woman, Helen in Greek myth, because she is silent. Hecuba and Ismene join to expose the contradictions which the statue, a pretence for war, serves to mask.

Faced with the unwillingness of the Trojans to hand over the statue¸ Heros and the Greek military decide to send Ismene to the Trojan Court on a diplomatic mission, accompanied by Thersites, Nestor’s son. Ismene is duped into believing that an honourable compromise can be arranged through her transaction with Hecuba to deliver the Goddess. Though they do not consider Ismene’s status equal to that of a man, they hope that a face to face conversation between the two women will be more successful than their own deadlocked negotiations. At first, Hecuba and Ismene proceed with cool politeness, proving each other’s will in search of a weakness. Ismene is unwilling to admit to the truth about the siege, but her self-deception, encouraged by her husband, is gradually stripped away by Hecuba. She begins to perceive her husband’s treachery and his duplicity as her own thoughts are voiced by Hecuba: “We both know the truth: your husband would take the statue and still burn and kill and loot” (I, iv, 33). Hecuba’s key role in the first part of the play is to make Ismene face reality and to support her in her stand against the war.

In contraposition to Heros’ double morality and irrationality, the two women, though opposed politically, form a league to save Troy from being sacked. Ismene, like her namesake in Sophocles’ play *Antigone*, urges a wise compromise between the Greeks and the Trojans. She offers herself as a hostage to the Trojans and decides to remain in Troy to

force the latter to hand over the statue to the Greeks in return for their guaranteeing the Trojans safety and the lifting of the siege. However, neither the Greeks nor the Trojans trust one another and the joint plan of Ismene and Hecuba to bring about peace fails. Considered a traitor, Ismene is imprisoned, "*her hair is shorn, she is pale and in rags*" (I, vii, 39). Hecuba, in turn, is put under house arrest by her *Son* and the Trojan Priests after their having snatched power from her. She visits Ismene in prison, where the two women acquire important knowledge about themselves. And it is this knowledge that makes Ismene take further action. Her determination is expressed in a speech full of the excitement of self-knowledge and intellectual energy. The scene is built on parallel statements, as Hay and Roberts (1980:250) have observed, where each character echoes the other to reveal the truth. Ismene, the younger of the two women, talks about her future and a city which will be rebuilt; Hecuba, the old queen, recalls the past and Troy's destruction. Both are given a political speech, which becomes very personal. The gap between the two lives, the political and the personal, is embodied by Heros.

It is interesting to note that Bond contrasts masculine arrogance and irrationality with feminine altruism and selfless sacrifice. Bearing this in mind it is essential for the spectator to comprehend Ismene's increasing decisiveness and sureness of mind. After a bitter learning process, she comes to the realization that independent action and telling the truth are vital factors. Ismene is fully aware of the action she is taking, and the cost of this action - it means renouncing her husband, her country, her privileged social position. But she has acquired sufficient wisdom to choose between her husband's irrationality and her own reason, between myth and truth. Hay and Roberts (1980:248) have rightly indicated that it is "her love for truth, rather than a hatred of the Greeks" that makes her accuse them. She becomes an ambassador of peace when she delivers a harangue from Troy's city walls appealing to the Greek's non-existent humanity and rationality:

> ISMENE. Greek soldiers: Go home: Is there any loot worth the risk of your life? Women? There are women in Greece! The goddess? If the Trojans listened to me they'd throw it out to you over their wall. ... What luck could it give you? ... You're wasting your life making your tombstone! (I, ix, 43).

Nestor and his officers try to drown out her voice, making a lot of noise by stamping, beating and clashing their weapons together, because people who tell the truth must be silenced in an autocratic system. Ismene's pacifist appeal is condemned and she is

submitted to a mock jury, made up of Heros and the Greek officers. She is still intent on making them understand her stand against them, to make them aware of the futility of an attack. However, her long speech, centred on the word "tomorrow", is again continually interrupted:

> ISMENE. ... I shall suffer more tomorrow! ... Tomorrow - tomorrow leave Troy alone. Troy has - ...Tomorrow - don't go to Troy. ... (I, xiii, 53).

The speech shows her extraordinary strength and determination to prevent the following day's massacre of Troy. Heros, her husband, condemns her to death, immuring her with "three day's food" to give her time to repent before she meets the judges of the underworld (I, xiii, 54). There is a striking similarity between Ismene's punishment and that of Antigone, who is incarcerated in a cave with just sufficient to eat to absolve the city from its guilt of her death (cf. Grant, 1995:213). Both give proof of the duplicity of Heros and Creon, respectively. On hearing her death sentence, Ismene is temporarily bewildered and senses defeat, but this only strengthens her resolve to continue to proclaim the truth:

> ISMENE. I shall sit in the dark and listen till the last wail. Not to tell tales when I go to heaven, but so that the truth is recorded on earth (I, xiii, 55).

In *The Woman* Bond places all the moral responsibility and all the moral development in the characters of Hecuba and Ismene. At the opposite extreme from the two women are the attitudes of Heros and the Son. Heros' action is motivated by vanity and an overriding ambition, while the *Son*'s is caused by his lust for power. Both seem incapable of genuine personal emotions, a fact which is especially striking in Heros's patronising and cruel attitude towards Ismene. He does not treat her as a wife, but as a public nuisance, because she is harming his reputation and his phallocentrism. He has to reassert his male power by repressing her mind and body. When he condemns her to death, he gives proof of his absolute denial of basic human feeling. He still sticks to a fatalistic belief that he must obtain the statue if he is to ensure the prosperity of his new city. However, the city he means to build will be laid on a foundation of slavery, violence and cruelty.

No longer hemmed by Ismene's arguments, once she is immured, Heros gives vent to his anger and cruelty. Through Heros, Bond demonstrates the savagery that man can inflict on his fellow men. Heros proceeds to the destruction of Troy; the violent events are stated by the Women of the city, who serve as a Greek Chorus. The scene is the

culmination of the relentless inhumanity shown by Heros. He is finally confronted by Hecuba, who desperately appeals to his non-existent humanity to spare her grandson, Astyanax, her daughter Cassandra's son, the only child still alive in the city after the Massacre of the Innocents. In one of the most powerful and moving scenes in the play, Ismene's supplicating voice is heard from the interior of the wall appealing to Heros to spare the child. Disembodied, her voice seems to be the voice of the very Earth. Heros does not listen and hurls the child from the city walls, while Hecuba blinds herself in a desperate gesture to avoid witnessing Heros' heinous cruelty. Her blinding is symbolic of her refusal to face reality. In the second part of the play, we witness Hecuba's movement from blindness (darkness) to insight, from victim to heroine, viewing the past as history, rather than myth. Ismene, in turn, vows to record the truth from the inside of the wall, the horror, the account, that will give the lie to any myth that might spring from a Greek victory (cf. Bulman, *Modern Drama*, 1986: 509).

In this way, by deconstructing the myth of the Trojan War, Bond points out the danger of maintaining a heroic conception of any war. In the second part of the play, through Hecuba's growing awareness of historical forces and the causes of social repression, Bond shows the spectator that the past has to be remembered as history, not myth. Like Hecuba, the author wants us to analyse the historical process, he wants us to move from darkness to insight. For this reason he has transformed Greek myths for our time to expose their roots in oppression and violence. Therefore, the plight of Ismene and Hecuba has to be looked at in the context of contemporary politics, where abuse of power and repression abound, especially against the most vulnerable, such as women and children.

In Wertenbaker's play, Philomele is Ismene's counterpart. Both women have been gifted with reason, both have the capacity of acquiring understanding, both are punished for speaking the truth, both become victims of male violence. Bond shows Ismene's development from the passive wife of a *hero* (who patronises and *uses* her, objectifying and alienating her for his own ambitious purposes), to a mentally and emotionally independent person. She develops the ability of making a rational analysis of the political situation that induces her to act and to raise her voice against the agents of violence and oppression. Wertenbaker, in turn, charts Philomele's experience as a progression from the inquisitiveness of an adolescent to a victim's disgust, hardening finally into action by re-enacting the atrocities suffered by her male oppressor with orgiastic dummies.

Susan Carlson (2000:135) has opportunely pointed out that “right from the beginning of the play, young idealistic Philomele is distinguished by her respect for and agility with words”, which she has partly acquired through her conversations with the Greek philosophers. In the second scene we listen to a talk between the two loving sisters, Procne (austere and rational) and Philomele (instinctive, passionate and questioning). The sisters reflect on manhood and sex, war, and the role of women. The younger sister desires sexual pleasure and expresses her curiosity about the nature of men: “What are they like?” Wertenbaker, *The Love of the Nightingale*, 1988: ii, 293). Philomele perceives men as brave young warriors that kindle womanly passion, while Procne sees them as soldiers who fight and die in war. In fact, the first word spoken in the play by a Male Chorus is “war”. The Chorus converses with two soldiers who come on stage with swords and shields and remind us of the reality of war, leading to violence, death, murder and - silence. Greece is ravaged by war and belligerence, yet the Greek soldiers possess refined communicative skills when talking about horror. In fact, the opening of the play with the stress on violence and silence foreshadows the inevitability of Philomele’s fate as narrated in its mythical source.

Wertenbaker transmits the verbal elegance of classical culture through the Male and Female Choruses that proceed from general statements about the action to specific commentaries. Like the Greek Chorus of classical theatre, Wertenbaker’s Choruses try to see what motivates actions beyond their immediate comprehension. However, in the most pivotal situations of the play, they are mute and fail to act. In the same way as the Greek Chorus in Euripides’ *Medea*, who could have prevented Medea’s bloody action, so the Female and Male Choruses in *The Love of the Nightingale* manifest a lack of will to act and become accessories to cold brutality and destruction.

Civilised Athens with its philosophers and theatre (Philomele’s father makes decisions with the help of plays) is contrasted with culture-less Thrace, where people suffer from a plague of silence. Procne, in the presence of the five members of the Female Chorus, after five years’ marriage, repeats the rhetorical question: “Where have all the words gone?” (iv, 297). She nostalgically recalls the meaning of words in Athens, the clarity of sound, truth found by logic, and happiness felt in the truth. She cannot talk to her husband - Thracians like the silences in between the words - and therefore she needs and wants her sister’s company.

Procne's insistence on the happiness transmitted by truth and the importance of language establishes a link with the scene where Philomele is involved in a poetic, philosophical conversation with the Captain of the ship when sailing from Athens to Thrace. She is watching a fire in the distance emanating from Mount Athos and learns about the savage misogyny of its inhabitants, who believe that "all harm in the world comes from women" (vii, 310). Philomele scrutinizes the Captain, whom she has chosen as her object of desire, about gender and power, as well as language. She insists on his renouncing the beliefs of those wild men. Philomele follows the dialectics of the logic of the Greek philosophers to prove that "beauty is truth and goodness as well" (vii, 310). She proceeds with her advances to the Captain, blaming him for his submissive attitude to Tereus.

As an agent of sexual desire, she asks the Captain to take her with him. This love scene, full of tenderness and courage, where a woman takes the initiative, is brutally interrupted by Tereus who kills the Captain. Tereus does not respect Philomele's own desires - "I do not love you. I do not want you. ... I have to consent" (xiii, 328, 329) - but guided by his male phallocratic power he insists on having her for himself. He had ordered the destruction of the sails to impede any kind of movement. The lack of movement symbolizes Tereus' mental stagnancy, repudiating Philomele's logical arguments for his own selfish benefit. He has isolated her on a forsaken shore, at the bottom of Mount Athos, not far from his own country where Procne is awaiting their arrival. Significantly, as Case (1991:240) has observed, "Tereus cuts off her logic, her mental powers, and her reasoning in the shadow of such a mountain, where woman-hating runs rampant". Imposing his male privilege and proceeding with ruthless violence, he forces his illicit desire on her by raping her. Tereus tries to justify his lust by referring to Phaedra's illicit love for her step-son Hippolytus, the play he watched in Athens, exclaiming:

> **Tereus** ... I am Phaedra. I love you. That way.
>
> *Silence*.
>
> **Philomele** It is against the law. ...
>
> **Tereus** The power of the god is above the law. It began then, in the theatre. ... I saw the god and I loved you. ... Who can resist the gods (xiii, 328)?"

After the violation, Philomele suffers the frightening anguish of the rape victim, instigated by her nurse Niobe who talks about shame and guilt. Niobe is following the

conventions of a patriarchal society where women are to blame for men's sexual violence. In this connection one can refer to Sarah Daniels' play *Masterpieces* (1983/1984) where we find one of the severest indictments of the object status of women in the system by the gaze of the *voyeur*, the humiliation of rape victims and the commercialization of the feminine body in a male-governed industry (jokes, pornography, snuff-films, etc.). Daniels has been called the venom-spitting virago by male critics because of her play. In Wertenbaker's play, rape is dealt with in a similar way. The old nurse Niobe suffered, when she was young, a similar fate to that of Philomele. However, she has never dared to accuse her rapists and she entreats Philomele also to be silent, not to accuse Tereus of his crime. Yet Philomele follows her mental powers and the logic learned from the Greek philosophers. It is an eloquent defence of the right to question the myth of women's guilt maintained by the patriarchy. It helps her to conclude that *she* was not the cause, but Tereus himself. She wants him to accept his responsibility and culpability: "It was your act. It was you. I caused nothing" (xv, 335). Philomele explores the potential of language when she accuses Tereus of his violent act, his abuse of power and his hypocrisy, which is a speech full of clear-sightedness and courage. It is a speech that begins on a personal level and becomes very political. She derides the enfeebled, dribbling potency of Tereus, the northern *hero*, the leader of men, who is empty, unless he fills himself with violence, whose spirit is tiny and whose courage is shrivelled. Like Ismene in *The Woman*, Philomene wants to proclaim the truth to the people of Thrace about their king whose power has resided in the myth of male superiority:

> **Philomele** Men and women of Thrace, come and listen to the truth about this man –
> **Tereus** I will keep you quiet.
> **Philomele** Never, as long as I have the words to expose you. The truth, men and women of Thrace, the truth - *Tereus cuts out Philomele's tongue.* (xv, 337)

Tereus silences Philomele for ever because she is a threat to the order of his rule (xvi, 338) where no rebellion can be tolerated. Rulers like Tereus, or Heros in Bond's play, have to keep people quiet by imposing their power, using violent methods. In his autocratic system, not only women are condemned to silence, but also his soldiers, who have received orders "to be silent ... not to ask questions" (scene x). Wertenbaker's play stresses that speech is a symbol of freedom and questioning a sign of true liberty, which is also the conclusion of Pinter's play *Mountain Language* (1988). Philomele has now become

Tereus' "caged songless bird" (xvi, 338), who cannot ask any more questions and is kept his prisoner and at his mercy. He wanted to reduce her to a weak helpless object by depriving her of the power of speech, yet the mutilated and violated heroine does not succumb. In spite of her physical muteness, Philomele manages dramatically to demonstrate how she has been raped to claim the punishment of the aggressor. As mentioned before, in the original myth, Philomela weaves the story on a peplos, while in Wertenbaker's version she reenacts her violation with life-size dolls, which stresses dramatically the brutality of the action. Philomele becomes "a creator of signs, an author", as Reghina Dascăl has rightly pointed out in her article "Who Gets Erased and Why?", (*Gender Studies* 2002/1:22) while Tereus had thought "to reduce her to a weak sign, a sign of his sexuality". Philomele's feminist awakenings are shared by her sister Procne, who accuses her husband of having "bloodied the future" (xx, 351). There are shades of Medea when the sisters kill Tereus' infant son to punish him for his deed.

Wertenbaker has established a connection between female (Phaedra) and male (Tereus) illicit sexual desires with gender violence across the thousands of years between Ancient Greece and today. In this sense one should refer again to Reghina Dascăl's article (*Gender Studies* 2002/1:20-22) where she analyses women figures of Greek myth, among them the Philomela myth. In this article she states that there exists an interrelation between violence perpetrated by men against women and the repression of their speech, and that, consequently, patriarchal ascendancy over women is sustained by the permanent attempt to silence women's speech which means the destruction of the language of their body.

At the end of the play the mutilated Philomele, changed into a nightingale, has recovered her beautiful voice. She is seen trying to elicit the correct, self-revealing questions from her little resurrected nephew Itys, who is encouraged to ask about Right and Wrong. The play ends with a question pronounced by Itys, but which Wertenbaker seems to direct at the audience: "Didn't you want me to ask questions?" (xxi, 351). Asking questions had been one of Philomele's strengths and a sign of her open, powerful mind before the power of speech was brutally taken from her by Tereus.

Both Wertenbaker and Bond have analysed literary models from Greek tradition and have transformed them for our times in order to show the relevance of questions raised about the human condition. In Wertenbaker's play the modern multilayered relevance of Greek myth is transmitted through the Male Chorus, who are "the journalists of an antique world" (vi, 308), and who establish a connection between the action of the play and

contemporary themes (cf. Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 25.8.89 in *London Theatre Record*, 13-26 August 1989:1071). In Bond's play it is his insistence that the past has to be remembered, not as myth, but as history, to be able to analyse the irrational power, to examine the present and to trace a path towards a more rational future for our society. Bond and Wertenbaker prove in their plays that, unfortunately, male violence against women maintained by a phallocracy has prevailed, as has the abuse of power of the upper classes against the lower classes, by maintaining the myth of male superiority.

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Gender Trouble

THUS SPAKE DIOTIMA

REGHINA DASCĂL

University of the West, Timişoara

The great philosophers of antiquity are often accused of engendering misogyny and its attendant prejudices. This preconception of their work has often caused them to be cast as the bêtes noires of those seeking to combat such attitudes. This paper is offered as a contribution to the continuing interest which exists and which I have among many in combating such a preconception – as evidence that there is, in fact, more to be said. One of the most hotly debated issues in contemporary feminism is the postmodern deconstruction of the history of philosophy. Many feminist authors address the extent to which such authors as Lacan or Derrida really manage to break with the phallogocentrism of their intellectual heritage. Moreover, we have a serious conundrum here. While feminists praise these postructuralist linguistic methodologies they sense that contemporary continental philosophy preserves the patriarchal hegemony of the tradition. This perpetuation is particularly insidious because postmodernism claims freedom from such oppressive modes of thought. Feminist writers themselves by re-examining the history of philosophy seek to rewrite the script of Western civilisation (Whitford, 1991:10) and in their desire to undo the founding gesture, feminists often return to the grand patriarch of Western philosophy, Plato (101). Feminist interpretations of Plato tend to focus on two particular texts: the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. In the *Republic*, Plato argues that women should train along with men as guardians of the *polis* - that they should receive the same education. In the *Symposium* the emblematic figure of Diotima appears as Socrates' teacher of Love (*Eros*).

Mythical narratives constitute an indisputable presence in Plato's work. These imaginary tales confront us with plausible hypotheses and they carry non-temporary truths into duration, they actually reinforce rational processes through their recourse to the imagination, thus the ineffable can be told and the distance that separates us from the realm of Beyond where the Supreme Good resides can be shortened. Plato provides a perfect example of the way the evolution of Greek philosophy is marked by a constant wavering between *mythos* and *logos* (Reinhardt, 1995:8).

