

# **GENDER STUDIES**

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# **GENDER STUDIES**

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**Through the Lens of Gender. Sites of Gendered  
Representation and Discourse**



**LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF SHAPING NEW CULTURAL IDENTITY IN  
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *THE WOMAN WARRIOR***

**ALEKSANDRA IZGARJAN**

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Reed Way Dasenbrock (1987:10) contends that multicultural literature includes works which explicitly deal with multicultural societies and those that are implicitly multicultural in the sense of inscribing readers from other cultures inside their own textual dynamics. Multicultural texts as a rule have barriers in the understanding strategically and selectively placed by the authors before readers who do not possess the knowledge of the culture and language to which the texts belong, forcing them thus to actively search for the intelligibility and in doing so become part of the meaning of the text. The work of finding the meaning leads readers to understand the way language shapes our perception of the world. Thus it can be said that multicultural writers base their work on a perception of culture and language as heterogeneous and translation is an inherent process in their creation. Their writing carries the burden and challenge of the Other.

Maxine Hong Kingston, like other multicultural writers, draws her readers to consider similarities and differences between American and Chinese cultures and gives them some other cultural maps with which they can compare those they have previously used. She translates stories about suffering, exile, different realities, not only for herself, but for others too (Lajoun, 1995:268). In her novels, she deviates from the canon of American literature, tells the stories of Chinese immigrants on the margins of American society who, just like her, with their lives and origin do not fit in the mainstream culture. By incorporating Chinese words into her texts she does not allow the readers to forget that the novel belongs both to American and Chinese culture or to lull themselves into the fantasy that the text is solely the product of the dominant culture. She tries to preserve language and cultural differences, to bring new words and new stories to the mainstream culture. One could say that this fusion of languages is a manifestation of the Other which is reflected not just in Chinese words inserted into the text, but also in motifs and narrative strategies Kingston uses which enable her and the readers to stay in dialogue.

The novels of Maxine Hong Kingston reflect the tension between dominant American and minority Chinese American culture and language. Due to these tensions and

the pleasure which comes in the process of deciphering the text, the novels of Maxine Hong Kingston create in the reader strong sense of reality which once discovered cannot be recaptured by reading of other texts written in (just) one language. She depicts what she calls double bind: existence in both dominant and minority culture, simultaneous discomfort in dominant culture and dependence on it, the limitations and guilt which this life on the boundary carries. In an interview, she stated that while she was writing the novels *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among the Ghosts* and *China Men*, she wanted to create a language which would be able to translate the language of immigrants who live within the Chinese language, carry on their emotional life and everyday activities in Chinese although they exist in American society. She also stated that she created Chinese American language as a response to the 'homogenized' nature of American culture that she tried to capture the Chinese American accent in American language (Chin, 1989:17). For her, finding different rhythms and vocabularies is the real task of an American writer. In her opinion, the elasticity of English language allows such a way of writing which includes leaving some parts of the text in a different language. Texts which incorporate words and concepts of different languages and cultures reflect American reality and make literature closer to the way people in American really speak nowadays (Carabi, 1989:10).

Language and struggle with language become key themes in Maxine Hong Kingston's novels because through her relationship with language, she and her characters reveal themselves. She shares with other multicultural writers the role of being a translator and interpreter of minority experience so their texts include "frequent reference to the specificity and difference coded into any and all languages; to the violence of inadequacy of translation and interpretation, to the translator's and, by extension, the writer's unfaithful role as betrayer of the culture's inside secrets, and to the existence of encoded messages, which are more accessible to readers familiar with various insider codes and cryptographic devices deployed in the text." (Mullen, 1996:3). Readers are always faced anew with the untranslatibility of subordinated cultural discourse into the language of the culturally dominant Other. Multicultural authors often have potential to create a "third language" (Mullen, 1996:5). This third language is available to those readers who have dual experience of existing in two languages – the English language of formal education and the inside language of a minority community. This new third language and new literacy include elements (such as slang, argot, colloquialisms, nicknames, diminutives