Following Ann-Marie Bowery's line of thought this paper deals with the narrative structure of Diotima's speech (1991:175-194). Many authors and among them well-known

feminist thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum, Luce Irigaray and Andrea Nye have gone into the metaphysical content of the speech but this is an attempt to analyse how the narrative techniques employed in their respective philosophical practices by Plato and Socrates are those that Diotima demonstrated. In the past most scholars have ignored the dramatic form of Plato's dialogues and focused instead on their argumentative content. Dramatic interpretation of Plato, as Ann-Marie Bowery suggests (176) emphasises the significance of the dialogue form of Plato's work and acknowledges that Plato writes about human interaction. The dialogues abound in chance encounters, argumentative confrontations, amorous flirtations and noisy parties. All these details of construction become central components of the dialogue's philosophic nature.

Narrative analysis of the dialogues provides another means for developing many concerns central to feminist philosophy. This kind of analysis provides a structure for philosophical thinking that engages in an unfolding of local narratives, stories told from a particular politicised point of view as opposed to more traditional philosophical thinking that seeks to uncover a universal foundation for knowledge and experience (Allen and Young, 1989:11) thus addressing Allen and Young's question: "If feminist philosophy thrives neither in the domain of the human universal nor in a position of marginalisation, from where can woman's lives which are told in local narratives be spoken?" (17).

One place where feminist philosophy can be spoken is in a narrative such as Diotima's that embodies the fruitfulness of interaction, the fecundity of dialogue (Nye, 1989:48). Moreover, according to philosopher Moira Gatens narrative analysis can give voice to what has been repressed in Plato's texts (Gatens, 1991:171). Gatens goes on to state that the presence of both sexes stimulates authentic interaction and forces Socrates and Plato to assume a bodily existence, to abandon their masks and to assume contingency and perspective - although I doubt it whether in all cases this results in phallic insertions into a mute, passive feminine body, as Gatens claims.

The narrative analysis of the *Symposium* divides into three sections. In the first section Diotima relates two narratives. It also explores why Diotima employs these narratives to promote Socrates' philosophical education. The second section shows Socrates appropriating Diotima's narrative methodology for his own pedagogical purposes. To teach his fellow symposiasts about Eros he tells a narrative about himself and Diotima. However, Socrates changes Diotima's narrative methodology. This is typical of Socrates' philosophical practice of leading others towards a philosophical life by using narratives

extensively and thus he reveals how deeply Diotima influences him, except Socrates tells a story about himself where Diotima does not. Plato, on the other hand, whilst recognising the pedagogical value of narratives also delineates the limitations of Socrates' particular narrative approach. Unlike Socrates, Plato does not tell narratives about himself. Instead he creates the complex narrative structure of the *Symposium*. While Plato remains absent from the dialogue, its narrative structure draws the reader into a philosophical world. The effect of his absence is that his readers must find philosophical answers for themselves. In many ways Plato endorses the narrative model that Diotima has used when she told the story to Socrates.

The first story she tells relates the myth of the birth of Eros, the God of love. So much scholarship had been devoted to the philosophical content of Diotima's speech that her use of narrative is often overlooked. *What* Diotima teaches Socrates is allowed to take precedence over *how* she teaches him. The first story is a 'once upon a time' story, Eros's parents are Penia, (Gr. "lack") who hasn't been invited to Aphrodite's birthday party, although she comes all the same and Poros (Gr. "plenty") who has become drunk on nectar and passes out in Zeus's garden; she seduces him and thus conceives Eros, a typical god of passage, reconciling and holding in tension contradictory states; ambiguous, mixed, he is perpetually in a state of transience between wisdom and ignorance or in Diotima's own words he is "one of the creatures that stand trapped between both categories" (Plato, 1968:285).

So, in telling her narrative Diotima wants to achieve a certain effect: convincing us about the intermediary nature of Eros, an intercessor between mortals and gods. What is often overlooked about this famous passage is that it is narrated by Diotima. This is also true of the second story whose substance is the famous ascent passage: the soul's ascent to the beautiful itself through the four stages: physical beauty, moral beauty, the beauty of knowledge and beauty in itself. Again, the fact that it is Diotima who conveys the information to us is overlooked. However, one cannot ignore the narrative features of the account. The story has a plot, maybe one of the most famous of Plato's plots. A person, divinely pregnant in the soul, desires to give birth. Then one person has intercourse with another beautiful person and gives birth to beautiful words in the soul. Then one perceives that the beauty of the soul is more valuable than the beauty of bodies. The one contemplates beauty as it appears in daily pursuits and laws then the beauty of scientific knowledge and gazes upon this vast beauty. The contemplation of this great beautiful sea

makes one beget many beautiful *logoi*. Finally upon growing stronger one comprehends a certain single knowledge and will suddenly behold a thing that is wondrously beautiful by nature. In the presence of the beautiful the soul becomes philosophical. As Andrea Nye notes this movement towards the beautiful never requires the renunciation of lower forms of engendering, only a widening circle of those with whom we have loving intercourse and a widening of the benefits of that intercourse (1989:48).

Diotima's story illustrates the way in which narratives and knowledge, mythos and logos, exist symbiotically and that the story as a major means of enculturation is a fundamental transcultural and transhistorical semiotic element. Postmodern philosophy has furthered awareness of this question. Lyotard speaks of the pre-eminence of the narrative form in the formulation of traditional knowledge (1989:190). Because Diotima recognizes the ease with which one can convey knowledge by telling narratives, a traditional role of women in all societies, Diotima uses narratives to teach Socrates philosophy. Diotima controls the narrative, she is a wise person as Socrates repeatedly assures us, a person who can organize the structure, the substance and anticipated effects of her story, she makes certain fragments cohere so that ultimately she conveys them to Socrates with the purpose of furthering his philosophical education. A narrative promises knowledge hence its rapturous appeal, its power of seduction, Socrates receives the narrated knowledge from Diotima and begins to become wise or at least to love wisdom - the very essence of philosophy.

Her qualities as a narrator are crucial. She interacts with people as she narrates, creating a participatory community that stimulates philosophical exchange. Secondly, she is fully aware of her telling a story, so she displays self-consciousness, an integral aspect of Platonic philosophy. Philosophical life and enquiries are communal activities based on dialogue; participants must reach a level of agreement in order to philosophise. A successful narrative like successful philosophising reflects an engagement with other people reflecting this harmonious philosophical community, Diotima speaks in a style that is loosely woven but never definitely knotted (Irigaray, 1989:39). Thus Diotima seeks to engage Socrates in her narrative; she insists time and again that Socrates participate in her inquiry into the nature of Eros. She elicits his participation by addressing him by name 13 times and by asking him direct questions throughout their discussion, she also includes him by using plural verbal forms: "let's imagine how it would be if someone were to see the beautiful itself" (Plato, 1968:296). She truly establishes cooperation and more of a kind of

partnership between the two of them as in her hypothetical supposition: “If someone were to ask us what is the love of beautiful things, Diotima and Socrates?” (286) At the same time Diotima repeatedly expresses her doubt about Socrates’ intellectual capacity to follow the higher mysteries, she urges him “try to keep your mind as awake and alert as you can” (1968:295). His philosophical limitations are put down to his overwhelming presence in his practice of philosophy, to a kind of gregariousness that his way of teaching philosophy displays. Examples of the universal applicability of the ascent include “it is necessary to begin in youth”, “if one is guided”, “if one perceives” (294), her language often shifts from addressing Socrates to addressing an impersonal audience. Then her language shifts again with her referring to Socrates as “dear Socrates”, she switches to a specific conditional use of the language “if you ever see it”, “if it seems to you to be” (296) this shift declaims the necessity for Socrates particularly to recognize the beautiful itself. But this final revelation does not occur in a linguistic context, which is beyond the *kaloi logoi*.

But whilst philosophy flourishes in such a dialogic and participatory environment it is clear that it is also an inward journey. A well-known Romanian feminist who participated in a feminist philosophy congress reported that Mary Daly had said in her keynote address that ultimately men could tolerate the fact that women could cultivate their minds and that they could even teach others, but what has always been hard to put up with is that they could also think, reason (Miroiu, 2001:10). Throughout the dialogue Diotima is reflective, self-conscious, pondering over the narrative processes in which she engages. She reflects upon how she narrates and about what she intends to accomplish with her narrated accounts: “It’s a most lengthy story; I will nevertheless tell it to you” (Plato, 1968:284); “I will try to teach you” (286). Self-consciousness is a vital precondition for self-knowledge. The former is an awareness of one’s various activities: speaking, narrating, thinking. Self-knowledge entails an awareness of oneself in terms of a system of beliefs or a theoretical understanding of the nature of the self and its relation to the world. Understood in these terms Diotima’s narrative style does not reveal her self-knowledge. However, Stanley Rosen (1973:632) argues that Plato thinks that self-consciousness is an integral part of philosophy, but self-knowledge is for ever evading us, it is in fact impossible. Diotima exhibits then the only kind of self-awareness that is actually attainable. In fact Diotima’s narrative serves a higher function: to promote Socrates’ philosophical education. Like Eros in the ascent passage Diotima’s narrative style leads the listener towards philosophical insight. She teaches him with the hope that he will in his

turn teach others. The purpose is accomplished: Socrates believes in the pedagogical power of the narratives and wants to tell others. He is persuaded by her speech, but also by how she says it.

Narrative analysis can enhance a feminist interpretation of Diotima by showing that in the *Symposium* Plato produces an account of truth focused on the female. Many feminists like Genevieve Lloyd argue that the patriarchal conception of philosophy which Plato is typically thought to represent refuses to allow a female voice. Donna Stanton in her turn sees philosophy as reproducing the dichotomy between male rationality and female materiality, corporeality and sexuality (Stanton, 1989:167). On commenting on Irigaray's theories Witford says: "attempting to show that if you produce an account of truth which includes or is derivative of an imaginary primal in which the role of the mother is written out, leaving engenderment entirely to the father, then your whole theory and its consequences will be marked by that forgetting" (Witford, 1991:112). In this Platonic dialogue, however, we do not find that patriarchal hegemony that so concerned Irigaray and Stanton. In this dialogue Plato portrays Socrates, his teacher and by extension himself, as learning from a woman, we have here a clear example and an undeniable affirmation of the kind of philosophy practiced by a woman and Diotima's narrative philosophy embraced by both Plato and Socrates may offer a "vision of women's language opening up the possibility of women's distinct cultural identity" (Whitford, 1991:5). Plato and Socrates also imitate her method, they both use narratives. Hence, 'the thinking muse' is not forever outside the activity of philosophising (Allen and Young, 1989:1).

Insofar as she persuades Socrates and Plato to follow her narrative plan Diotima exists as the birthplace of philosophy. Socrates' narrative illustrates the same qualities as Diotima: it aims at increasing the listener's knowledge, it produces a participatory community with others and it promotes self-knowledge in the narratee. It s interesting that although in most cases Socrates professes his ignorance this time he makes a positive claim. Like Diotima he involves his audience and converses with the symposiasts before narrating his account to them. But as we have already said Socrates rounds off the narration by telling a story about himself, because for him philosophy cannot be divorced from the search for self-knowledge. And as has been often noted because Socrates tells his own story, his narrative style manifests a concept of self-knowledge that is more in keeping with postmodernism than Platonism. In contemporary philosophic literature it has become commonplace to acknowledge a connection between self-knowledge and the

activity of telling stories. As Kerby says, the meaning of a life can be adequately grasped only in a narrative or storylike framework (1991:4). The self or the subject being the product of language, it is itself a discursive result and not a prelinguistic item. If the self is a narrative construct surely self-knowledge arises out of an exploration of the narratives that construct it.

Diotima does not tell a story about herself. Why should she be not interested in finding out anything about herself or in demonstrating her self-knowledge to Socrates? Diotima's absence prefigures Plato's own absence from the dialogues. Her absence at the same time allows the narrative to function as Eros functions leading the listener towards the Beautiful itself. Diotima's knowledge is one that pertains to the *daimonic* that serves to mediate between polar realities that can never be allowed to come into direct contact. It is through the character of Diotima that a true theory of the *daimonic* is developed as an entity existing mid-way between gods and humans. Diotima is a hermeneutician, she silences humans with her caduceus until the gods tell their tale, and when they finish she uses her knowledge to further communication. She does not deliver herself with her message. Her nature like Eros's own nature is daimonic *par excellence*. Her narrative is applicable to anyone and from a feminist perspective her narrative style reflects "a liberating universality" (Bowery, 1994:187). Andrea Nye says: "there is no reason to think that Diotima's teaching would have been meant only for men. The content of that teaching clearly refers to both women and men" (1989:58). The universality of Diotima's message is underlined by the very absence of Diotima's particular self. In the content of her narrative the *Symposium* is unique in the Platonic corpus because it shows Socrates learning from someone who teaches him to narrate. By focusing on the narrative lesson he learned from Diotima we can come to understand Socrates' practice of philosophy in a different way. We come to see how profoundly narrative in nature this practice is. Just as Diotima remains absent as a character in her narratives in order to further Socrates' philosophical education, Plato's absence turns the reader away from himself and toward philosophy. His refusal to represent himself in his narratives is a *pharmakon*, an antidote for Socrates' self-involved narratives.

Let us now explore the ways in which Diotima's speech interacts with the other stories about Eros in the Symposium. It is commonly charged against Plato that in the *Symposium* he ignores the value of the love of one unique whole person for another such whole person. In his *scala amoris* or *ordo amoris* it is exactly this love that ranks very low,

the high climactic moment of fulfilment the peak achievement for which all lesser loves are to be used as steps is the one farthest removed from affection for concrete beings. But if we were to look at things more attentively we would soon understand that it is not a work that ignores the pre-philosophical understanding of Eros, but that it is all about that understanding and furthermore about the need to purge and transcend it, (we could metaphorically speculate here on Diotima's fame for having saved Athens from the plague), because the *Symposium* is a work about passionate erotic life, a complex passion both sexual and intellectual for one particular person - Alcibiades' love for Socrates. It is remarkable indeed how Eros's portrait as rendered by Diotima evokes Socrates, with the loved one thus becoming a paradigm of love. Eros is seen in the *Symposium* as *philosophos*, a model to be followed against all odds. If in *Phaidros* philosophy rationalizes and justifies love in a way that renders rhetoric and education secondary, in the *Symposium* philosophy is seen as more than abstract love for wisdom, it requires sheer passion, deeper and more concrete, for the very master of wisdom. The philosopher was an *aristos* for Plato and he demanded unconditional love and devotion not for a while but for a whole lifetime (see Cornea, 1995:80-84). It is in this light that homosexual love should be considered. In ancient Greece homosexuality was tolerated only insofar as it did not interfere with the family, the sacred *oikos*. Pederasty was thus the only accepted homosexual relation seen as a temporary bond between a mature man (*erastes*) and an adolescent (*eromenos, paidika*) a relationship that was educational and formative in the highest degree. There is in fact a deep ambiguity, a continuous wavering between censorship and tolerance in ancient Greek society. As philosophy presupposes a life-long education, *paideia,* it could also accommodate a homosexual relationship extended way beyond the limits that were deemed respectable in the age.

The dialogue has the structure of a Chinese box, Apollodorus has a conversation with a friend and the latter reports a previous conversation of his own in which he recalls a speech of Aristodemus who reports a speech of Socrates, who reports a speech of Diotima. The comic speech of Aristophanes and the tragic speech or tragic-comic speech of Alcibiades contain the most serious objections raised in the *Symposium* against Socrates' programme for the ascent of love. Aristophanes never succeeds in telling us his objections to the ascent story because the drunken Alcibiades with his revellers and flute women bursts in upon the scene. Aristophanes tells the story of the perfect creatures, self-sufficient spheres, punished for their overweening attempt to defy gods. The mighty creatures are cut

in half for ever yearning after wholeness and completion, Eros being the very name of the desire and pursuit of the whole. The story is comic because it somehow makes us gain detachment from ourselves and watch ourselves with a fresh eye as if we were a species remote from ourselves and our needs.

It is interesting to see how Diotima's speech relates to such stories as Aristopanes's. Diotima's name means "Zeus-honour". It is derived from her benefits to Athens at the time of the plague, when she succeeded in postponing the catastrophe for ten years. Symbolically then, Diotima is the external guide indicating that our salvation may have to come to us from without at the cost of abandoning beliefs and relationships, human-centred and human-honouring that we now cherish (Nussbaum, 1986:177). And looking towards the vast amount of the beautiful he will no longer like some servant, loving the beauty of a particular boy or a particular man or of one set of customs and being the slave of this, remain contemptible and of no account. But turned towards the vast sea of the beautiful and contemplating it, he gives birth to many beautiful and grand speeches and reasoning in his abundant love of wisdom. Diotima connects the love of particulars with servitude, tension, excess and the love of the qualitatively uniform sea with health, freedom and creativity. The powerfully rhetorical character of Diotima's speech in the ascent passage accepts nevertheless Aristophanes' characterization of the misery and the irrational tumult of personal erotic need, agreeing that Eros disrupts our rational planning to the point where we would willingly give up everything else, even health or life itself. But that is intolerable, such a life is not liveable, the way suggested by Diotima is conducive to an immortal object to be fond of instead of the flesh and all the mortal rubbish, instead of having a painful yearning for a single body and spirit, a blissful contemplative completeness. The dramatic nature of the dialogue is illustrated by the abrupt entrance of Alcibiades, bursting with colour and all the mixed impurity of mortal flesh, interrupting the reflective descent into the symposiasts following the summit of the ascent as revealed by Diotima. From the rarefied contemplative world of the self-sufficient philosopher we are suddenly, with an abrupt jolt, returned to the world we inhabit and invited to see this vision. We know it is the story of a particular passion for a particular contingent individual. Alcibiades tells a story that is not marked by coherence and calm but by the narrator's groping for images and associations to communicate the inside feel of his experience; he mentions Socrates' virtues in the process of describing the wholeness of a unique personality. The speech is disorganised and tumultuous, moves from imaging to

describing, response to story and back again many times over. It is precisely this very groping, as Nussbaum remarks (1986:188), this somewhat chaotic character, that makes it so movingly convincing as an account and expression of love.

With his claims that a story tells the truth and that his goal is to open up and to know, he suggests that the lover's knowledge of the particular other gained through an intimacy both bodily and intellectual is itself a unique and uniquely valuable kind of practical understanding, and one that we risk losing if we take the first step up the Socratic ladder. There are two kinds of knowledge clashing here and it is indeed difficult to distinguish in a clear-cut way between the two modes because both are concerned with truths. Alcibiades claims that through a lover's intimacy, through familiarity with one person he can produce stories that are more deeply and intensely true, that capture more of what is characteristic and practically relevant about Socrates - more than any account even one produced by a form-lover who denied himself the cognitive resources of the senses and emotions.

Alcibiades appears as a gender conundrum wavering between the poles of *eromenos* and *erastes* - self-sufficient sexually or incomplete and needy - a disturbing sexual analogy to the ascent to philosophical contemplation (Nussbaum, 1986:188) and this gender trouble is further sustained by the crown of violets on his head with which he makes his appearance at Agathon's party. The crown of violets is a sign of Aphrodite, and it is surprising to see one so aggressively masculine as a female divinity. It is also a crown worn by the Muses. The ivy is the sign of Dionysus, god of wine and irrational inspiration, representing the bodily fertility of the inspired lover. Dionysus male in form, yet of softly female bearing, exemplifies the sexual contractions of Alcibiades' aspirations. Now Plato's strategy in constructing this dramatic confrontation is finally comprehended. Through Aristophanes he raises certain doubts in our minds concerning the erotic projects to which we are most attached. And yet the speech of Aristophanes still praises Eros as most necessary for the success of practical reason itself. Then through Socrates and Diotima he shows us how despite our needy and mortal natures we can transcend the merely personal in Eros and ascend through desire itself to the Good. What the visions omit however is exactly what is so movingly displayed to us in the person and the story of Alcibiades. Through him we see the deep importance unique passion has for ordinary human beings we see its irreplaceable contribution to understanding. But we have a problem on our hands. The ascent of Diotima and the love of Alcibiades are mutually exclusive. We cannot

have this love and the kind of stable rationality that she revealed to us. As Nussbaum concludes this is far more alarming and harsh a book than we thought. It does make a case for the conception of the beautiful as the valuable, as the good, but it shows us also clearly how much that conception requires us to give up. It starkly confronts us with a choice. Diotima and Alcibiades compete for our souls (Nussbaum, 1986:198) and we become like Agathon, beings without character, without choice. The illusion that Eros and philosophy could live together is shattered. Plutarch tells us that the night before his death Alcibiades dreamed that he was dressed in women's clothes. A courtesan was holding his head and painting his face with make-up. In the soul of this proudly aggressive man it is a dream that expresses the wish for unmixed stability and passivity the wish to lose the need for practical reason to become a being who could live entirely in the flux of Eros and so avoid tragedy. After the arrow had killed him the courtesan Timandra ("honour-the-man") wrapped his bitten body and his soul of flesh in her own clothes and buried him sumptuously in the earth. Diotima emphasises that the beautiful itself partakes of no body nor any discourse and so Diotima has been doubtful throughout her teaching about Socrates' capacity to make the ascent precisely because of his linguistic dependency. Diotima does not believe that Socrates can comprehend the Beautiful itself because he cannot comprehend without *logos*. Diotima chastises the youthful Socrates, so mired in *kaloi logoi* that he does not see the beautiful itself. In contradistinction with the encomia presented in the other speeches, Alcibiades' eulogy does not amount to an idealized portrait or to the working of a feverish exalted spirit. We can see in it a summit of the Socratic discourse, an incarnation of the ideal good, of a higher and better consciousness that the Other may embody, a love of the essence and not the appearance that the loved one brings into the world.

In the *Symposium* there are several instances of gender boundary transgression and fluidity and as already hinted at of de-sexualisation of passion and reason. The importance of gender difference becomes relativised in structuring subjecthood: Pausanias's speech about the two Aphrodites, Aristophanes' myth of the androgyne, the daimonic nature of Eros, an intermediary, a guide, an intercessor between mortals and gods. Like his mother Penia, he will always suffer distress, and "like a modern Lacanian" he is vexed by longings, insatiability and repetition (Riley, 1988:20). Eros, the desire for that which is not yet possessed, is poised between love and longing; the object which Eros seeks must be good, for it to be longed for is not enough.

What this reading of the *Symposium* throws into question are some century-old assumptions about the fundamentals of Western culture, about the complicity between Western discourse and the phallocentric interpretation of the male body, about a language with claims to universality which is only produced by men (Irigaray, 1977:62), with women as repositories of corporeality and matter and men of rationality and abstract thought. The dialogue through its sophisticated narrative structure and through its argumentative content reminds men that they have a body too and women that access to true wisdom, philosophy and philosophising is no longer denied to them. The undermining of phallic domination in this dialogue is in many ways unique. We can see in this dialogue an articulation of that ideal of a new mental landscape in which plurality and multiplicity might be valued, in which, according to Irigaray, women should be recognised as bodies that desire and think and express, and in which men come to acknowledge the materiality of their bodies, in which the separation sex/language, on the one hand, and body/matter, on the other, is no longer relevant (1976: 76).

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FIGHTING MEDUSA: FAY WELDON'S *BIG WOMEN*

MICHAELA PRAISLER

University of the Lower Danube, Galaţi

The contemporary novel in English includes and presupposes a multitude of what have previously been defined as *alien voices* or the politically, socially, as well as economically and culturally *colonised.* Women and marginalised groups of all sorts now manage to express themselves openly and to voice with authority issues formerly silenced or ignored. Fiction now seems to have taken up the task of creating alternatives to authority and its ability to impose and intimidate. Writers today are seeking appropriate means for exposing the absurdity of present attitudes to both men and women and their patterns of behaviour not to mention different ethnicities, "with their ironic, parodic, disruptive, metaphoric, irreverent and distinctly political deconstructions of prevailing forms in literature, art, media and culture generally, which otherwise perpetuate prevailing attitudes in society". (Rod Mengham [ed.], *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction*, 1999:30).

'Written' by a predominantly patriarchal culture that subordinates the female to the male, women are now writing back. Fay Weldon, like A. S. Byatt, Doris Lessing or Helen Fielding, constructs a new identity for women and for womanhood, literature by, about and for women. Her fiction counters the kind which comes under the form of a ready-made, easy-to-handle, take-away offer with which contemporary consumerism has accustomed the reader but, more importantly, it counters the already canonised, great literature of the past, for their having outlined two dangerous models: of the 'Cosmopolitan' woman on sale, neatly parcelled in pretty wrapping paper (that can hardly be seen under the cosmetics used to please men's eye) and the woman as housewife/mother/slave, whose only desire is to love and serve her man.

Adopting a direct, straightforward attitude and point of view, Fay Weldon expresses a sense of paradoxical sisterhood and exposes the various aspects of patriarchal ideology. She seems to point to the fact that any stereotype is self-destructive, easily transformed into its own unstable contradiction and thereby demonstrates that such stereotypes only exist as verbal constructs in the service of that ruling ideology or that, as

Germaine Greer argues (see *The Female Eunuch*, 1993), whatever kind of feminine stereotype women are supposed to conform to it is necessarily a construction of patriarchal capitalism:

> The stereotype is the Eternal Feminine. She is the Sexual Object sought by all men, and by all women. She is of neither sex, for she has herself no sex at all. Her value is solely attested by the demand she excites in others. All she must contribute is her existence. She need never give positive evidence of her moral character because virtue is assumed from her loveliness, and her passivity. (in Keith Green and Jill LeBihan [eds.], *Critical Theory and Practice*, 1996:234)

Her favourite method is that of juxtaposing contrasting statements while depriving the reader of any authorial comment whatsoever. Without guidance of any sort, the latter is allowed to read on and experience a feeling of unease as to the position being put forward. What remains true (because it pervades the whole text) is the feminine anger pulsating behind each and every line.

> Wimmin, oblivious to the reasoning of linguistics, so antagonistic to 'man' they wouldn't even let these three letters into the word which described their gender. [...] What did women, oblivious to the pull of national pride, care about 'free speech', 'democracy'; their oppression was nothing to do with forms of government, with right or left, capitalism or communism, simply to do with this one massive central problem, that of gender now taken to extremes. Men for death, wimmin for life. (Weldon, 1998:231)

Big Women, like many of Weldon's novels, formulates this angry philosophy and shapes reader response shockingly against reader expectation. It brings together feminist literary theory and practice, situating itself on the border of two opposing worlds, outlooks, types of discourse: the masculine and the feminine. It moves from the politics of the media to the economics of love and analyses the present-day situation and women's role within it. It rewrites feminist criticism, taking up the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', borrowed from social science (where sex is determined biologically and gender is a psychological concept which refers to culturally acquired sexual identity) and shifting the emphasis from the fight for women's rights in all areas to the politics of reproduction, women's 'experience' and sexual 'difference'. 'Sexuality' becomes a key issue since, in its

coupling of the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’, it has always constituted a crucially influential challenge to traditional (male) political thinking.

As in feminist critical writings, the novel involves five main foci relevant to discussions of sexual difference: biology, experience, discourse, the unconscious, and social and economic conditions. Its dominant themes are also those characteristic of feminist criticism, especially that of the second-wave (gynocriticism and gynesis included): the omnipresence of patriarchy, the inadequacy for women of existing political organisation, the celebration of women’s difference as central to the cultural politics of liberation, the association of feminist militancy with the struggle against racism and so on. (see Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 1993: 211-213) The characters are given a voice, allowed to express themselves and to contribute to raising awareness regarding delicate, previously unformulated, topics:

> ‘Patriarchy is the enemy; what is a wife but a slave, required to provide domestic and sexual services for her master in return for her keep. What is marriage but legalised prostitution? And so forth.
>
> ‘Society is sexist, language is sexist: by sexist we mean the in-built assumption that the male is superior to the female. A set of ingrained and irrational beliefs that condemn women to be second-class citizens, discriminated against under the law, in education, in government policy.’ And so on. (107)

Male positions are ridiculed by their ridiculing the female other:

> Mention of the Philosophy of Gender makes a few minds click to attention.
> ‘What new discipline is this?’ Gender has not been a word much used in universities till now. The world is male: the greater male includes the lesser female, as it still does today in legal documents. Say ‘mankind’ and find it includes women, should the question arise. The female is an unfortunate mutation of the male: such mind as exists is clouded by emotion. Gender is of little interest. (100)

Feminism itself is mocked, but only to point to the disturbing way it is perceived, to the threat it is understood as representing:

> The attention of the meeting was thus diverted to the Black Feminists' claim for Wages for Housework. Many professed themselves worried by the lobby: it could foster the notion of women as mothers who did shit work: it suggested that women too, like men, could have a group guilt. Could white women be guilty of the oppression of their black sisters, if only historically? It was impossible. All women were victims. But their protests were subdued. No one wanted to be accused of racism. If black women saw themselves as a viable sub-group, how could white women argue? In the race for victimhood, black women at the time were in the lead, and were to increase it over the decades. White women didn't have a hope, not when they were up against the slave markets. Racism took precedence over feminism: that is to say 'racist' was a worse accusation than 'sexist', and has remained so to this day. (167)

The patriarchal norm, the masculinity of the text, the authoritative, intrusive practices in its forwarding and the manipulative attitudes directed towards its reception are also hinted at by the writer. The novel produces the effect of heteroglossia, and it is this concrete heteroglossia which serves as the vehicle for the confrontation and dialogue among world-views and ideologies. Since the world (as explained by men) has caused the male subjectivity be mistaken for objectivity, what Weldon seems to be undertaking with this novel is having feminine subjectivity play its part in delineating another 'objective' interpretation of that world, building at least a double-voiced discourse containing a dominant and a muted story, or what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call a 'palimpsest'. Two alternative oscillating texts have to be constantly had in view: the overt and the covert, the foregrounded and the backgrounded; two positions have to be simultaneously assumed: that of the reader following the text given and that of the writer filling in empty spaces and endowing them with meanings.

Like L. M. Alcott's *Little Women*, whose title it brings to mind, *Big Women* is built around the lives of four women and their 'female friends'. Nevertheless, Weldon's novel, unlike its nineteenth century counterpart, no longer commits the crime of fashioning orthodox female characters in a way that aims to address orthodox female readers accepting a secondary status in a male world. To alter the stereotypical visions of women as passive creatures who are vulnerable, dependent and incapable of sexual desire, its female characters are depicted as strong, active heroes rather than passive shadows of the great male protagonist. It features "a small, vivid group of wild livers, free-thinkers, lusters after life, sex and experience, who in the last decades of the century turned the world

inside out and upside down. Unable to change themselves, they turned their attention to society, and set about changing that, for good or bad". (I): Layla – the 'head' of the Medusa (a publishing house they all work hard to set up and make profitable), Stephanie – the one who abandons husband and sons and initially prefers to live among the women, Alice – the feminist academic whose mind is more productive than her body, and Nancy – the dull, unattractive woman whose femininity vanishes under the governing sensibility that characterises her. They all, at some point, become immasculated in tenure, demeanour and discourse, to then, having survived the changing world they themselves have contributed to defining, regain their liberating selfhood.

After having concentrated on and denied men access to women's private life/hell in novels like *Down Among the Women*, in an attempt at avenging women's centuries-old silence, Fay Weldon builds, with *Big Women*, yet another exclusive feminine universe: the Medusa, this time allowing all issues associated with womanhood to be made public and underlining the shift from passive to active positions, starting with the very subtitle of the novel, *Big Girls Don't Cry*, and following through the whole text with references to it:

> I want angry women to buy our books. You want victim women to read them: I want women to glow with confidence and be as glossy as men: you want their moans to get a hearing. (52)

The setting is London, historically presented. Under the spotlight there fall different corners of a city whose glamour and attraction are, symbolically for the message being put forward (the metamorphosis of woman from the fearing to the feared other and back, as has pleased or been imposed by man), rooted in sad realities of the past, which breathe from every stone and contaminate the present. Revisiting and reshaping them, therefore caught in an endless game of reliving second-hand experiences, people tend to overlook the fact that their own present is tailoring future postures.

> And [she] walked back up the hill, up Chalk Farm Road, alongside the tall blackened brick wall which marked off the old railway land, and the melancholy Round House, where once was housed the horse-driven mechanism of cogs and wheels which pulled the trains up from Camden Town. Decade after decade, groups do their best with the place: enthusiasts try to turn it into a sports centre, or a shopping mall, or a focus for Black Arts, but it never works. The sorrow of the bricks sops up the high spirits: perhaps the horses had a hard time

> in the sunless building: or their owners: or those who built the place. Some affliction entered in. [...] Who is to say how the sorrows of the past seep through into the present? And let us never suppose that the present we live through, and take for granted, and think just about OK, is free of responsibility for the future. (200-201)

Against this changing background, the twenty-year span covered by the novel (from the seventies to the nineties) helps suggest fluidity, following the evolution of mentalities in an apparently illogical way: backwards to ancient times, to legend and myth. Feminist thought is traced the same way, consequently against the flow, and shocking formulations of masculine/feminine anger are given to justify the omnipresence of the battle between the sexes, that no one has ever won:

> 'Men use their anger as a way of controlling women,' said Alice. 'As they see us uniting, their rage seems to know no bounds, but in truth they are frightened, scared out of their wits. What we do seems to them unnatural, dangerous, powerful enough to put out the sun, stop the planets in their revolutions. Man has the race memory of Orpheus imprinted in his being, Orpheus the poet, pursued and torn by the Maenads, the mad women who in religious ecstasy hunted down and destroyed men'. (51)

The hard core of the novel, Medusa, brings mythological representations to the fore with a view to highlighting the controversy of woman between angel and devil. Medusa's story, but especially her death, eroticised to locate the violence between men and women, has rich connotations, all of which serve to decode the female/feminine/feminist debate encoded within the book. The fertility of the myth is recurrently suggested and ironically manipulated to relativise imposed sex roles and to underline the transformations having taken place with regard to its reception and impact.

> Ideas flowed freely out of Medusa: and freely were adopted. Men came too, to re-learn their ways, to worship new Gods. How not to be patronising, how not to say 'speaking as a mere man', how not to be the first to stand up at a woman's meeting and declare himself on woman's side; not to claim, 'I am a feminist too.' A man cannot be a feminist: he has not suffered as woman has. He cannot know, nor claim a victimhood he has no knowledge of. These matters were minefields: Medusa the best mine-detector around. And good PR for Medusa, of course. (106)

Beneath the victimiser there lies the victim and if Medusa has become a central figure for the woman artist to struggle with, it is because, herself a silenced woman, she has been used to silencing other women. If women have served, along the years, as scapegoats for male violence, if the silenced woman artist serves as a sacrificial offering to the male artistic imagination, the woman writer and the feminist critic (and Weldon is both) seek to remember the embodied, resisting woman. By doing so, she resists her status of privileged victim and interrupts the structure of reciprocal violence.

The death, brought about by Perseus's strength and Athene's wisdom is instrumented by a mirror (shield) which becomes inscribed with the effigy of the decapitated (castrated) Medusa; it is used by Weldon to subvert traditional artistic beliefs in the power of mimesis to encapsulate the world and illustrate it minutely and to imply that masculine, authoritarian practices in forwarding texts have been replaced with feminine, looser, more creative means of expression now that women have managed to gain a voice of their own.

> OK, it's 1983. Medusa is going great guns. Women have discovered, as they say, their voice, and their history, their literature. The concept of sexism has arrived in the land, as the concept of racism arrived a decade earlier. It doesn't necessarily mean people behave any better, but they have a vague idea of what the new parameters of good and bad behaviour are. The world is not yet female, the gender switch is not yet thrown, God is still the Patriarch, not yet shoved over on his throne by Nature the Matriarch, but we're on our way, for good and bad. (195)

The legendary snakes on Medusa's head are also powerful symbols bringing additional information on artistic intentionality. They may be seen as standing for a number of issues specific to the cultural phenomenon under scrutiny: ominous intelligence, creative wit, elastic time, meteorological light, the phallic sign, complex embodiment of natural force. As to her eyes, symbols for knowledge, wisdom, illumination, their 'gift' of turning men to stone is meant to serve in formulating the warning against attempts at silencing the feminine other.

> 'So what are women meant to do?' Layla enquired of the multitudes who stared at their screens and part rejoiced and part lamented they were not there at Greenham that day. 'Wash dishes while men destroy the world, with their absurdly phallic weapons, in an argument about nothing? Mutually Absurd Destruction? MAD?' (236)

The novel's dense, though oblique, symbolism helps to denounce the patriarchal society for having driven women away from writing as it has driven them away from their bodies. The moment women are taught their name, they are taught that their territory is the black, the dark and dark is dangerous; or, as Helene Cixous puts it:

> The 'Dark Continent' is neither black nor unexplorable; it is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed... They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. ('The Laugh of the Medusa', in Robyn Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, *Feminisms – An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, 1991:341)

Weldon's women, however, defy history and myth:

> Being flawed, they were the stuff of tragedy as well as triumph. They walked like goddesses down from Mount Olympus, without so much as deigning to notice their own difference. (I)

As to Medusa, it is turned into the perfect means of ideological promotion and dissemination of feminist outlook. The publishing house uses the printed word as the perfect weapon directed against outmoded patterns of thought. By means of it, the mechanisms at work in the interaction of literature, culture and sexual identity, (emphasising the way that configurations of gender are located in history) are dismantled. Furthermore, the changing representations of women in writing, the changes at the heart of women's writing and those in reader response, running parallel with the metamorphosis of the central myth, are reflected in the different hypostases Medusa appears under and which culminate with her final 'look' at the very end of the book.