characteristic for the speech of children and other intimate and familiar speech, non-standard codes of minority cultures, folk references, and onomatopoeia) which are often excluded from dictionaries because they are not used in written, as opposed to spoken, discourse. It could be said that third language includes insider codes of the dominant and minority cultures and thus becomes the language of the contact zone. In that sense, English as a dominant language becomes reinvented recreated to encompass experiences of people who only recently have been excluded from the dominant discourse and culture (Mullen, 1996:4). Kingston uses Chinese English in her novels as this third language. It casts light on the problem of the legitimacy of the languages of minority communities. From the perspective of Chinese immigrants in the novel, Chinese American is correct and legitimate, from the perspective of the dominant culture; it is irregular and belongs to the margin. By allowing it to exist in parallel with the English language in the novel, by admiring it and revealing to the readers the magic of word play in it, Kingston enriches the text and draws meaning from both languages. But most importantly, she also enables Chinese American to occupy a position in the centre. From all stated above, it is clear that Chinese American is the language of interspace. The speaker of this language must have access to both realities (Chinese and American), both languages and cultures, since otherwise, he or she is not able to tell which elements of language are Chinese and which English. It is an amalgam of both cultures and those who do not have the key to unlock both cannot enter it. However, Kingston uses Chinese American in such a way that even her readers who do not speak Chinese manage to get an impression of it, about the sound of some words, their content, the way Chinese American came into being. Chinese American words also serve as signals to the readers that the text they read in English is in fact the author's "translation" from Chinese or Chinese American. Moreover, it allows Kingston to reflect on the painstaking process during which her immigrant characters learn to navigate between them.

Cryptic encoding of names and secret messages in the novel gives advantage to those who are conscious of codes of minority culture as opposed to those who are not. This new kind of literacy gives insight into the "experience of the Other" (Freire and Macedo, 1987:12). In the title of Kingston's novel *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of the Girlhood among the Ghosts* we encounter the word ghost which is the perfect example of cryptic encoding. Kingston uses the word ghost to convey to the reader the degree of isolation of the community of Chinese immigrants in America. The narrator remembers her childhood

“among the ghosts”: “But America was full of machines and ghosts – Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts. Once upon a time the world was so thick with ghosts, I could hardly breathe; I could hardly walk, limping my way around the White Ghosts and their cars. There were Black Ghosts too, but they were open eyed and full of laughter, more distinct than White Ghosts.” (Kingston, 1977:113). The word ghost reflects dualism which is characteristic of the novel and which represents perfect metaphor for the way Chinese immigrants perceive Americans. Ghost implies something unknown, otherworldly, and alien. In that sense, for Chinese, Americans are aliens; words of their language are words of ghosts. Kingston decided to translate Chinese word *gui* (or *kuei* or *gwai* depending on transcription) with the English word ghost so that she could at the same time refer to the ghosts with which the narrator’s ancestors in China struggle and the white Americans whom members of the Chinese immigrant community to which the narrator belongs face. This “cross-cultural” translation as Gayle Sato (1991:200) terms it, functions as a metaphor and reflects aspects of Chinese American culture. The function of ghosts in the novel is sometimes explicit, sometimes not, but in either case it is clear that the text is not written solely for Chinese insiders who know the original meaning of the word or for outsiders who speak only English. Understanding and differentiating between various levels of meaning of the word ghost from simple idiomatic expression to complex metaphor demands a certain degree of engagement and imaginativeness on the part of the reader. In the quote above, it is clear that the word ghost does not refer to the creatures of the nether world, but to human beings of flesh and blood (Dasenbrock, 1987:14). However, Kingston successfully blurs the border between worlds of fantasy and reality. Enumeration of different kinds of ghosts continues through the rest of the novel and includes ghosts against which famous Chinese warriors fought. But, in comparison to these Chinese ghosts, American ghosts are familiar to the western readers: grocery ghost, postman ghost, Jesus ghost. The readers also begin to understand that unlike their famous Chinese ancestors who did not flinch from struggling with ghosts, the narrator and her family shrink from ghosts in America. People who for western readers represent everyday life, for narrator’s family represent American demons. The readers who are capable of imagining the point of view of the narrator, even if they themselves belong to the world of the ghosts, after some time stop thinking of the dual meaning of the word ghost and enter the “semantic world of the novel” (Dasenbrock, 1987:14). Constant repetition of the word

confronts the readers with different ways the word is used and consequently with different ways speakers of different languages perceive the world around them. Kingston deliberately makes understanding of the word difficult in order to make her readers stop and think about what the experience of a different environment entails (Dasenbrock, 1987:15).