> People cannot bear too much reality. Medusa's hair will in the end get washed and shorn: there's no help in it. It falls now in a silky cloud, no longer in a wreath of twisting snakes. How pretty Medusa looks, how unravaged her face. [...] Medusa turns no one to stone; her power is gone; she is thoroughly approved of, upsets nobody and could be any gender at all. (345)

The fought-against Medusa adopts the mask that sells well, but continues to fight back unless, of course, She has already come out victorious from the battle against male cultural authority. She remains a threat, therefore, despite her having swapped places with ordinary Woman (or specifically *because* of it).

This transformation and de-centring of the Medusa myth (and its tendency to form and reform images in relation to certain kinds of repeated experience) embeds *Big Women* within the contemporary age/stage and connotes plurally, in the direction of feminist positions. In other words, if, in decoding the novel, the focus is laid on the newly visible world of female culture, freedom from the linear absolutes of male literary theory becomes possible (see Elaine Showalter [ed.], *The New Feminist Criticism*, 1986). It then emerges as subverting the understated misogyny in interpreting the Medusa myth, which is made subject to historical flux so as to explore the question of how female identity has been de/re/constructed, together with the ways in which this relates to society as a whole.

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THE BODY AND ITS SEXUAL ENIGMA: MASCULINE VERSUS FEMININE IN GENDER STUDIES

ANDREA BALOGH

The body includes the sex as an organ, but sex and its enigma have been thoroughly studied by many fields of science, including medicine, psychology, or psychoanalysis. Freud is known as the initiator of psychoanalysis and his greatest achievement was to transform the way we think about ourselves. Jacques Lacan continued the psychoanalytic studies commenced by his predecessor, but viewed them from a totally new perspective. An area apparently less scientific, but also dealing with body and sexuality is feminism. It is a duty of feminist writers to embellish the (sexual) feminine image men have created and also try to warn feminist counterparts about the shortcomings of reaching the typical feminine figure.

For Freud the theory about sexuality focuses on men's victory of a prominent sexual organ. In his writings, women are present through their absence.

Freud's understanding of sexuality is very complex; it transcends the simple idea of genital sexuality. "He sees it not simply as animal instinct but as specific both to human culture and the form of the conscious and unconscious life we live within it." (Minsky, 1996:31). In 1905, Freud published his book entitled *Three Essays on Sexuality* in which he laid the groundwork for his later theory of sexuality. According to Freud, sexuality appears already from birth; he also came up with the revolutionary idea of "infantile sexuality". The fact that children are sexual from the moment of birth means that the baby, small child and later adult gains pleasure from its own body, or, cultural substitutes for his body.

If Freud's conception of sexuality was totally new in that he introduced a new concept, Lacan takes us back to Freudian territory in a post-structural context. Still, we cannot expect deep resemblances between the two. For Lacan sexuality no longer exists as a pursuit of pleasurable experience. "Lacan eroticises both language and the linguistic concepts by linking their meaning to body and sexuality. Language becomes the means by which repression is achieved by driving our unconscious desire underground into the spaces between words and using its energy to propel us from one meaning to another." (Minsky, 1996:141) For Lacan, sexuality cannot be seen as a search for pleasure, for Lacan everything is linked to language, which represents the vehicle for unconscious desire. The unconscious exists only through speech and writing and no structure exists other than that which language provides. In order to develop his conception of the unconscious, Lacan

drew on the Saussurean concept of the sign (which comprises the signifier and the signified).

The crucial moment which determines our future gender identity is, according to Freud, the Oedipal crisis. It represents the dramatic moment when the small girl or boy locked in the phantasy of a passionate love affair with their mother has to be prised apart from her permanently in order to become a gendered and autonomous human being. This moment of separation is achieved by the entry of a third person, usually the father.

I would like to lean on the patriarchal norm that has been guiding us for centuries. Being representatives of a patriarchal culture, the men called to speak in this paper, Freud and Lacan brought their entirely masculine point of view. For example, a major criticism of Freud is that his theory is completely patriarchal, phallocentric and emphasizes the role of the father to the exclusion and importance of the mother. Critics have argued that his construction of gender and the inequality within the "masculine" and "feminine" categories seem to centre obsessively on the father and the male genital organ. Women are made up of envies that they project towards men (such as penis-envy), they are seen as the "dark continent" prevailing in the idea of "feminine mystique", and their cunning and difficult to understand nature was described by Freud as "the riddle of femininity". Also, women have to confront two more tasks than men in order to grow into "normal" women. So, Freud has not been particularly affirmative about women, a tendency which his follower Jacques Lacan did nothing but reinforce.

Lacan's titles for his articles are revealing of his low opinion on women: "Woman: the lack?", "The phallus: the first sign of difference" or, "The meaning of the phallus" are just some examples. Lacan justifies his negative opinion about women by explaining it from the Oedipal moment. The little girl, perceiving her total lack of what has value and power, enters language negatively, as one who lacks the sign of the essential. For Lacan, the only way a woman can obtain a phallus is by "being" the phallus for her lovers in the realm of Demand. Only this way, through her heterosexual relationships, and by becoming an object of Desire for men, can she reach the phallus and, therefore, have a kind of identity. "For Lacan, the absence of the penis in women only matters because it makes meaningful the father's prohibition on her desire for the mother. Within this context, females appear retrospectively to have been castrated. A girl has not got what is required to be her mother's lover and - to add insult to injury - neither does she seem to have what is required to be an active, self-determining subject in the world. She is the *lack* itself."

(Minsky, 1996:159) Reduced to a projection of male lack and having no meaning except as an object of phantasy in language, woman as herself cannot exist. Lacan states that denigration of woman is the precondition of man's belief in his own soul. In Lacan's world, where no one has a genuine identity, woman represents a double lack - her own lack of the valued phallus, and as a projection of the male lack produced by his symbolic castration by the father. So women are doubly powerless.

At a first approach, one would say that woman is totally defeated in these manly theories that proclaim only men's sexuality and their prominent sexual organ. But, if we take a closer look, we can remark that, paradoxically, these theories seem to turn (to some extent) in favour of women. So, for Lacan, *the phallus*, the first sign of difference is the symbol of power within patriarchal societies and has two representations. It has a controversial signification, as at the same time it is Desire (the girl wants it) and loss. Actually, "the meaning of phallus is not power, but powerlessness, that is defeat by the superior power of the father and the loss of the mother as an object of Desire as well as identification." (Minsky, 1996:153), but later on it is still him who tells us the difference between phallus and penis.

The distinction between penis and phallus affects two psychical realities which reflect this distinction - the realm of Demand and the realm of Desire. Lacan argues that the child must achieve the move from the realm of Demand, represented by the penis, to the realm of Desire, signified by the phallus. But Desire can never be satisfied, so phallus turns out to be a symbolically castrated penis. The penis, which is not just an organ, but also a sign, fixes male power irrevocably in all identities; the penis is male subjectivity, meaning power, order and female absence. Thus, woman is herself the lack. But Lacan's ambiguous argumentation on penis and phallus is not ready here. He makes clear that the phallus only seems to have power because it has value as a signifier, but signifiers are arbitrary and lack value in themselves. The value of the phallus is bogus, and from Lacan's point of view, male identity seems to look increasingly precarious. The power which Lacan accords to those who are represented by the sign of the phallus is always fraudulent and based on symbolic castration, humiliation and loss. The price of male power, therefore, is split subjectivity and a fragile identity.

So, for Lacan all meanings and identities based on the phallus are false. He himself makes a play with some words: fallacy/ phallusy. As far as Lacan is concerned, he made a very clear distinction between two concepts, of which, one, the penis, is male power, and

the other, the phallus, is nothing but a fallacy, an invention, an aberration and a loss of male power.

Sigmund Freud also made an attempt of women's rehabilitation. He speaks about man's need for woman, which, in his opinion, is greater than woman's for man because man needs to gain access in phantasy at least, to his primary identity. This is situated in the binary opposition which classifies women into whores or angels. But besides this need, Freud proclaims women's importance by being mothers. Women are mothers, they *can* be mothers. "Masculinity depends on being not mother."

Despite the sometimes appealing masculine theory which depicts not the supremacy of women, but their need, importance and objects of desire, feminists have advanced some new ideas.

Luce Irigaray, first of all, contests the deeply rooted ideas about female sexuality which has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters. Man is the creative force, woman is the bodily support. Irigaray's conviction is that Freud is only following a well-established tradition when he discovers penis-envy in girls, or when he envisages the clitoris as a little penis. In these situations, Freud is subject to what Irigaray calls the "Blind spot of an old dream of symmetry". The blind spot marks the lack, what is missing, negativity. The dream of symmetry consists of the myth that women must be represented as if they were essentially the same as, or parallel to, men. In conformity to this theory, women's sexuality is subjected to the same laws as masculine sexuality; the feminine sexual organ is constantly paralleled to the male one. Women are partial men; they are defined in relation to the supreme species.

Women's sexuality is defined by an absence. If female sex is not comparable to male anatomy, it doesn't count, it can't signify. Irigaray's point of view is that women should have an independent status and not be defined according to their resemblances or differences from men.

Since female sex was perceived as an absence for not conforming to the male one, the feminist writer wants to explain the exact opposite, even by entitling her article *This Sex Which Is Not One*. This sex is not one, cannot be reduced to one. Women's sexuality is at least double, it goes further, and it is plural. Men have their penis, but women are in the possession of two pleasurable organs. So, Irigaray's point is that women not only equal men from this point of view, but even exceed them. But if we see things through the lens of the male sexologist, the definition of the female sex organs is automatically a matter of

identifying a body part that approximates to the penis. The question that arises then is: clitoris or vagina? Which female body part approximates to the penis? Irigaray votes in favour of the clitoris. The clitoris is active, in the sense that it is erect. It is obviously much more suitable as a penis-substitute than the passive, invisible vagina. Irigaray observes: "The vagina is valued for the 'lodging' it offers the male organ." (Chanter, 1999:364). The masculine active – feminine passive well-established duality is turned to new factors. Irigaray replaces the passive with the vagina, while the clitoris is seen as the active sexual organ because of its capacity to react to stimuli. In other words, it is a rephrasing of the Freudian binarity since the active component, the clitoris, has abilities closer to the penis.

The woman as mother has always been seen as a provider and giver. She shelters, offers a dwelling, an abode, a home. For the child, she represents a protector, a guardian. The maternal figure gives food, warmth, milk and wipes tears away. Irigaray accounts for the woman's passive side. The rooted patriarchal norm expects woman to fulfil the role of good mother, wife and housemaker. Freud, in his characterising women as passive simply followed this tradition. Women's cultural expectation is to take and give care, to offer protection. The contours of this shadowy, marginal, maternal figure are blurred, her sexuality is obscured.

The type of the body image depends a good deal on the secondary sexual characteristics. Freud's theory of bisexuality has another interpretative channel, so that our secondary sexual characteristics can establish our gender identity. Grosz states that gender must be understood in terms that link this concept much more closely to the specificities of the gender. Gender is the inscription of the sexed body. Masculine or feminine gender cannot be neutrally attributed to bodies of either sex: the "masculinity" of the male body cannot be the same as the "masculinity" of the female body, because the kind of body inscribed makes a difference to the meanings and functioning of gender that emerges.

Gender and sex are deeply related to the body. Elizabeth Grosz sets out her understanding of the Irigarayan conception as follows: "All bodies must be male or female, and the particularities, specificities and differences of each need to be recognised and represented in specific terms." (Riley, 1998:220) Irigaray's desire is that the subdued bodies of women be restored in a true form.

In her text, *Bodies, Identities, Feminisms*, Denise Riley states that nowadays women can spend less of their lives awkwardly *in* their bodies. We have witnessed a fragile assumption of progress, which, for women is that pregnancy and gynaecological hazards

are far less catastrophic. So to the history of the body as a narrative of morbidity and its defeats, we could contrast a historical sociology of the body. As we have found out from the Irigarayan conception, all bodies must be male or female; we have a gender-specific historical sociology. An account of men's bodies would include descriptions of sex-related illnesses, heart disease, lung cancer and the statistical challenge from women; the history of soldiery, war slaughter; of virility as a concept; of the greater vulnerability of the male foetus, of narcissism and its failures; of disabling conditions of work, of mining accidents, etc. All these masculine frailties and enjoyments are those of women, still the sum of the two parts would not produce a "satisfying total of the body, now democratically analysed with a proper regard to sexual difference." (Riley, 1998:221) Denise Riley questions herself what it is she could have done wrong. She argues that anyone's body is only periodically lived or treated as sexed, so the gendered division of human life into bodily life cannot be adequate or absolute. The body imposes itself only at times to be arranged as that of a woman or a man. According to her opinion, there is a further reason for unease with the sufficiency of a historical sociology of the body, sexed or not. The body is a concept, and so, it is hardly intelligible unless it is read in relation with whatever else surrounds and supports it. It enters in the famous duality with the mind. The soul is known for its capacity to dominate the flesh. But in the western modern world, the body has defeated the soul. The flesh is dominant nowadays. It is especially the consumer society that has given birth to this phenomenon. The physical image has become the attribute of people, mainly, of women.

Women are brainwashed about the physical image they should have. Even if woman's progress is a cause of resentment at certain levels, such as the standard of living, by her greater possibility to get involved in "manly" jobs or activities, woman must keep her femininity by constantly embellishing herself. The image she should correspond to is given by the media: television, newspapers, and advertisements.

Women are often apologetic about their bodies, considered in relation to that plastic object of desire whose image is radiated throughout the media. Their breasts and buttocks are always too large or too small, the wrong shape, or too soft, their arms too hairy or too muscular or too thin, their legs too short, too sturdy, and so forth. Not all the apology is fishing for compliments. They are actually apologizing. The compliment is actually necessary reassurance that inadequacies do not exist, not merely reassurance that these inadequacies do not matter: "The woman who complains that her behind is droopy does

not want to be told, ‘I don’t care, because I love you’, but’ Silly girl, it’s a perfect shape, you can’t see it like I can’. It is a commonplace observation that women want to straighten their hair if it is curly and curl it if it is straight, bind their breasts if they are large and pad them if they are small, darken their hair if it is light and lighten it if it is dark”. (Greer, 1999:293) Not all these measures are dictated by the phantom of fashion, but they all reflect dissatisfaction with the body as it is and an insistent desire to be otherwise, not natural, but controlled, fabricated.

Sometimes women appeal not to cosmetics or artificial ornaments for their body, but adopt disguises coming from fear and distaste. The unsatisfying body (or at least, its impression) can be helped away with some soft lighting, frilly underwear, drinks and music. Germaine Greer agrees that the universal sway of feminine stereotype is the single most important factor in both male and female woman hatred. Woman is able to dress in this spectre of plastic in order to conform to the male desire, to become its incarnation. More important though, she must conform to her own expectations which take shape and amplitude due to the media.

Feminists, such as Germaine Greer, or Elizabeth Grosz, recognize the exorbitant efforts women have to make in order to please, but their dissatisfaction comes from the fact that man demands in his arrogance to be loved just as he is. Woman must accept her male’s pot-belly, wattles, bad breath, farting, stubble, baldness and other uglinesses without complaint. Man even refuses to prevent the development of the sadder distortions of the human body which might offend the aesthetic sensibilities of his woman. Greer admits that women cannot simply be content with health and agility, they must make efforts “to appear something that never could exist without a diligent perversion of nature”. (Greer, 1999:293) Greer’s discontent has its source in women’s continual fight to improve their image as long as she must offer her caresses to a subhumanly ugly mate.

My opinion is partially different from hers. I agree that the media not only enters our homes, but also our minds and image/look is already a way of life. What I do not agree with is that “there is no such image for men”. More and more products appear on the market day by day that are exclusively targeted at men and how to cure their image. Lots of magazines and shops are on the market and all they try to do is, along with the physical image and specialized diets, make men get rid of their unpleasant habits.

All these physical “should-be” images are much more developed for women than men. Women who cannot correspond to the societal expectations try to protest against and

resist cultural expectations. For some women, unfortunately, this acting out of resistance is made concrete in typical feminine neuroses. We also encounter similar reactions on the part of the "stronger sex".

Anorexia, together with hysteria is an overwhelmingly feminine neurosis. The anorexic person has a complex relationship with her body that cannot be cashed out without taking into account the body image. The illusory gross distension of the stomach that the subject sees when she steps in front of the mirror can only be explained with the help of an account of relation between cultural ideals of femininity on the one hand, and the empirical reality of the anorexic body on the other. Irigaray offers us a very good example in this sense: "Sixty-nine and a half pounds! I've gained a pound and a half in three days (not counting the five glasses of water I drank before being wheeled here: half a pound perhaps?) My belly feels tight to bursting and suddenly looks obscenely round; reflexively I press it with my palm, resolving not to eat again today. I have a rule when I weigh myself: if I've gained weight, I starve for the rest of the day. But if I've lost weight, I'll starve, too." (Chanter, 1999:372) Anorexia is a form of protest against the definition of "proper body" for women. It is itself a kind of sexualisation (in a mode of renunciation) of the eating process, a displacement of genital sexuality. The body image becomes bloated, extended as the biological reality of the body becomes thinner and frailer.

Hysteria and hypochondria are two neuroses traversing the mind/body split. We deal here with a somatisation of psychical conflicts, where it is the status of the female body that is causing the conflict. The mediatic side of the conflict can also be remarked in hysteria, called by some people "fashions". The exhibited forms of breathing difficulty common for the nineteenth century have relatively disappeared today and have been replaced with the "popular" forms of hysteria of today: eating disorders, anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Today's hysteria has practically no limits. Elaine Showalter has delineated for American society "several manifestations: alien abduction, multiple personalities, sexual abuse in childhood, chronic fatigue, sick building, satanic abuse."

Self-loathing is an important factor in nymphomania which is usually compulsive self-abasement. Pop psychology refers to it in jargon as having a low self-image. It has turned into a fashion of not being satisfied with yourself.

This great number of disorders caused by the body image has made feminists ask "why women have to somatise their conflicts more than men?" Elizabeth Grosz has offered an explanation with reference to the ego: "The ego is not simply bounded by the natural

body. The natural body is constantly augmented by the products of history and culture, which it readily incorporates into its own intimate space." (Grosz, 1997:301) According to Freud, in this case, "man" must be recognised as a "prosthetic god" approaching the phantasy of omnipotence.

In conclusion, I must agree with Luce Irigaray who says that if we aim "to reverse the order of things, even supposing this to be possible, history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness, to phallocratism. What is needed in order for women to invent a female imaginary is to find a way of *never being simply one* – of never sacrificing one pleasure for another. We have to abandon the goal of discovering one true pleasure, of defining woman according to a single essence, of reducing multiplicity to singularity, and pluralism to monism" (Chanter, 1999:373). In other words, Irigaray's theory could be paraphrased as being that women have to be at least twice as good as men in order to be accorded the same rights.