Maxine Hong Kingston also often uses the strategy of covert translation (Bell, 1995:71). Some characters in *The Woman Warrior*, most notably the narrator's mother Brave Orchid, who belong to the first generation of Chinese immigrants to America mix Chinese and English in dialogues with their children or use broken English – that is they translate a Chinese expression into English literally or they leave out some parts of the construction in English. However, in certain parts of the novel, the English they use is perfect. This “perfect” English juxtaposed to “broken” English is supposed to represent proper Chinese that they actually speak and which the author “translates” into English. Their English is perfect, fluent, without code mixing because their Chinese is like that and that is why we might say that it represents covert translation. By reading these parts of the text, the readers are in fact supposed to imagine how the characters really express themselves in their mother tongue. There are several levels of language that Kingston uses to convey this: proper English of the immigrants which actually represents proper Chinese, standard English of the second generation which it really is, broken English which illustrates the language of immigrants and Chinese English which represents mixing of codes of Chinese and English. Precisely this language duplicity is the dominant characteristic of the rich American immigrant literature. Division of a person who, willingly or unwillingly, after leaving home recreates him/herself – new language opposite to the old one, imperatives of present against the demands of the remembrance of the past, projected personality against internal one – finds a clear correlative in the dual consciousness of the writer (Dee, 2005:77). Translation makes recognizable, and thus available, what was strange or perceived as the Other. If large parts of Kingston's novel were left in the minority language, that would considerably or maybe even completely, make reading impossible for many. As it is, words and expressions which are left in Chinese function in the text as the signals of the Other but understanding, although difficult, is possible. The writer/translator exists in two worlds, two languages and consciously mediates between them. Multicultural reading which is the result of such texts can be disturbing, but at the same time very interactive – readers notice the writer's

mediations and think about them which further influences their altered perception of the language and reality (Dingwaney, and Maier 1995:303). Thus to the readers of Maxine Hong Kingston's novels, it often seems that they have learned a lot of Chinese words (although she actually uses a relatively small number of them), because she often uses literal translation of Chinese words into English and tries to find in English equivalents for phrases which are inherent to Chinese culture. Kingston uses different strategies to make the readers understand that her characters do not speak the standard English language. One of the very first sentences of *The Woman Warrior* offers such examples of her strategies: "In 1924 just a few days after our village celebrated seventeen hurry-up weddings – to make sure that every young man who went 'out on to the road' came responsibly home – your father and his brothers and your grandfather and his brothers and your aunt's new husbands sailed for America, the Gold Mountain." (Kingston, 1977:3). Kingston uses the expression "hurry-up weddings" but she does not put it in quotation marks, in cursive or mark it in any other way although it is not a usual English collocation. Its purpose is to serve as a signal to make the reader aware all the time (even if it is on the subliminal level), that the stories are being told by the narrator's mother, Brave Orchid, for whom English is not a mother tongue. She uses expressions which are ordinary in Chinese, but unusual in English and often she literally translates from Chinese into English. One example of such literal translation which is used throughout the novel is the expression "out on the road" which is usually put in quotation marks. Although it is not an unusual combination of words as is "hurry-up weddings", this expression is put in quotation marks because for a Chinese speaker it creates a very specific association since it refers only to the journey to the Gold Mountain, which is the Chinese expression for America, that is, California. With such a beginning to the novel, not only as far as language, but also the plot, is concerned, Kingston addresses two kinds of readers. For readers of Chinese American ancestry, it is enough to read the above mentioned expressions to put the story in appropriate context. On the other hand, readers who belong to the dominant American culture need additional signals to understand the status of the narrator and the framework of the story. Language thus functions as the subliminal framework of the story because at any given moment it reminds the reader that one part of the text is actually a translation from Chinese as far as words and content are concerned.

As we can see, the process of translation and transposition of meaning as well as the specific usage of two languages in Kingston's novels functions on three levels. On the