The differences between men and women are numerous and can be found not only at the sexual level. What psychoanalysis did was that it tried to give explanations for different phenomena, to explain that primary childhood can deeply influence our future gender identity. On the other hand, feminists have come forward with arguments that stand for the equality between the sexes, and also genders.

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THE QUEEN FIGURE IN IRISH CULTURE

TUDOR BĂLINIŞTEANU

"Ştefan cel Mare" University of Suceava

Myth and Discourse

This essay is concerned with the Queen figure and its presence in various forms in Irish culture. I will argue in favour of regarding the myth of the Queen as a manifestation of a certain cultural perspective and mental structure inherent to the Irish, perhaps to the whole culture rooted in the Celtic tradition. The Queen myth will thus be revealed as an instance of organising nature (non-human) into culture (human), a perspective based on the works of Claude-Lèvi Strauss.

In this effort of organisation of nature into expression an archetypal pattern emerges. This pattern, rooted in the space of the collective unconscious, surfaces at times throughout the history of Irish culture variously charged with such content as is provided within specific epistemological clusters to define the reality of (subjective) consciousness. According to C. G. Jung:

> A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience. Its form, however (…) might perhaps be compared to the axial system of a crystal (…). The archetype in itself is (…) but a *facultas praeformandi*. (Jung, 1969:13)

Thus, a distinction between myth and discourse needs to be defined, in the framework of this essay. In defining this distinction, I will use the following sets of opposites: sacred/profane, unconscious/conscious, and inner being/outer being. These opposites help to define the relationships within discourse between meaning and significance, on the one hand, and metaphoric and metonymic order, on the other.

According to Mircea Eliade, myths describe primordial events taking place *in illo tempore* (in a space of the sacred). The space of myth is a sacred space, a-historical and a-temporal. In the profane world, the world of the mundane reality, myth is enacted through mythic scenarios underlying rituals, rites and customs. Thus, myths are enacted, made present in the profane world – the reality of which is organised historically and temporally.

I will use the term discourse to refer to the enactment of myths in the realm of the mundane. Discourse, therefore, mediates between myth and mythical text. Mythical texts are versions of myth written in such cultural codes as can allow the structuring of reality in storytelling, literature, drama, film, etc. Mythical scenarios can be detected in the modern arts. The events of storytelling, reading, acting, playing, etc are events by which texts are enacted in dialogical structures.

Thus, discourse interpolates and effects standpoints, constitutes subjects, demands participation. Discourse is also characterised as presence, dialogue, negotiation and an act of knowing.

As an event demanding participation, discourse engages the inner being, which it summons to speak itself out, to objectify itself, to make itself present, thus mediating its becoming an expression in the outer reality. Presupposing dialogue, discourse presupposes an 'Other', making necessary the distinction between inner and outer being assumed simultaneously by all participants in discourse.

Recorded as text, discourse appears sequential, historically and temporally organised. In texts, which are, in a sense, scenarios for discourse, only an outer, expressed being can be contained. Thus outer being is assigned historical and temporal position. Discourse enacted is an act of presence of the inner being, its uttering forth. In this act of presence, a subject of discourse is constituted.

Situated outside discourse, as myth is, the inner being shares in the realm of myth; it is an awareness, a knowing of a primordial state of being unexpressed consciously. Meaning abides in myth and is articulated in the space of the inner being. The inner being is made present in discourse through a process of articulating a double, a process which involves an intuitive perception of semblance, a "*facultas praeformandi*", an archetypal structure not yet filled with content, but whose configuration is, in a sense, the content made available by the disruptive force of a metaphor, revealed in the discourse's metaphoric order.

As an event constituting subjects, discourse organises the realm of subjective consciousness; the structures (mythic scenarios) discourse uses are, however, fluid, changing upon the instant. Constantly interpolated in the act of discourse, subjects assume and are assigned position in a permanently emerging and dissolving configuration.

The delineation of a realm of consciousness in the presence of discourse involves a process of signification which is an attempt to convey, to communicate meaning; an

attempt to signify by establishing relationships of contiguity between sequential stages of discursive interventions. A discursive intervention is but an adjunct of the discursive voices, the metonymic representation of subjects of discourse. Signification emerges in the process of constituting a network of communication founded on an always arbitrarily (re-)negotiated norm. The presence of subjects in discourse is revealed in its metonymic order.

The relationships between myth and discourse could be thus summarised:

- Discourse emerges as the threshold between sacred and profane, inner and outer being, unconscious and conscious.
- Myth belongs to a sacred realm, knowledge of which resides in the inner being; myth shares in the realm of the unexpressed unconscious, while its meaning in the realm of the inner being. Deciphering the metaphoric order of discourse will allow the tracing back of mythic meaning to the point of its articulation beyond historical and temporal organisation.
- Discourse is also a process of signification in which reality is constituted and legitimated as such, in the realm of subjective consciousness. Appealing to (con)textual structures (scenarios), discourse assigns its participants positions as subjects. Thus, discourse reveals itself as a metonymically organised, but fluid, structure.

Mythic Patterns and Discursive Structures

The Queen figure can be found in a variety of mythic patterns, interrelated and overlapping as a result of conflated traditions. However in most Celtic areas the Queen figure is distinctly associated with the regeneration theme. Jeffrey Gantz, referring to Irish mythology, states that "its fundamental orientation seems more seasonal than societal, for the mythic subtext of the tales focus on themes of dying kings and alternating lovers." (Gantz, 1981:23)

The mythic regeneration pattern can be thus summarised: the winter king, a Champion, and the Queen are to be found together initially; a Challenger, the summer king, soon appears and wins the Queen; eventually, the Queen returns to the winter king.

The earliest recorded instances of the regeneration pattern in Irish literature are the surviving manuscripts conventionally known as the Mythological Cycle. In the third section of "The Wooing of Étaín", a story in this cycle, Echu Airem, king of Temuir, is

holding court with his queen, Étaín, when he is visited by a "strange young warrior", Mider of Brí Léith. Mider and Echu play fidchell together. Each time Mider loses he is required to perform great tasks by which fertility is bestowed upon Echu's land. When, eventually, Echu loses, Mider demands Étaín as his prize. Denied this request, Mider, who, as we are led to understand, has courted Étaín every year, steals Echu's queen by changing her and himself into the form of swans, and they thus fly away. Echu assembles a great army and threatens Mider, who is now revealed as a Síde king. Mider fools Echu into marrying his own daughter, who very strongly resembles her mother. Eventually Étaín's daughter is banned and she is won by another king who sets up court with her.

The mythic regeneration pattern as such is indeed based on such tales, because the winning of the Queen is associated with fertility, virility and renewal. The crucial events in the discourse of early Irish literature occur regularly at certain dates that also mark the changing of seasons and the entering of a new phase of agricultural activities. "The Wooing of Étaín" reveals Echu as a powerful, earthly king, Étaín as the fairest woman of Ireland, whose presence is required in the institution of ruling prerogatives, and Mider as a faery king, of great beauty and magic strength, who can restore fertility to the land and perform great tasks *in the process of courting the Queen*.

Thus, both Echu and Mider need Étaín in order to define their status. Such definitions of identity and ontological background emerge in the dynamics of the regeneration pattern. Echu cannot become king unless he has a queen so that fertility of his land be guaranteed. In the second section of "The Wooing of Étaín" we find out that the people of Ériu would not hold the yearly festival at Tara (it is probably Samhuin, as taxes must be reckoned and assessments made) unless Echu (whose institution as king is probably also renewed at this time) has a queen. It is the feis of Tara that is due. According to Jeffrey Gantz, a feis was "originally, a feast during which the tribe's king was married to its tutelary goddess (…)." (Gantz, 1981:269) Thus, Echu's union with Étaín signifies the tribe's gaining protection and legitimation to begin the new year (the Celtic new year begun at Samhuin, on the 1st of November) and the beginning of winter.

Mider's magic power and his status as a powerful Síde king are only defined as he exerts his strength to win the queen. Mider is himself a godly figure as his character derives from an inferred association with the Dagdae, king of the Síde race who has fought the human race for right of sharing Ireland. Thus Mider's union with Étaín signifies an

unleashing of faery powers, by which fertility is restored and the magic renewal of nature in summer begins.

Thus, Étaín is revealed as an agent of change, of qualifying, instituting and legitimating power relations, and as an agent of defining the ontology of seasons by which nature is rendered meaningful. The Queen's presence also qualifies and legitimates social and economic practices by which prosperity and wealth is gained, and a mode of spiritually assuming the magic regenerative powers associated with the coming of spring.

This mythic pattern survived and maintained or shifted meaning and significance, throughout the history of Irish culture. It became embedded as signifying practice throughout Irish history, and it further determined and effected definitions of the real and of subjects as an underlying discursive structure of power relationships within the discourses of arts, politics, and culture.

The Queen as Literary Character

The predominant discursive mode of Irish literature until late in the 16th and the 17th centuries was enactment in the event of storytelling. Early and Medieval Irish literature is based in the filidh or bardic tradition.

Although in decline after the violent colonisation of Ireland by British forces, storytelling remained a powerful way of preserving a sense of cultural identity by reinforcing a specifically Irish ethos, based on a distinct mythological tradition.

The Irish filidh, bard or poet builds on mythological patterns often conflating multiple traditions and deploying the powers of rhetoric. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the aisling poetry emerged, in which representations of the regeneration motif can be often found within conventionalised structures. Later collections of folk stories, such as is that of Lady Wilde, also exhibit features common to both the mythological tales and the bardic tradition. Aisling poetry and the Revivalist folkloric collections stand as proof of a degree of literaturisation of myth.

Both the mythological tales and the aisling poetry and folkloric productions are based in a common tradition of storytelling. There is continuity in employing similar schemes and patterns.

Both early literature (even though written down by monks) and the aisling are produced by the filidh, however distanced apart in time. Given the dependence of bardic literature on mythological motives, such motives continued to be employed within the

caste; possibly, the mythological meaning became opaque to the poet while the pattern has been preserved.

Bardic storytelling relies on producing its effects on the poet's ability to develop a scheme by adding his own variations to such an extent as would not, in fact, produce a dissolution of the scheme. Given this (limited) adaptability of bardic literature to external circumstances, it is likely that the 16th and 17th century bards developed a form of literature able to express a contemporary feeling of alienation and distress while preserving its rooting in the ancient tradition.

A number of common elements can be detected in aisling poetry and the mythological tales. The regeneration pattern sustains an archetypal narrative wherein the Queen (who is the wife or daughter of a powerful earthly king) leaves her husband (impersonating winter) to join his Challenger (a faery king form the Otherworld symbolising the fertility of summer). Their union is an epiphany ensuring the rebirth, the fertility and the regeneration of the land.

In the aisling, the poet often finds himself in a deserted, barren land which suggests a winter like landscape, where he has the vision of the encounter with a Queen or Princess who announces the return of a king who would restore order, joy and fertility to the land.

In the mythological tales winter is signified by the presence of an earthly king who demands that great tasks be performed towards the fertility of the land by a faery king in exchange for the Queen. This usually happens at Samhuin.

In the aisling, the imagery of the space where the bard finds himself before the event of the vision is often a barren land characterised by a gloomy, sullen atmosphere. It would fit a setting as of a landscape in winter. Other key words suggest winter associations and the temporal setting corresponding to Samhuin: "deep night" where the vision is announced by "a magic mist" and the poet becomes "an outcast in places unknown" (Otherworld?), as happens in Eoghan Rua Ó Suileabháin's "A Magic Mist".

In aisling, the poet hopes for the return of a king who has great historical tasks to perform in order to restore joy and peace. The discourse of aisling poetry thus assigns mythic roles to historical events and characters. The winterland is that of Ireland which has become barren and woeful following British full-scale invasion. The faery king is impersonated by the deposed king who fled to France following defeat at the Battle of the Boyne.

Both in the mythological tales and in the aisling poetry the story revolves around the Queen. The Queen character is the most striking similarity between the ancient tales and the aisling as she is described in almost similar terms, to such an extent that the descriptions are interchangeable without causing alteration to the semantic fields associated with her.

The Queen clearly emerges as a representation of Ireland and it is often employed as such throughout Irish literature in a gesture of importing myth in history.

This mode of knowing and defining the reality of historical fact became widespread. This is attested by folkloric versions such as is one recorded by Lady Wilde in her collection of *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* under the title "Eodain the Poetess". The text relates the story of King Eugene of Munster, who left Ireland to lead a life of luxury in Spain (!). Upon returning, he found his kingdom "plundered" and "ruined" and his people "starved". He then requested assistance from the poetess Eodain, the inspirer of poets, who helped him restore "peace and order" to the land.

The presence of the regeneration theme and the impersonation of the Queen figure in Eodain are suggested firstly by Eodain's name, which is probably a form evolved from Étaín, the goddess queen of the mythological tales. We are also told that she is the Leanan-Sidhe, the spirit of life, which definitely suggests her having regenerative powers. Indeed, she helps Eugene restore his powers as king.

The passing from a state of desolation to a state of abundance and joy is very much the essence of the regeneration motif. This 19th century version of older tales fulfils the expectations expressed in the aisling. The woman initiating the vision in the aisling poetry can be connected with the Leanan-Sidhe, the inspirer of poets. Both figures can be connected with Étaín, as impersonations of the mythic Queen figure.

The myth of the Queen as tutelary goddess, spirit of life and spirit of the nation become merged in the space of literary discourse. Dissociated from myth, because of its organisation as text under pressures of a literary tradition and historical reality legitimated in the realm of reason, the Queen figure is enacted in discourse through an event which is also part of political and social practice, thus re-positioning, and creating new configurations for, the subjects participating in discourse. The subjects' inner being, abiding in myth is thus given new modes of expression as outer being in a process which renders the participants in discourse subjects to signifying practices.

The Recuperation of Mythic Meaning

As a site of permanent re-negotiations, the space of discourse is a space of confrontation, exclusion and institution of relationships of power. With the emergence of the discourse of reason in an authoritative position towards the end of 19th century, the mythic mode of knowledge was assigned through exclusion a position at the periphery of discursive practices.

Modern discourse uses structures of signification offered by tradition, imposing "a certain position, a certain gaze and a certain function" "on the knowing subject". (Foucault: 1981, 55)

According to Michel Foucault:

> "a day came when the truth was displaced from the ritualised efficacious and just act of enunciation, towards the utterance itself, its meaning, its form, its object, its relation to its reference." (Foucault, 1981:54)

Literature is thus born as an institutionalised mode of knowledge, replacing the participatory mode of knowledge of myth with the scrutinising mode of knowledge of reason. The authority of text, fact, structure over act, intuition, (ex)change is established. Signification dominates over meaning attempting to contain it and explain it by signifying relationships, in a process that permanently defers it. Truth becomes conceptualised as an expression of, and inherent in, the binding of nature to the presence of the sign rather than as an intuition of, and inherent in, the presence of nature itself. Truth becomes sighted, rather than felt.

Thus meaning and truth are dissociated in literature while they were one in myth. In literature truth becomes a semblance of meaning, and it becomes inherent in the syntagmatic relationships of contiguity which texts purport to establish with reality. Reality, in the practising of the discourse of reason, is constituted and established as such within these relationships of contiguity. In modern discourse, as opposed to the discourse of myth, meaning becomes hidden, and significance foregrounded.

In modern discourse, mythic meaning maintains an oblique relationship to truth. Still articulated in the presence of discourse, mythic meaning subsists in the discourse's metaphoric order while truth resides in the discourse's metonymic order. The presence of

myth in discourse can be apprehended through the disruption of syntagmatic organisation. Metaphors force the discourse's subjects to place themselves within this space of disruption, wrestled as a space of freedom from the airless closure of signifier upon signified.

The recuperation of myth in Irish literature was the project of the Anglo-Irish revival, notably of W. B. Yeats. The challenges met relate to the freeing of meaning from the prison of language and to the investigation of mythic truth as opposed to the truth of reason.

Yeats's "The Shadowy Waters" is structured on the mythological regeneration pattern. Forgael following the killing of Iollan wins Dectora, the Queen figure in the play. Once again, the mythic Queen is summoned to define the ontology of the world.

Forgael represents the poet (like the filidh, he can cast spells by playing his magic harp), and his quest is a quest for a realm which cannot be defined within rational discourse. In Forgael's words:

> "I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.
> Yet sometimes there's a torch inside my head
> That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
> I have but images, analogies (…)." (Yeats, 1997:6)

The reality of reason is defined in the process of signification through "images, analogies", that is, through signifiers and by establishing of relationships of correspondence between signifier and signified.

Such a realm as Forgael longs for is entered only in the presence of and through the consenting union with the Queen.

Like the poets in the aisling poetry, Forgael finds himself in a space of desolation, wandering through "the waste places of the great sea". On a different level this situation signifies the poet's imprisonment within the reality of reason, which he seeks to transcend.

Dectora's joining of Forgael and their love allows them to transcend the reality of reason and thus enter the space of myth where

> "The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
> The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,
> Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life,

Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy." (Yeats, 1997:6)

Dectora's union with Forgael grants him access into a realm which, in Kristevian terms, is the preliminary to meaning, and whose presence Forgael has felt as the force that can disrupt signification. On another level, this is the space of the unconscious wherein the poet's inner being struggles to become named, and wherein the spontaneous overflow of emotion leading to the objectivation of the expression of the inner being in poetic text originates.

The mythic Queen figure resides in Dectora to the extent to which she reveals herself as the very space and possibility of meaning. Like the Queen of the regeneration cycles, who qualifies the ontology of seasons and allows nature to be appropriated in human terms, Dectora both withholds and permits meaning. She allows Forgael to transcend the realm of signification which the passion of their love disrupts, thus freeing meaning and restoring the harmonious presence of the inner being in myth.

According to R. A. Cave, referring to the above quoted passage from Yeats:

"Forgael's quest is more clearly defined here as longing for an amatory union that will bring
him to a state where all oppositions and antinomies will be transcended and he will know what Yeats termed 'unity of being'" (Cave, 1997:276)

In Yeats's modern poetry and drama the Queen figure (also representing elsewhere Ireland), embodies the principle of passion whose lighting up guarantees the release of the inner being and its harmonious integration within a meaningful mythic world. The winterland of the barren reality of reason is thus transcended and access granted into the realm of everlasting youth, of Tir-na-Nog.

The process of redefining the ontology of the real by allowing the invasion of myth creates a kind of subject who longs for release from structures of signification (outer and imposed) and struggles for recuperation of the inner self in myth.

Such positioning of subject creates an identity which, on another level, requires release from British oppression and motivates the struggle for the recuperation of what is now qualified as true Irishness.

The Queen Figure in David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter*

The regeneration pattern and its central figure, the Queen is made manifest in many modern and classic Irish film productions.