first level, words in Chinese are left untranslated so that their meaning is not transparent. The word thus stops being only the carrier of meaning and the way it sounds and looks on paper becomes also important, since the readers do not understand its meaning, but perceive it as an image. Kingston's objective is twofold: these words function as signals of the Other, but they also create in the readers a sense of alienation because they participate in the confrontation of two cultures: the dominant American and the marginal Chinese. On the other hand, by repeating the untranslated elements, the author entices active readers to take part in reading and discovering their meaning and thus at the same time learn something about them and about the culture of their origin. On the second level, readers encounter the process of intralingual translation: some words and sentences are given first in the language of the Chinese ethnic community as foreign code units followed by the literal translation of their meaning in English or only the literal translation of Chinese words into English is given. Although they still serve as signals of the Other, literal translations of metaphors and word play reveal the way of thinking of the members of the minority culture which is different from the dominant one. The reader is able to attest the elasticity of English language and ways in which the literal translation of Chinese words and concepts changes it. We could say that on this level the writer establishes connections between two languages which illuminate the way they function and gives them deeper meaning. This also makes readers identify with the main protagonists, who are in the constant process of translation. On the third level, we arrive at the metaphorical usage of the notion of translation. The protagonists translate not only words; they also translate themselves from the ethnic into the dominant culture and *vice versa*. They also translate silences of the first generation of immigrants, empty spaces in their family histories behind which lie hidden tragic destinies of members of the marginalized communities. Neither the protagonists nor the readers can ever be certain to which extent this translation of unspoken into written is completely accurate and to which extent it is a construction. On this level, we also encounter Kingston's translation of Chinese myths and legends from ethnic into the dominant culture, most notably the ones about Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen. In this process of translation/transposition of myths, they are created anew. Kingston creates a network of meanings which underlies the text. The reader has to decide where the "real" myth ends, and where the literary "construction" begins.

Usage of names in *The Woman Warrior* can be used as an example of these three levels of meaning but it also gives us insight into the ways social and gender identities are

construed in Chinese and American society (Li, 1998:500). Of six female characters, two have full Chinese names, two have only first Chinese names which are literally translated into English, and two have no names. On the first level of meaning are names of Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen which Kingston does not translate, but she transcribes the phonetic symbols of Chinese characters whose value exists on the referential, but not on the semantic level. The names represent code units which remain a mystery to the readers who do not speak Chinese because their meaning is not transparent. However, their function is not just to be symbols of the Other but also to indicate the Chinese framework of the novel. The literal translation of the name of Fa Mu Lan who is a heroine of various Chinese myths of the woman warrior is "Sylvan Orchid". The name of Ts'ai Yen, who was a renowned Chinese poet, in literal translation means "Well wrought jade" (Li, 1998:500). Both names reflect the common Chinese practice of giving names to the girls which connect them to jewellery, flowers and other kinds of nicely wrought objects. Kingston deliberately translates only the sonorousness of the names, but not their meaning. The name functions as an encoded message whose meaning is available only to those who know how to decipher it. Kingston does not allow hidden meaning to enter the surface level of the text for two reasons. The narrator of the novel identifies herself with Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen because she believes that they can give her strength to overcome limits imposed on her by both communities in which she lives. Translation of their names into English would undermine this conviction of the narrator. However, more importantly such withheld translation is for Kingston a way to resist the perception of women as slaves and objects. In her revised versions of the traditional stories about Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen, she refuses to see them only as flowers or jewellery. For her, they are women warriors who have power to change reality. By not translating their names, she leaves behind the negative part of their meaning and transforms the misogynistic perception of women by giving them with new names new strength.

On the second level of meaning are names of the narrator's mother Brave Orchid and her mother's sister Moon Orchid. The names given in literal translation into English transfer the content, but not the sonorousness of the Chinese names. Although the second part of the names signals family connection, the narrator never reveals the surnames of her mother and aunt which was typical of Asian American immigrants who were always wary of deportations. The name of Brave Orchid represents in some measure the contradiction which is at the centre of her character. Orchid symbolizes fragility, elegance, femininity



which is characteristic for *yin* whose sign it is. However with her resoluteness, ambition, courage and inflexibility, Brave Orchid does not fit into Chinese standards of femininity. The first part of her name also indicates this. Bravery was of course in Chinese society connected to masculinity, soldiers of imperial army, *yang* (Li, 1998:503). Although it seems impossible for one person to encompass these contradictions, Brave Orchid manages to do just that. On the other hand, her sister, Moon Orchid is the embodiment of *yin* (*yin* in Chinese means ‘moon’), beautiful and elegant, she is also weak, fearful and docile. The meaning of names reflects the temperaments and destiny of those who carry them. Brave Orchid manages to cope in immigration and ensure the survival of her family in California. Moon Orchid loses her identity after she immigrates to the United States and dies in an asylum. Kingston raises their names on the third level by reading additional meaning into them and by turning them into paradigms for fates of women and immigrants in America.

On the third level of meaning, Kingston translates Chinese myths, legends and stories into American framework trying in this way to make them more understandable and more real to herself, but also to the others. She is conscious that although she writes in English, the content she describes does not belong only to the American culture, but also to Chinese and Chinese American. Because of this, the focus of the novel is on balance and connection between the Chinese and the American heritage. In the novel, Chinese stories and myths are translated and rewritten from the perspective of somebody who belongs at the same time to Chinese and American culture. For Kingston, the reshaping of Chinese myths is a way to reclaim American identity: “I think that the highest form of that appropriation is art. In a sense, when I wrote these books, I was claiming the English language and the literature to tell our story as Americans. That is why the forms of the two books are not exactly like other books, and the language and the rhythms are not like other writers, and yet, it’s American English. I guess my thought is, ‘If I can use this language and literature in a really beautiful, strong way, then I have claimed all of it for us.’” (Rabinowitz, 1987:183). These alternative versions do not try to obliterate the original, but to represent a different perception. Although some critics blame Kingston for “Americanizing” Chinese myths, she managed to preserve with this new translation and retelling of stories, the real value of oral culture and to enrich both American and Chinese culture (Kingston, 1982:65).

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**CULTURAL SPACE AS A MODERNIST NON-PLACE IN ZORA NEALE  
HURSTON'S *JONAH'S GOURD VINE***

**PÉTER GAÁL SZABÓ**

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The African American womanist writer Zora Neale Hurston occupies an ambiguous position in the bosom of Black Modernism. As a popular artist of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston can be seen as a central figure of that artistic movement; however, from a different angle, her Modernism can be placed in opposition to the movement. This positionality of being within, yet without, grants her the status of a non-place-like character - something which also permeates her works. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is particularly relevant in this respect, since the book itself embodies Hurston's politics of ambiguity and non-places prove to be structural elements in the construction of her cultural universe.

According to Marc Augé, non-places represent characteristic places of (super)modernity that are detached from historicity due to their nature as places of transition: "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (1995:77-78). Such places provide, though, locales for social interaction; however, this type of interaction remains transitory and temporary. In a sense these places cannot be claimed by any spatial paradigm, and they cannot be integrated into the spatial stories of individuals. This is due to kinds of rootlessness in time and space that in supermodern hyperspaces become simulacra. On the one hand their character derives exactly from the differences between them and their environment; on the other, these differences are not in the least superficial since they represent disruptions of the given spatial framework in both form and content.

Another understanding conceptualizes certain places that are similar to non-places also as timeless, but rather as prehistoric or ahistoric precipitations. Nancy D. Munn talks about excluded space or negative space that is established through "spatial prohibition as a mode of boundary making" (2003:93). She refers thereby to racist tactics of place-making, e.g., ways whereby Australian Aborigines are excluded from certain places; as well as to negative spaces that are established by ritual. Thus whereas Augé's non-places are open to

social activity, the latter kind of non-places are closed and not at all transient. These are ideological or sacred precipitations that are not to be trespassed upon. Yet their timelessness and asocial character connects them to Augé's non-places, an aspect that disallows them from becoming real places and that also excludes them from social interaction.

Polk underlines Munn's concept of negative spaces by describing non-places as "nowhereness" (1997:7) and as "interstice" (1997:xi). Non-places, however, can signify anti-pictures of places, and, in this way, they can have political content in so far as they represent opposites, or even alternatives. As Rapport and Overing claim, "non-places serve the purpose of exploding the normative singularity of place; so that place and non-place represent contrastive modalities" (2000:293). Rapport and Overing's definition further flavours Munn's understanding, and also Augé's, in that he emphasizes the contradictory relation between place and non-place, while apparently suggesting that, as modalities, both are part of a larger social space.

What is striking is that non-places are not meaningless. Just as supermodern non-places can have an ideological function, or can even be gadgets among the pantheon of tools of the mainstream spatial framework, so similarly, Munn's negative spaces represent intact places that have meanings as zero signs. The aborigines' ritual of detour shows their awareness of these places, which they avoid constantly because such places are dangerous (2003:94). As opposed to Augé's hyperreal non-places, Munn's negative spaces are real places that yet lie outside transparent social space.

Hurston's cultural space combines both, seemingly mutually exclusive, aspects of these non-places: their transience and their precipitation-like character. Her cultural universe establishes a socio-cultural space that stands apart from other socio-spatial paradigms such as white social space and that of the Harlem intelligentsia. It works like Munn's negative space; it persists through time and maintains integrity. Hurston's space, in fact, withstands the changes of her time, but, more importantly, her cultural politics establishes her space in spite of the strivings of black mainstream cultural politics.