David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter* (1970) brilliantly exploits the regeneration pattern. The central character in the film, Ryan's daughter, marries a winter king figure, the middle aged professor of an Irish village. Her entry into highly ritualised social structures, the phallic authoritarian rigid order, exposes these structures as oppressive. The authority of structures is maintained by a combination of British military forces camped in the village (the time setting of the story is the time of the First World War, before the Easter Rising) and the village Catholic priest whose attitude, however altruistic, is nevertheless forbidding towards the young woman's inner longing for what in Yeatsean terms could be called a realm of her heart's desire.

The presence of Challenger is made manifest in the arrival of a young British officer, who is to take command of the British forces camped in the village. His presence as an agent of British authority is problematic, as he himself appears to be a victim of a system that has produced the devastating war machine.

He begins an affair with the professor's wife, which is tragically terminated when discovered by the villagers. Both lovers find themselves caught in (and between) the nets of pre-existing rigid structures, Irish and British. Eventually the woman is returned to the conformist role within the winterland of constraining outer structures, while the British officer kills himself in a self-provoked explosion thus returning to the realm of fire beyond the sea, like a faery prince returning to the Otherworld, the realm of eternal spring.

Ryan's daughter and the British officer are nevertheless able to transcend the pre-conditioning social patterns. Their love allows them access to a mythic realm, suggested in the film by the setting of their secret meetings: a landscape of woods untouched by human hand, neighbouring the sea where distant sunlight is distilled into warm intimacy. It reminds us of the faery realm where Niamh took Oisin.

Just as permanent stay in that realm is not allowed to the mythic hero, so in the world of mortals they reclaim their Queen in order to re-confirm by her exclusion the authority of social structures.

Ryan's daughter as a Queen figure preserves her attribute of being inherent to the process of instituting authority. Yet David Lean is able to explore how modernity has banished mythic meaning to the periphery of the discourse of power. Finally, the

understanding of the meaning of love as distinct from its social practice effects the viewer's position closer to myth. The viewer is thus left in the intimacy of the faery realm. In a sense, it may be said that in moving to contest the rigidity of outer structures the viewer acknowledges such mythic meaning as is present in the Queen's joining of the faery king. Regenerative potential is thus brought into the viewer's awareness.

Conclusion

The Queen myth and the regeneration pattern evolve from the shadowy realms of the ancient tradition of the Celts. Undoubtedly, the centrality of the Queen can be traced back to the times of matriarchy. Impersonating the regenerative powers of creation, the Queen figure allows an experience of the world as a realm of cyclical rebirth and sharing in the mysteries of nature.

With the advent of rationalist discourse to a position of power, such experience became conventionalised, thus being reduced to the status of mere representation, in an urge to signify and foreground significance at the expense of interiorising and foregrounding meaning.

Banned to the space within the interstices of structured discourse, mythic meaning could only be recovered by disrupting the discourse's metonymic order through an exploitation of the disruptive potential of metaphoric discourse. In Irish literature W.B. Yeats best illustrates an effort to free meaning from the enclosed space designated through signification.

Inevitably, this leads to the constitution of a new kind of subject and a remaking of identity with consequences in the realm of social and political practice. Re-contained within newly institutionalised power structures, mythic meaning re-emerges in manifestations of contemporary cultural life.

By virtue of its power to define ontology and identity the Queen figure appears as a principle of play, archwritten in the grand narrative of Irish cultural history. It signals the presence of sets of binary opposites ascribed to the domains associated with renewal (spring) as opposed to desolation and coldness (winter). The poles opposed remain male dominated: they are erections of structures and authority. By putting them into play, the Queen deconstructs the phallic order, dissolves and plays out authority against the forces seeking to dominate and freeze the play.

As in myth, where the kings need the Queen in order to legitimate their institutions as sovereigns, cultural and signifying structures need the space of signification, the realm of undifferentiated harmony, the substance to be contained and mastered, against and in reference to which to define themselves.

Thus, perhaps rediscovering mythic meaning would grant access to a mythic reality of essences, beyond a reality defined and constructed by signification in the process of which the truth of the inner being and of its mythic substance is but deferred and alienated.

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MOTHERHOOD AND LATE-VICTORIAN FEMINISM

TRACEY S. ROSENBERG

University of Edinburgh

When American writer Gertrude Atherton visited London in 1889, her introduction to Mona Caird might have been a historic meeting. Only a year earlier Caird had shot to notoriety after the *Westminster Review* published her essay "Marriage" (1888), in which she argued that marriage was a patriarchal system which adapted primitive standards to modern society. The *Daily Telegraph*, seeking to enliven its pages during the "silly season" of late summer, used Caird's essay as an excuse to ask its readers, "Is Marriage a Failure?" Over the following six weeks, until the Whitechapel murders seized the media's full attention, the newspaper received more than twenty-seven thousand responses. The American publication *Cosmopolitan* also took up the question. (Marks, 1990:51) The *Telegraph*'s question led not only to a trans-Atlantic debate among the bourgeoisie, but a backlash against the writer of the original essay; Caird was marked as a social radical who had no qualms in destabilising one of society's foundations.

Nor was Gertrude Atherton a stranger to controversy. While a young married woman in her native state of California, she had written a thinly-veiled account of a local scandal. This had caused outrage among her social circle, though she cared about nothing except being the cause of such sensation. (Atherton, 1932:102) On the sudden death of her husband, Atherton chose to pursue a writing career, moving to New York and then to Paris. There she met the writer William Sharp, who thought highly of her novel *Hermia Suydam* (1889).

Mona Caird's relationship with Sharp was a result of her friendship with his wife Elizabeth. The Sharps cultivated the acquaintance of many artists and writers, and Atherton became part of their circle when William invited her to stay with him and his wife in London. After this visit, but before moving into her own lodgings, Atherton spent a few days with Mona Caird.

In her memoirs, Atherton describes Caird's house as lovely, and notes that the drawing-room was done entirely in "primrose yellow - walls, furniture, carpet." (Atherton, 1932:172) Caird's taste was unusual for her time, and her choice of yellow leads to interpretations of drama and aestheticism. Her 1891 short story "The Yellow Drawing-Room" focuses on a woman whose refusal to conform to a traditional

colour-scheme is “a manifestation of [her] unpredictability and her refusal to submit to male domination”. (Forward, 2000:300) This description can also be applied to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), which in the late twentieth century was to become an emblematic feminist fable. Gilman wrote this story a year before Caird published hers, indicating that neither writer had been influenced by the other, but the conjunction highlights that the colour “best represented the art of the 1890s.” (Forward, 2000:300)

Similarly, Gertrude Atherton used her fiction to challenge women’s restricted roles. In *A Whirl Asunder* (1895), the heroine wears men’s clothing and hides in the forest to witness a primal male-only rite, while the eponymous heroine of *Patience Sparhawk and Her Times* (1897) separates from her upper-class husband and supports herself as a journalist. This latter novel bears a plot resemblance to Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), in which a woman leaves her husband and children in order to study as a composer in Paris.

Caird and Atherton might well have found a mutual alliance when they met in 1889, even if their personal views had ultimately been less similar than their literary work. However, Atherton’s account of her visit is almost entirely negative. Atherton’s memoirs claim that five-year-old Alister Caird was, in fact, being raised in an unconventional manner based entirely on his mother’s views:

> Mrs. Caird was proud of the fact that she had evolved out of her own inner consciousness a new way to bring up children; this solitary offspring of hers had never been cuddled, coddled, punished, crossed, admonished, or coerced by rules of any kind. He was to bring himself up and be one of her minor offerings to a benighted world. (Atherton, 1932:172-3)

With one exception - a reception Caird gave in Atherton’s honour, noted for Thomas Hardy’s obsession with San Francisco cable cars - the encounter with young Alister is the only incident Atherton cites from her “dull” visit. The episode centres around her trunk, which she had to open in the front hall. After bringing some essential items to her room, Atherton returned to the hall, where she found “a small boy sitting in the top tray among my hats! He stared at me stolidly when I told him to remove himself and settled back more comfortably, his elbow planted

on my best hat." (Atherton, 1932:173) Atherton's response to the boy's minor infraction is outrage and physical abuse:

> There was no one else in the hall. I took him by the back of his neck, shook him soundly, and deposited him none too gently on the floor. 'You cannot sit in my trunk, whatever you may do in your mother's,' I said severely. 'Now, understand that once for all.' (Atherton, 1932:173)

Atherton indicates that she is well aware that her treatment of the boy merits chastisement; she fully expects him to "lift up his voice and howl" in response, thus "bringing to the scene an indignant mother, who would probably order me out of the house." (Atherton, 1932:173) In fact, Alister reacts quite differently, which Atherton clearly considers to be Caird's fault:

> But he merely stared at me in awe-struck admiration for a moment, then he sprang nimbly to his feet, ran out into the garden, and returned with a handful of flowers which he held up to me with a pathetically eager expression on his dirty freckled face. Poor thing, I suppose it was the first human attention any one had ever shown him. (Atherton, 1932:173)

Atherton's condemnatory verdict is that Caird's child-raising methods are so deficient that her son, when mistreated, instead of striking back or reacting as the injured party, clings to the person who has heeded him more than his own mother. Atherton concludes by describing how the boy subsequently devoted himself to her. She places herself as the superior maternal figure, whose rough treatment brings the boy greater happiness than Caird's ideologically-based neglect.

Unfortunately, Caird has left no direct response to Atherton's charges. None of her personal papers have come to light, and her known biography is so thin that this meagre account constitutes the entire contemporary view of her child-rearing beliefs. Though solid biographical evidence is lacking, Caird's opinions on motherhood can be extrapolated from her writing. There are few children in her pre-1900 novels, except for younger versions of the heroines. More importantly, Caird does not use children as instruments of

redemption or as the pinnacle of achievement for women's lives. This in itself marks her as distinct; many of her contemporaries believed that the Woman Question could only be answered through emancipation, yet held that motherhood was the core of a woman's identity. For these writers, only when maternity was embraced by forward-thinking women could society maintain the stability that *fin-de-siècle* decadence and degeneration threatened to unbalance.

Grant Allen supported this view in his infamous New Woman novel *The Woman Who Did* (originally published 1895). The work stems from Allen's belief that "maternity defined womanhood" (Russett, 1989:43), a belief Allen preached as a "gospel of evolutionary rationalism derived from the work of [Charles] Darwin and Herbert Spencer." (Wintle, 1995:5) Free union, rather than marriage, would ensure that women maintained their independence - but such emancipation should be used to raise children. Allen's heroine knows that denying marriage while embracing "the eternal religion of maternity" (Allen, 1995:137) will result in social martyrdom; she is willing to suffer this "for women's sake". (Allen, 1995:42) A consummate New Woman, college-educated and able to support herself by writing, the heroine nevertheless emphasises the needs of others, particularly her daughter. When the girl turns out to be conventional, rejecting the ideals for which her mother suffered, the Woman Who Did commits suicide. This final act of self-sacrifice is made not simply in recognition that her beliefs are too advanced for the world as it exists, but to allow her daughter to perpetuate the legitimate social order.

Mona Caird's method of raising her son does not appear to have prevented him from becoming a productive member of society. It is tempting to draw conclusions regarding his choice of a military career, which by its very nature demands discipline and a high degree of conformity - something he does not seem to have received as a boy. Yet it is clear (if "benign neglect" is indeed an accurate portrayal of her mothering practices) that Caird went against the grain of her time. A woman of strong principles who believed that society's treatment of women was based on oppression, she appears to have consciously rejected the demand to "guarantee both morally perfect children and a morally desirable world". (Chodorow and Contratto, 1982:64)

But there are strong indications that Gertrude Atherton's account of Mona Caird is not wholly objective. Atherton seemingly disliked sharing the spotlight with other women, especially those who followed the same paths she did; although she became friends with "newspaper women," in her writing she is overtly hostile to emancipated women writers.

One example in her memoir involves a woman identified only as an "EMINENT FEMINIST." The situation is eerily similar to that of Caird; both involve a male child (freckled and with a dirty face) effectively abandoned by a mother too concerned with her rhetorical stance to worry about her offspring. Atherton's biographer, Emily Wortis Leider, claims that this feminist was Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who was publicly condemned for giving up her daughter Katharine, even though the girl was well-raised by Gilman's ex-husband and his wife. Katharine herself, years later, said that when she lived with her mother, she was "happy, confident, and self-sufficient. She was not lonely." (Hill, 1980:233) However, her playground between the ages of four and nine was the freightyard, and in general she lived an unchaperoned and unattended existence: "'Ostensibly' she was living with her mother, but in reality she was 'turned loose' on the neighborhood", perpetually taking second place to her mother's health and career. (Hill, 1980:233)

Behind her dual condemnation of Caird and the "eminent feminist," Atherton is addressing serious issues about maternity and maternal instinct as experienced by late nineteenth-century women who did not accept the role of motherhood as central to their lives. Maternal instinct became a critical element in discussions of gender differences, especially in the forty years following publication of Charles Darwin's heavily influential work *The Origin of Species* (1859). Herbert Spencer, a biological and sociological writer, was one of the major influences of the time, in spite of the fact that his "attempt to derive social theory from physics and biology" was made without his grasping "the biological concepts with which to go about his work" (Conway, 1972:140). Spencer believed that instinct towards the care of offspring is possessed by both genders, but "That the particular form [...] which responds to infantine helplessness is more dominant in women than in men, cannot be questioned." (quoted in Russett, 1989:43) In 1891, a lengthy Darwin- and Spencer-oriented discussion on pathological and physiological differences of the male and female nervous systems led one doctor to argue that sexual selection in women led to "Her chief mental characteristic, that round which her whole mental being centres, viz., the maternal instinct". (Campbell, 1891:46) Darwinism "was suffering a decline in the estimation of biologists" by the time Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson wrote *The Evolution of Sex* (1889), in which "they dismissed sexual selection as a teleological notion," and their interpretation of maternal instinct is grounded in a more pragmatic physical foundation. (Sayers, 1982:39) A lactating female animal who no longer has her

own offspring will “adopt” other nursing animals so as to relieve the physical pressure, “yet we soon see these established in her affections.” (Geddes and Thomson, 1889:270) The conclusion is that it is impossible to consider “even maternal care as altogether disinterested.” (Geddes and Thomson, 1889:270) The end of the section states that, for mammals, “parental care is general, and unquestionably grows into love for offspring” (Geddes and Thomson, 1889:274). Although for Geddes and Thomson, the burden is not necessarily placed entirely on the mother, maternal instinct as seen in the late-Victorian era is one of many “sex roles [that] were interpreted according to the accepted roles of contemporary social convention” (Conway, 1972:153).

Elisabeth Badinter’s work on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France offers a radical theoretical view of maternal instinct. Badinter claims that this “instinct” is in fact “a socially conditioned ‘sentiment’ that varies widely with the mores of different epochs”. (du Plessix Gray, 1981:x) Her argument has stunning implications for the high rates of Victorian infant morality; according to Badinter, it “was not so much because children died like flies that mothers showed so little interest in them, but rather because the mothers showed so little interest that the children died in such great numbers.” (Badinter, 1981:60) Between 1760 and 1830, the fundamental view of childhood changed from “a brutal indifference toward the welfare of infants” to “the most solidly institutionalized concern for offspring yet witnessed in the Christian era.” (du Plessix Gray, 1981:xi-xii) Yet in order to bring about a deep and lasting alteration, the attitudes of the mothers themselves had to change. Numerous advice manuals testify to the efforts made to convince mothers of the moral and emotional commitment owed to children. In general, motherhood became increasingly more of a social concern as the century progressed, becoming “defined as a skill that had to be learned, rather than behaviour that could be acquired” and thus being handed over to experts in morality and health (clergymen and doctors) as well as to women whose experience was stable and weighty enough to justify being distributed to others. (Gorham, 1982:65) Society was taking greater responsibility for the treatment of children. Yet although advice manuals provided new mothers with the necessary skills, at the same time, those mothers were taught that they *must* love their children and that their own innate nature proved that this was their ideal feminine role.

Caird rejected this conclusion. In her 1890 essay “The Emancipation of the Family,” she argues that being a parent in no way ensures a person is the best suited for bringing up a child. This can only be accomplished by “those who have a natural gift for

the work" - instinct by another name. Moreover, this "natural gift" is insufficient by itself, and must be supplemented by a thorough grounding in moral and intellectual beliefs, as well as the more practical tenets of good hygiene. (Caird, 1897:154-55) Caird wanted to abolish the belief "that the mother should always take charge of her child, or rather, that she should not allow one more competent than herself to do so." (Caird, 1897:155) Competency in raising a child may require an instinct for nurturance and care, but it is an instinct which is not restricted to a child's biological mother. Caird expresses similar views in *Whom Nature Leadeth*; Leonore, seeking absolution to give up her creativity because it is impossible to meet the needs of both art and domesticity, is instead advised (by a character who clearly represents Caird's ideal masculine figure) to embrace art and abandon domesticity entirely. Leonore should not only allow her servants to run the household, but "leave the management of [her] children's dress, education, and daily life in the hands of some refined, well-educated lady, who knows and will carry out [her] views." (Caird, 1883:320) This is effectively what Leonore's own mother had done, with beneficial results. Caird clearly believes that severing the physical act of reproduction from "maternal instinct" is the most suitable solution for the children as well as their mothers.

That Atherton had great anxiety about her position as a woman, particularly as a mother, can be seen in her condemnation of other women who behaved similarly, whether through deliberate physical "abandonment" of a child in the case of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, or perceived emotional deprivation, as appears to have occurred with Mona Caird. Both Atherton and Caird attempted to replace the supremacy of motherhood in a woman's life with the more individualist goal of writing (each woman wrote steadily for several decades). Caird worked extensively within the anti-vivisection movement and supported the suffrage movement for many years, approaching these goals from the standpoint of personal integrity and an abhorrence for the use of force by one party to dominate another. Arguments that woman's "nature" prepared her only for a life of domesticity and nurturance, that her main role was to act as moral guidance counsellor to the next generation, and that she was ultimately "defined [...] in terms of a sexual function" (Pykett, 1992:15) were rejected in favour of becoming a "seeker after truth, personal fulfilment and a measure of social and sexual equality with men." (Pykett, 1992:10) Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that although the two women might well have been able to provide support for each other, Atherton was unable to see Caird as anything other than the "bad" mother that she undoubtedly feared she herself was.

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Gender and Society

PATRIARCHY IS DEAD! LONG LIVE PATRIARCHY!

IOANA SĂLĂGEAN

Women's Studies Centre, Timişoara

This essay addresses the issue of "queerness" in terms of its visibility and its assimilation into the mainstream middle class culture within the framework of postmodern consumerism. It is an attempt to contribute to the debate regarding the relation a peripheral discourse like that of queer studies ought to have to the masculinist mainstream patriarchal system in late capitalism and to offer a reflection upon the dynamics of this relation.

I will exemplify and discuss the way in which the limited assimilation of queer spectacles, styles and identities functions in large part to lay claim to a postmodern cosmopolitanism, i.e. a system in which gender and other hierarchies are readily subverted or no longer seen as valid. The systematic persistence of patriarchy is thus hidden (and safe). The gender flexibility promoted by postmodern patriarchy is even more pernicious and insidious because it spreads the illusion that patriarchy has disappeared. Yet, the death of patriarchy should never be taken for granted, it should always be questioned. *Patriarchy is dead!* is followed by *Long live patriarchy!*

Taking the arguments Rosemary Hennessy develops in her article *Queer visibility in commodity culture* as a starting point, I will discuss the controversial role played by queer in some of the latest debates that have arisen in the attempt to differentiate the category of **pornography**, as something that needs to be censored or charged with obscenity, from that of **erotica** (considered as art), defensible on grounds of freedom of expression. In doing this, I also want to emphasize the paramount importance these issues present for feminist studies. If the queer project may have the advantage of learning from the "older" feminist project, feminism should follow with interest the queer project, and constantly reposition particular stands that may be proven to have worked out the wrong way. (Queer studies can be considered a child of feminist studies; the relationship between them is an intimate one, queer develops at a certain point from feminist studies when it realizes that feminism does not properly handle lesbianism which should in fact associate with gay instead of other women as they share the same enemy: heteronormativity).

Researchers and/or activists dedicated to lesbian and gay political projects (as well as to the feminist project) are today facing an excruciating dilemma: they have fought for visibility, which they have gained in many respects. However, although their struggle has

achieved important positive effects (many affirmative representations of gays and lesbians in the mainstream media that have led to empowerment and prepared the ground for the gay civil rights movements, as well as the legitimisation of queer studies in mainstream academia, etc.) the much-desired visibility seems to have served others better than their own aims: it has served the consumerism of the capitalist society well. (Here I have to mention that I refer to a western situation, which is certainly not the case in Romania - a country where gays and lesbians have no visibility at all; in this respect a strategy to avoid the problematic outcome of gays/lesbians visibility could be of interest for an eastern feminist). It did not take much for the queer theoreticians and activists to realize that the growing visibility of gay/lesbians is less an indicator of "a growing acceptance of homosexuality, than of capitalism's appropriation of gay styles for mainstream audiences" (Hennessy, 1995: 143). Beaten on their own ground, homosexuals had their revolution confiscated. Yet, is queer to be blamed for complicity with capitalist consumerist culture? Against Hennessy's arguments, it may be argued that while queer does indeed acknowledge the commodification of its spectacle in capitalist culture, it does so in order to enable a critique of it through its very exploitation of this power.

Hennessy (1995:144) tries to trace the trajectory that has led to this situation. In order to do so she starts by criticizing academic gay studies and queer theory for retreat from historical materialism to social and cultural theory (a much safer ground), a move that results in an insufficient exploration of the relationship between sexuality and capitalism and between sexuality and commodification.

This seems to be an old story - as in many respects we may argue that the same trajectory has been followed in the feminist political project. The *turn to the cultural* in feminist studies has been interpreted as having been a means to sidestep many of the problems, which have arisen in feminist studies (Lury, 1995:34). In what the class interests are concerned, for feminism this issue may be as old as de Beauvoir, who from 1970-71 on identified the danger that "the moment a woman gets power she ends up adopting masculine standards and loses track of the solidarity that ought to link her to other women" (Leon, 1995:142). Does what has been defined as *additive feminism* (Lury, 1995:35) correspond to the location of queer studies today? Has queer fallen into the same trap as feminism once did?

Hennessy (1995:142) argues that within a capitalist consumption framework, visibility of sexual identity becomes often a matter of commodification. Consequently, we

are tempted to believe we face a new world, a world in which gays are welcome to exist, to be visible, yet we fail to realize that their visibility is welcome only as long as it serves to produce new and potentially lucrative markets, as it brings more money into the system.

By positing a primarily sexual issue, *queer* involves the danger of missing the intersections of sexuality with class, race, nationality and other categories that situate individual lesbians and gays in dramatically different ways (which is so for feminism as well). In order to avoid this *queer* realized their target should be heteronormativity and not heterosexuality, acknowledging thus that the latter is an institution organizing "more than just the sexual […] it is socially pervasive, underlying myriad taken-for-granted norms that shape what can be seen, said and valued" (Hennessy, 1995:146). The aim of queer visibility actions was definitely not a desire to include queer in the culturally dominant system, but to continually pressure and disclose the heteronormative - they claimed a position that would be both anti-assimilationist and antiseparatist. What happened then?

Hennessy identifies the problems she addresses within queer theory and politics as similar to the contradictions that marked the evolution of the avant-garde in the West over the past hundred years. History repeats itself. Queer is becoming the new avant-garde. Born as a radical political project by declaring art as an instrument of social revolution, the avant-garde, unlike aestheticism, aimed to reintegrate art into meaningful human activity by leading it back to social praxis. It attacked, as queer theory and activism the philosophical and political assumptions reigning in the bourgeois-realist conceptions of representation and visibility. It set out to shock the bourgeoisie (the dominant). It was a political project that proposed to supersede the limitations of its cultural politics. It involved strategies for disrupting the organization of everyday life in commodity culture.

Eventually, the avant-garde fail to accomplish its aims by participating on their own in the increasing commodification of social life, retreating to cultural experimentation as their principal political forum. The fact that the term avant-garde now connotes primarily and almost exclusively artistic innovation is a proof of its failure as a socio-political project.

Queer **Lifestyle**

Hennessy considers the more general aestheticization of everyday life in consumer capitalism as one aspect which accounts for the avant-garde's gravitation towards cultural politics (1995:164). In order to expand and be better off, capitalism thought of its own way (epitomized in advertising) of encouraging the integration of art and life. One effect of this

aestheticization is a further mystification of the social relations on which cultural production depends. The whole range of new tastes and sensations, become pleasures in themselves and conceal the labour that made them possible. The aesthetic emphasis increases the importance of style as a marker of identity and social value. Furthermore, a new term was coined in the 1970s in the United States: *lifestyle*. It was to promote individuality, self-expression and the conception of the self as a fashioned identity. Whereas Hennessy argues that *lifestyle* would come to even better obscure social hierarchies, Celia Lury describes *lifestyle* as a way of promoting social hierarchies:

> As a mode of consumption or attitude to consuming, it refers to the ways in which people seek to display their individuality or their sense of style through the choice of a particular range of goods and their subsequent customizing or personalizing of these goods. This activity is seen to be a central life project for the individual. As a member of a particular lifestyle grouping, the individual actively uses consumer goods [...] in ways which indicate that grouping's taste or sense of style. In this sense lifestyle is thus an instance of the tendency for groups of individuals to use goods to make distinctions between themselves and other groups of individuals and thus supports the view that consumption practices can be understood in terms of a struggle over social positioning (Lury, 1996: 80).

Lifestyle does not obscure social hierarchies, it is even an indicator of the social position, yet it does hide the economic behind the cultural, as limited access to resources precludes some people's aestheticization project. As it presents itself as "the most stylish of the many attitudes on sale in the mall" (Berlant and Freeman, 1992:167), queer participates in the postmodern aestheticization of daily life (Hennessy, 1995:167).

Queer **in fashion and entertainment**

[...]It seems forever stopped today
All the good women are married
All the handsome men are gay
(Robin Williams, Love Supreme)

The business of fashion and entertainment was probably the first to notice the huge, ripe potential present in homoerotic imagery. As an industry that usually sets the tone and rushes to where the money is, it easily identified *and* constructed *gay* as a hot commodity. No sooner had a gender-bending aesthetics been formed than it became incorporated into the gender structure of postmodern patriarchy. Gays are included in the elastic community of pleasure seekers and a tentatively more pliant heterosexual sex/gender system, which had so far rigidly kept the connections between sex, gender and sexual desire. This flexibility comes together with the shift of the gendered divisions of labour in the middle class.

The very process by means of which gay cultural codes and styles become appropriated helps to the reconfiguration of the same patriarchal gender system in a more postmodern mode, with looser links between gender and sexuality. This appropriation of the queer parody of authentic sex and gender identities is quite compatible with the aestheticization of everyday life into postmodern lifestyles. Not only does this limited assimilation of gays into mainstream middle class culture not disrupt postmodern *patriarchy* and its intersection with *capitalism* it is in some way quite integral to it.

The claims of a postmodern cosmopolitanism, of a system in which gender hierarchies no longer operate or are readily subverted has tended to hide the systematic persistence of patriarchy. Thus, the gender flexibility promoted by the postmodern patriarchy is even more pernicious and insidious because it spreads the illusion that patriarchy has disappeared. Behind the curtain, corporate interests celebrate (and extract the profits from) the discovery of new markets.

Which specific niche of homosexuals has been granted visibility? Obviously the choice has been that of a certain class specific lesbian and gay consumer population. Homosexuals are stereotyped in images of wealthy, healthy, happy and beautiful free-spending consumers. It is only by the "visibility" of this sort of gay consumer that "tolerance of gays makes sense" (Tobias 1992, in Hennessy, 1995:172).

The case of queer pornography

In the realm of pornography the class dimension rules as well. In the rebirth of the debate around the attempt to differentiate pornography from what should be felt to

constitute erotica, pornography has come to be defined as "worthless trash" and to be associated with the low class, whereas erotica (as art) pertains to the upper-middle class. It seems to me that erotica, coined as a term to enter the general vocabulary only in the 1950s and 60s as pornography became increasingly tainted with low class association is an invention of the middle class, a word needed to designate the increasing number of materials dealing unequivocally with sex - but in a "safe and classy way". It was a strategy of segregation: "Pornography and erotica are the same thing. The only difference is that erotica is the stuff bought by rich people; pornography is what the rest of us buy" (John Preston, veteran photographer and editor of *Flesh and the Word* (1992), a collection of stories by and about gay men, quoted in Kendrick, 1996:242).

Towards the beginning of the new millennium, the printed word has been declared *sexually* dead, (now that pornography means pictures, preferably moving pictures). (Kendrick, 1996:243). In 1992, one "late", "erotic" book is published. Simply entitled *Sex* the prerequisite for this book was of course the fame (visibility) of its author: the controversial, "always just on the safe side" pop singer star Madonna. The book would have definitely been labelled pornographic had it been published 20 years before. The fact that it was now able to claim to pertain to the genre of erotica is also proof of a more flexible, broader general public tolerance of sexual imagery. (Usually this tolerance is far broader in practice than in theory, if we think that many of the acts hinted at in *Sex* are illegal in most parts of the United States: whipping, bondage, bestiality, intergenerational sex, group sex, etc.).

The most remarkable and appealing thing about Madonna's book was definitely not her nudity, but its persistent flirtation with homosexuality and sadomasochistic practices - a little naughty, yet acceptable: to best define Madonna! Thus, her book represents one "living" proof of the customary appropriation and entrepreneurial commodification of gay and lesbian images from a heterosexual standpoint (taking into consideration Madonna's heterosexuality). Two of the gay critics at that time declared:

> Everything about *Sex* is made possible by Madonna's celebrity, and her celebrity is constructed, in however complex a way, as *heterosexual*. She can be as queer as she wants to, *but only because we know she is not* (Crimp and Warner, 1993:93, my emphasis added).

The *Butler* Decision

In February 1992, the Canadian Supreme Court upheld the obscenity provision of the criminal code, ruling that, although the anti-pornography law infringes on the freedom of expression, it is legitimate to suppress materials that harm women. The unanimous decision - in the case of Butler vs. the Crown - also redefined obscenity based on what subordinates or degrades women. At that time, Catharine MacKinnon, the well-known anti-pornography feminist activist declared:

> This makes Canada the first place in the world that says that obscene is what harms women, not what offends our values. [...] In the United States the obscenity laws are all about not liking to see naked bodies or *homosexual activity in public*. Our laws don't consider the harm to women. But in Canada it will now be materials that subordinate, degrade or dehumanise women that are obscene (Catharine MacKinnon cited in *The New York Times*, February 28, 1992, emphasis added).

The case involved the owner of a Manitoba shop that sold and rented out hard-core videotapes and magazines. The owner, Donald Victor Butler was prosecuted under laws prohibiting the manufacture, sale or distribution of obscene materials, possession of obscene materials for distribution or sale, or public display of obscene material.

The Canadian criminal law provided that any publication that has as a dominant characteristic the “undue exploitation of sex” is obscene. Offenders are usually fined rather than jailed, and the law does not cover those who privately possess the material. Butler challenged the charges on the ground that the material was protected by the guarantee of freedom of expression in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was passed in 1982 and has provisions similar to those of the U.S. Constitution.

“This case is the first test of the obscenity laws under the charter’s provision on freedom of expression,” said Kathleen Mahoney, the lawyer who argued the case for the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund. “But the charter also has strong equality section. The court said that while the obscenity law does limit the charter’s freedom of expression guarantee, it’s justifiable because this type of expression harms women personally, harms their right to be equal, affects their security and changes attitudes toward them so that they become more subject to violence.” (*New York Times*, February 27, 1992)

Many feminists welcomed this new law as progressive (see Catharine MacKinnon's statement). Yet, in Canada, in the post-Butler years, what really happened was that straight, mainstream, *sexist* pornography flourished, while gay and lesbian sex and s/m sex, i.e. sexual representations that challenged conventional notions of sexuality became the real focus of censorship, now by invoking Butler's decision. What was to have been a feminist victory turned out to be a new strategy to promote homophobic attitudes. MacKinnon was wrong. In the collection of essays entitled *Bad Attitude/s on Trial*, which set out to challenge the dominant feminist reading of this case as a feminist victory, Becki L. Ross critically examines the expert testimony she delivered in defence of *Bad Attitude*, an American Lesbian sex magazine seized by the police from Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto in 1992, immediately after the Butler case. She uses as an example Madonna's book *Sex*, that (no wonder) had not been subject to obscenity charges of any kind:

> Sex's metal covers serve as a bullet proof, anti-cop shield held up smugly by the multinational dynasty Time-Warner and its stable of crackerjack entertainment lawyers. As is common practice among media magnates, Time Warner sought and obtained pre-clearance for Sex from Canada Customs. Lawyer Brian Blugerman of the prestigious Canadian firm Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt was hired to instruct customs officials on how to interpret Sex: 'Since there was no penetration we could say it was just violence, no sex. Violence alone is OK under Butler' (cited in Toobin 1994, 76). Blugerman notes that in order to pre-empt a censorious strike at the border they could have used the 'internal necessities test' of 'artistic defence', but they didn't need to (Ross, 1997:170-71).

The book's embeddedness in the legitimising discourses of high art and fashion secured its (not to mention the publishers') virtual inviolability. This is not the case of other gay/lesbian representations. Thus, a new distinction is being made: between a *good* sex and a *bad* sex. The good one is definitely the one worthy of being assimilated (for specific aims), being granted visibility, and the bad one is that of the "other", i.e. rejected and not assimilated within the mainstream discourse. The assimilation works like the transplant of an organ: it is rejected if it does not serve the needs of the organism.

Coming back to the question *Is queer to be blamed for complicity with capitalist consumerist culture?* brings me to Fredric Jameson's provocative argument about postmodernism. He argues - against Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* - that the nature

of advanced capitalism makes postmodernism not merely one style among others, but the cultural dominant of our age. Postmodernism in the age of globalisation is not an option any more, postures of being pro or against it can only be moralizing gestures. There is no critical distance, no possible step back from the standpoint of which one can maintain such a stance. We are all in it and resistance can only come from within. In this sense it is our job to never stop questioning how our positions (as feminists, or queer activists, etc.) contribute to its ends. We are all in complicity.

As globalisation transforms capitalism, it also transforms sexual identity opening up both new forms of commodification and new opportunities for agency. On the one hand middle-class gays and lesbians are enjoying unprecedented visibility, but on the other society still relies on the gendered division of labour that renders certain subjects unequal. The lesson to be learned from this is that it is exactly by displaying new forms of flexibility in the once-rigid links between sex, gender and sexual desire that capitalism once again deflects attention from the divisions of wealth and labour.

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NATION, LITERATURE, AND GENDER - OUTLINES FOR A ROMANIAN CASE STUDY

VOICHIŢA NĂCHESCU

Women's Studies Centre, Timişoara

Feminist literary criticism has often been accused of losing connection with activism, with the less artistic everyday problems of the many, and thus not only of offering no solution to the discrimination faced by real women, but sometimes completely losing sight of it. While the high degree of theoretical knowledge necessary to understand the works of Kristeva, for example, and the fact that the immediate social effects of such reading or teaching are not particularly striking, may plead for this claim, I am going to argue in favour of feminist literary criticism as producing new insights that do not lose sight of social problems. One of the premises governing my approach is that not all feminist literary criticism can be described and accused *in toto* and that there are different trends governed by different assumptions about what one understands by an author, especially a woman author, and the nature of the relationship between her and the text signed by her; one of my attempts will be to highlight how a variety of feminist literary criticisms can be used. Another premise of my approach arises from the need to introduce into our equation containing gender and literature a third variable, namely the various ideologies of the nation state. The reason for this inclusion is simple: for at least one hundred and fifty years, literature has not been produced, disseminated, and evaluated as literature *per se*, but as part of a specific organization of discourse in specific historical circumstances, amongst which the fact that literary works were produced in national states and as parts of *national literatures* can be notably suggestive. Nation, literature and gender could be the theme of this paper - how they interconnect and in what circumstances feminist literary criticism is able to bridge the apparent distance between reading rooms and underpaid women, especially underpaid women in "feminized" professions. As nationalisms also vary, I will refer mainly to Central and Eastern European nationalisms, often called linguistic nationalisms, and I will take my examples from Romanian history – not limiting that to literary history. However, as most of the theoretical tools used have a more general reference, hopefully the conclusions regarding the way nation, literature and gender interconnect can also be relevant for other Central and Eastern European circumstances.

Let us begin by evaluating the role that the construction of a national language (by initiating and subsequently building a national literature) played in the national projects in Central Europe. As Miroslav Hroch has proved, based on sociological and historical evidence, most Central and Eastern European nationalisms ("small nations" nationalisms) began with a literary movement, a search for folklore and the cultivation of literature in the language of the people involved. Hroch states that all nationalisms in Central Europe generally passed through a three-phase process: first a period in which intellectuals were concerned with the study of language, of the culture and the history of the "oppressed nation" (Hroch's term); second, a stage of patriotic agitation, in which a group of "patriots […] who were already dissatisfied with the antiquities of the land, the language and the culture […] saw their mission as the spreading of national consciousness among the people" (Hroch, 1985:22, 23) and third, a phase when a mass national movement finally took place. Hroch's model allocates all effective action to phase 2 and 3, while the first, motivated in his view only by scholarly interest, was apolitical both in intent and outcome. This would seem to deny any relationship between literature and politics, or, in a narrower sense, between literature and nationalism. Nevertheless, Hroch's own conclusion based on quantitative sociological analysis of the social componence of the groups of patriots involved in the second phase of the movement - that of spreading the national word among the masses - would appear to raise doubts about the political innocence of the concern with folklore: the only conclusion Hroch's analysis allows for is that in this second phase the majority involved was represented by "intelligentsia", namely all those who "lived from their intellectual labour" (Hroch, 1985:129).

One might avoid the rigid Marxian framework of Hroch's analysis, and pay more attention to the intellectual context in which these nations' nationalisms developed. Particularly influential during the whole nineteenth century in Central and Eastern Europe were the ideas of Herder. To summarise a rather sophisticated and sometimes even incoherent theory, Herder basically focused on the strong links between language and "national *geist*". This *geist* was a result of geographic site, tradition, and genetic inheritance. The *geist* was manifest in language, and each nation had the duty to cultivate and foster the national treasure. As its most unaltered forms were to be found in folklore, one had to look there for the authentic unique features of the respective *geist* and begin all national literature from there, hereby guaranteeing its unique features and securing its authenticity. It is worth noting the social critique of the upper classes, tributary to French

culture, who were unable to use their mother tongue, namely German, thereby transforming it into a language good for the servants. Herder's project also included a strong cosmopolitan component, namely the aspiration that one day all nations will empathise with each other and that in the event of an offence caused to any of them (be it war, deprivation of riches or drainage of human resources away from it), all the others would feel equally touched and insulted. Herder also insisted on the necessity that one and only one nation should live within the same political borders (Herder, 1973:25), an idea that, more recently, Gellner (1994:7) took to be defining for nationalism - in his view, a *political* principle, a point of view which we will follow from now on. Given the influence of Herder's ideas and the fact that most other circumstances surrounding the birth of other nationalisms (the rise of the bourgeoisie, the industrial revolution, the advent of print) were missing at the time in Central and Eastern Europe, it appears that the relevance literature has for the study of such nationalisms should not be disregarded.

Herder's ideas became very popular among Romanian intellectuals in the first part of the 19th century. They may have shaped the interest towards folklore that stands at the origin of the Romanian revival. Although not translated, except in a few fragments in literary magazines, starting in 1839 (Petrescu, 1973), they were widely circulated in French and German, even if the first selection of his works did not appear in Romanian in a book form until 1973. The late translation of Herder's work did not impede its circulation among Romanian intellectuals in the 19th century. C.A. Rosetti, a prominent fighter in the Revolution of 1848, wrote sadly in his diary in 1852: "I very much suffered reading Herder, as, given the current circumstances, if my children learn French as a mother tongue, they will think like the French and not like Romanians" (Pantazi, 1969:204). Very often in Herder's writings one encounters ideas such as "poetry as an expression of society", "the life and true poetry is in the nation" etc. (Neţea, 1970:326). In this light, the concern for the formation of a national literature acquires a rather different significance.

I will outline in the following a few examples, taken from the articulation of the Romanian national project in the 19th century, highlighting the idea that Romanian nationalism began not only as a linguistic project, but also as a literary one, and has continued to do so right up to present. The relation between language and literature in Central European nationalisms is twofold: on the one hand, the constant preoccupation with building a "common" idiom, with its quality and development, is often viewed as a necessity for the promotion of national literature. On the other hand, literature becomes a

means of legitimizing national linguistic pride. It is worth mentioning that the nationalist discourse, even if it claims to be talking about "culture", generally refers to literature, as the most specifically national form of art. Among the most telling examples is the case of *Dacia literară*, the first Romanian literary magazine to be published (1840, in Moldavia; at the time, Romanians lived in three different administrative entities: Moldavia, Vallachia and Transylvania, the latter part of the Austrian Empire). Its name, Dacia, pointed to the Thracian kingdom which had allegedly included around 100 BC most of the area which came to be inhabited in the 19th century by Romanians, plus some additional areas. Simply the name can raise doubts with regard to the political innocence of such an endeavour, were we to trust Hroch's claim about phase 1. The magazine's main purpose was to foster the creation of local literary productions referring to the Romanian past, Romanian traditional customs and folklore. It also paid much attention to the quality of the language it used: it published lists of neologisms and suggested "proper" uses of Romanian. One can say that none of the debates regarding language were ideology free. This becomes particularly clear with regard to the policy of vocabulary construction, which in general implies the construction of a narrative regarding the national identity. The Latinist school argued for the purely Latin origin of the Romanians and consequently produced a dictionary full of etymological reconstructions, most of which no Romanian speaker had ever heard of, let alone uttered, while the critical school accepted borrowings from French, as a more powerful sister nation, and an example of modernity to be followed. Debates over orthography are also relevant: the Latin alphabet won in competition with the Cyrillic one (the secular, therefore modern, nation with roots in the past won over the religious one) and a phonetic orthography (efficient, modern, of the "new" nation, and also specifically Romanian) over an etymological one (which would have involved difficult reconstruction). One could say that the debate on language is the debate over the ideal speaker of the language, his past and future (whenever speaking about the various power systems implicit in the mechanism of language engineering and how the existence of a literary language operates as a means of exclusion I am using ideas from Pierre Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* of 1991). Indeed, given the strong voluntarist component of nation building in Central and Eastern Europe, all such debates regarding language fail to be other than "political".

The voluntary creation of a *national* literature was also part of a strategy of legitimising the élite. If we agree with Charles Taylor that nationalism is fuelled by the

élite's sense of dignity requiring a modernization, or a more intensive one, following a foreign example, yet within a specific national context (1999:219-243), then part of that modernization means quite often the creation of a literary culture comparable with the "great" ones, and Romanian literary criticism is full at its very beginning of examples that compare one or another Romanian poet to Goethe or Shakespeare, of course to the detriment of the foreigner.

Even later, in the 1870s, when the "critical school" advocated for the priority of the "aesthetic criteria" i.e. ideology free, as opposed to the "ethical criteria" i.e. educational, ideological, when judging a literary work, this was not such a politically innocent matter. It is worth mentioning that one of the major criteria for aesthetically evaluating a work of literature was according to its style. Romanian literary histories even in 1949 offer samples of the beauty of metaphors and congratulate or criticise the author for the adequate or deviant use of Romanian (Indeed, Sorin Alexandrescu, in a study referring to various Romanian canons, complains that they still are articulated according to features that do not go beyond the level of the sentence (See Alexandrescu, 1999)). As the language becomes "literary", "standard", the capacity for using it as such becomes a powerful mechanism of exclusion. In Romanian literary history, one can give various examples of how such mechanisms operated at various levels. Liviu Rebreanu, a writer born in Transylvania, and an ethnic Romanian, spent years learning the literary *Romanian* idiom, and a volume of more than 500 pages testifies to his efforts to acquire the proper language. Lower classes and women writers also had more difficult access to "great" literature, at first (during the latter half of the 19th century) due to the fact that, among other things, they did not have access to an education that would allow them a proper use of the language.

Between the wars, when finally the last province (Transylvania, formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) was united with the other two, and the dream of generations of unionists came true, the new generation of intellectuals felt that it was their duty, now that the political problems were solved, to create a *specifically national* culture. Indeed, it was a period of great intellectual effervescence, marked however by antisemitism, sexism, and often sheer xenophobia. Given that the territories added after the First World War doubled the population and the area of the country, and that they included a significant number of ethnic minorities, the national identity had to be remade from scratch, and "the scratch" was to be found in rural areas, where the prototype of the "new identity" resided. This fact is easily explained because the towns were largely inhabited by (at the time) ethnic

minorities who had previously enjoyed social and economic advantages, such as Hungarians and Germans in Transylvania, or that were discriminated against with regard to the possession of land, such as Jews (see Livezeanu, 1995). The "Romanian peasant" is a theme running like a red thread in Romanian literature from beginning until now, and one of the favourite topics (given its size, one finally finds something to say about it) for students of various ages in their literature exams. Such a focus on the Romanian peasant as the prototype of national identity favours a stress on patriarchal sex roles, evident both in canonical works of literature and in literary criticism, that still await a feminist critique.

During the communist period things did not change much. Socialist realism, as a means of propaganda *par excellence*, focused on women's emancipation during the first 20 years after the war, when the nationalist discourse became marginal, the stress being on social change in the international context of class struggle; however, the official communist discourse took a strongly nationalist turn after 1964, when it changed its name to "humanist realism", as a sign of de-Sovietization. In 1966 the nationalist component of state ideology took a nasty side, as abortion, the main means of birth control, was forbidden, which resulted in the death of thousands of women (see Kligman, 1998). Again, the theme of the Romanian peasant fighting for national freedom and his obedient and always fertile wife made a grandiose comeback in literary works benefiting from various literary prizes and subsequent advertising. It is time perhaps to introduce the third variable in our discourse, to see how the connection between literature and the national discourse operates when related to gender.

Lauded by the nationalist discourse as mothers of the nation and cultural bearers of the tradition, women found themselves excluded from most cultural activities, as far as such activities were part of the public sphere. Nira Yuval Davis argues that, given the separation between the private and the public that civic societies rely upon, and also that women are located within the private sphere, their exclusion was, from the very beginning, "... part and parcel of the construction of the entitlement of men to democratic participation which conferred citizen status not upon individuals as such, but upon men in their capacity as members and representatives of the family" (1993:625). Given the central position of literary discourse within the nationalist project, it logically follows that women's literary careers are fraught with difficulties. One can say that a possible use of the literary canon is the insight it gives with regard to who precisely can become a great author, namely who are the actors of the public national sphere. In such a context women are either discouraged

from writing, any attempt to enter the public field being labelled unfeminine (even in 1947, George Calinescu, one of the constructors of the Romanian literary canon, was advising women to talk to intelligent men and inspire them instead of writing themselves (Calinescu, 1992:310), or their production is condemned from the outset being viewed as marginal. Even if they acquire fame, their works usually fail to enter the literary canon. To give an example, during the nineteenth century at least, most literary groups excluded women from their meetings, even those who had sometimes managed to publish in the literary magazine of the respective group. Another example can be found in the advice one of the most famous cultural activists of the time addressed to his readers in 1837: "It is time to write. Write how you can and as much as you can", and "Write, guys, just write", sentences that are telling for the voluntary creation of the national literature and also for those who were supposed to take part in such an endeavour, namely the "guys". Another telling feature is the way the national culture, which could not do without its own founding myths, articulated femininity. The "fundamental" myths of Romanian modern culture were identified in the most monumental and extended *History of Romanian Literature*, written by G. Calinescu and published in 1941 (Calinescu, 1986:61-65), and it is worth mentioning that the passage was included in all school textbooks. In it Calinescu stated that the modern Romanian culture was based on four fundamental myths, one of them the myth of (artistic) creation, in which Manole, a church builder whose construction kept falling down, following divine inspiration and a plot of his comrades who kept their wives and sisters at home, has to build his pregnant wife into the wall of the church, as a sacrifice required in order to finish it - and, with all due desperation, so he does. This myth, claims Calinescu, "symbolizes the conditions of human creations, the incorporation of individual suffering in the work of art" (1986:60). Now to consider this story as a founding myth of Romanian (modern!) culture is quite a strong claim. First, such a myth associates reproduction with women and production with men; second, it legitimizes violence against women as long as it is done in view of a higher, artistic, goal. The one who suffers, claims Calinescu, is Manole, the generic "creative human" being male, just as male as the generic "individual" whose suffering is required in order to create. Ana, Manole's wife, even if pregnant, is a negligible quantity, just as negligible as her suffering of being built alive into the wall, which the ballad dwells upon, but is obscured in Calinescu's reading, for whom the murderous artist's suffering prevails.

It is worth drawing a connection between literature as part of the national project and the way literary criticism constructs women (writers), even nowadays. For Tom Nairn the nation is the modern Janus, a contradictory figure of time, one face looking backwards to the primordial past and the other one into the distant future. Anne McClintock claims that this figure is gendered: "Women, it was argued, did not inhabit history proper, but existed, like colonized people, as anachronistic humans, childlike, irrational and regressive, the living archive of the national archaic. White, middle class men, by contrast, were seen to embody the forward-thrusting agency of national progress" (1993:67). Within such a paradigm literature, especially national literature, is constructed contradictorily: in the name of progress, male writers construct national literatures as part of modernization, or are situated in a tradition leading to the founding fathers. They are also the proponents of various stereotypes regarding proper sex roles within the nation. Women writers are denied such agency: their writing is labelled as 'feminine', therefore minor, and they are consequently refused entrance to the canon, thus being denied the power of representation. One could argue that not all literary works are quite so easy to be decoded, that there are writing practices that undermine the closure of meaning. However, as Patricia Waugh argues: "Prevailing twentieth-century aesthetic norms have emphasized concepts of 'organic wholeness', unity, vision and coherence" (1989:34). The literary canon, even in the case of Romania, which had a very rich avant-garde movement (Tristan Tzara was born in Romania, where during the 30s many avant-garde circles were active, although the bibliography of Romanian literary criticism on the subject is still incredibly thin), is no exception.

One might state that the canon itself is a body of works that is intended to fulfil a variety of (often contradictory) functions: it is the field of predilect use by high academics, within the framework of what is called the aesthetic canon, and is also taught in schools (curricular canon), in order that pupils acquire literacy, basic social and national values, and of course linguistic pride. The literary canon is undoubtedly one of the vectors transmitting general knowledge with regard to the specificity of national identity, crucial for the constitution of the nation as an "imagined community" (see Anderson, 1983). The nationalist discourse (through its major instrument, national literature) constructs femininity as well as masculinity, and one might say that of the latter at the expense of the former. Femininity is assigned the reproductive role, while masculinity acquires the productive one: men are supposed to be both active constructors and defenders of the

nation, of its “womenandchildren”, allegedly the most exposed and defenceless category. This can of course have repercussions for the allocation of resources within the nation state: to give an example, highlighting the heroic past contributes to the credit of the military, one of the professions that still prohibit the access of women, at the expense of feminized professions, such as those belonging to the field of medicine and education (Predosanu, 1996:87). Romanians currently accept the situation in which an army sergeant earns more than a university assistant or a young doctor working in the state system, and, ironically enough, it is precisely through the feminized education state system and also through the “feminine” concern with books and reflection, as opposed to the “masculine” action, that such ideas are endlessly reproduced and that the nationalist ideology is perpetuated.

Where do the various feminist literary criticisms fit in this rather complex picture? What are their uses? Were we to take them chronologically, “Images of Women” Criticism can offer invaluable insights with regard to the way national masculinity and femininity is constructed by national literature. Gynocriticism, especially through its critique of the canon, can highlight women’s participation in the construction of national literature, and scrutinize the male bias of national agency. Highlighting the practices of *ecriture feminine*, with its refusal of fixed meanings and stress on polymorphous fluid identities, can offer an alternative to unified coherent narratives regarding gender roles, and gynesis, that views femininity as a writing effect can deconstruct traditional gender assumptions based on the sex of the author. All these can acquire an even more poignant effect if applied to national literary histories. As grand narratives based on assumptions with regard to the specificity of national identities, masculine and feminine literary histories both narrate a history in which male and female writers are characters and interpret various works based, more often than not on shared presuppositions regarding gender. A feminist critique operating at both levels, and focused on the way literary histories narrate stories of national masculinity and femininity, thus deconstructing not only the masculine/feminine opposition but also that between us and others, can provide valid information with regard to hegemonic discourses that legitimize distributions of power and resources within the nation state.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Andrea Balogh graduated from the University of the West in 1997 and works as an assistant lecturer at "Tibiscus" University, Timişoara. Her main interests lie in the area of gender studies, this being also the theme of her doctoral research.

Mihai Tudor Bălinişteanu obtained a BA in English and Romanian Languages and Literatures from the University of Suceava and an MA in Irish Studies from the "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj. While a student he took time off study to work as a long term volunteer with the Glencree Peace Centre (Ireland), European Youth for Action (The Netherlands) and For Mother Earth (Belgium) – all three NGO's whose major concerns include eco-spirituality. In recent years Tudor held workshops on woman's identity in globalization society at major international grassroots festivals and activist gatherings. At present Tudor Bălinşteanu is a teaching assistant in the English Department at the University of Suceava.

Reghina Dascăl teaches British Studies and Gender Studies at the English Department of the University of Timişoara. She holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology (her thesis was entitled *House and Dwelling in a European Cultural Context*) and she has so far published three books: *Casă/Locuire* in 1999; *British Topics* in 2000 and *Feminist Perspectives* in 2001. She is one of the initiators and currently coordinator of The Women's Studies Centre at Timişoara University and editor of the *Gender Studies* journal. Over the years she has presented and published papers in the country and abroad and has also edited and co-edited several publications. In 2001 Polirom published her translation of Andrea Dworkin's *Letters from the War Zone.*

Hildegard Klein is professor of English Literature in the English Department at Málaga University, Spain. She has completed a Ph.D. thesis on the theatre of Edward Bond and has written a number of articles and an interview on this author and on contemporary British theatre, published in several books and periodicals, such as *Atlantis*, *Modern Drama*, *In-between*, *Studii de limbi şi literaturi moderne*, etc. Her current research focuses on British Feminist Theatre. She is co-author of a book on feminist theatre "Teorías Feministas y sus Aplicaciones al Teatro Feminista Británico Contemporáneo", Granada 2000. She is now editing a book on feminist strategies in Contemporary Feminist Theatre.

Voichiţa Năchescu is currently a Ph.D. student in Women's Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She has a BA in Romanian and English and an MA in

Comparative Literature from the University of the West, Timişoara. She is in the final stage of her Ph.D. in Romanian Literature. She is a founding member of the Women's Studies Centre, Timişoara and her areas of interest include feminist literary criticism, nationalism studies, and, lately, sociology.

Michaela Praisler is associate professor and head of the English Department at the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology - University of Galati, Romania. She has a doctorate in British and American Literature, teaches twentieth century literature(s) in English and literary criticism, and has published a number of books and articles (as author and co-author) including: The Contemporary British Literary Scene (Evrika, 1996) And For *A Psychoanalytical Approach To Literature. Reality And Fiction With Virginia Woolf And Ernest Hemingway* (Porto Franco, 2000). At present, she is working on *Voices Of Otherness In Contemporary English Literature.*

Ioana Sălăgean is assistant lecturer at "Dimitrie Cantemir" University, Timişoara. After completing an M.A. in Applied Linguistics with the University of the West Timişoara she earned a postgraduate scholarship at the Central European University Budapest, where she was enrolled in the Gender & Culture M.A. programme. She is one of the founding members of the Women's Studies Centre at Timişoara University. She published one book on *Business English* (1998) and several articles on gender. Her current research focuses on irony and how this functions as a strategy to preclude feminist criticism.

Nóra Séllei is a lecturer at the University of Debrecen, Hungary, teaching gender studies, feminist literary theory, 19th and 20th century women's literature. She has published three books (*Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Personal and Professional Bond,* Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996; a monograph on 19th-century British women writers' novels in Hungarian—*Lánnyá válik, s írni kezd*; and one on early 20th century autobiographies by women writers—*Tükröm, tükröm…*—Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1999 and 2001). She is the editor of the Hungarian feminist book series Artemis Books (Artemisz Könyvek), and a co-editor of *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, and the translator of Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being*, and Jean Rhys's *Smile Please* (Debrecen: Csokonai, 1999 and 2001).