While Hurston's space appears rigid from the outside, inwardly it is based on transience. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* this becomes visible in both the main character's journey, as a black way of cultural detour, and the safe haven of the tie-camp-like places. The latter precipitates a before-unaccounted-for cultural pluralism, which allows spatial paradigms and stories to co-exist and not simply to collide. The non-place aspect enters

here as a shared attribute of non-belongingness, which, at the same time, establishes a collective thirdspace on a meta-level. The tie-camp cannot be claimed by a single spatial paradigm. It is thus a non-place from the point-of-view of mainstream spatiality as far as its unintelligibility is concerned; on the other hand it is hybrid space through its anti-social character in Augé's sense. Anti-social character is to be understood here as the lack of homogeneity that would enable the ordering of this space into a well-defined spatial paradigm. The striking aspect of Hurston's conceptualization of muck is this heterotopical network of social interaction.

Hurston's cultural universe can be seen as an inverted and hybridized space within the broader framework of Black Modernism, and therefore as a Modernist non-place. This is so for two reasons: first, considering the geopolitical notion of non-places that "With power generally understood to reside at the centre, [. . .] margins have usually been understood as simply objects of others' actions [and] comprehended as lacking subjectivity" (Browning and Joenniemi, 2004:700), Hurston's cultural space was criticized by the mainstream (and assimilationist) black intelligentsia of the time as unrealistic and inauthentic. In this sense, Hurston's space represents a marginal spatial discourse.

Furthermore, Hurston's cultural space is realized in opposition to both white and black cultural space, while being deeply embedded in the latter. The opposition is realized on several levels. As I will subsequently show, the notion of the South in contrast to the North holds for Hurston the mythic cradle of African-Americanness and stands as a means of criticising Black Modernism. Apart from her geographical way of signifying and effecting wilful distancing, Hurston employs an anti-picture of Black Modernist ideology. This was influenced significantly by a desire for self-defence against white depictions of African-Americans, as a result of which it converged toward white Modernism and centred around racial issues. As Sieglinde Lemke points out, this dualism within Modernism was due to "the racist imagination [which] conflated these two versions of alterity [African American and white] and defined people of African descent as irrational, uncivilized, and not-yet-modern" (Lemke, 1998:4-5). Mainstream Black Modernist ideology concentrated on debunking racial conceptualizations of African-Americans, which certainly reproduced notions of white Modernism as a proof of an imagined authenticity.

Hurston, on the other hand, represents a split within Black Modernism in that she distances herself from both white and Black mainstream Modernism. Distancing is not negation *per se*, but the creative, i.e., re-interpretative, use of Modernist notions of

eitherness. This hybridity renders Hurston's works Modernist (see Lemke, 1998:15) and establishes a non-place.

Secondly, the very criticism that her works provoked sheds light on the nature of Hurston's cultural politics. More importantly, "imitation" and "masking," two terms that L.M. Hill uses to describe Hurston's cultural politics, raise the question of authenticity; but according to my analysis, they lend Hurston's cultural universe a non-place-like character for its trickster quality. The very criticism that Hurston continues the tradition of minstrel shows with their supposed stock characters and stereotyped atmospheres chimes in with "the Negro's universal mimicry" (see "Characteristics") Hurston identifies in her ethnographic research. I agree rather more with Hill that Hurston employs the strategy of masking. Hill defines masking as "a vehicle through which African-Americans transmute the minstrel mask into cultural performances which are at once, linguistic, artistic, and politically informed" (Hill, 1996:xxiii). This masking of her cultural space as a static world that seems to reinforce racial stereotypes carries on the tradition of disguised resistance to racist conceptualizations of the African-American self. Her portrayal of lower class and rural people establishes for Hill the originality of Hurston's works. In this way, Hurston neatly criticizes "social scientific explanations of cultural diffusion and assimilation" by, for instance, reconceptualizing stereotypes (Hill, 1996:37). Mimicry is an existing form of cultural expression also supported by white patrons, who demanded a supply of African-American cultural production reinforcing cultural stereotypes. Hurston and other African-American writers, as Carr and Cooper suggest, "because of the commodification of African-American bodies and cultural forms persisting as slavery's legacy, were acutely aware of the inevitable cooption of their self-representations within a system of capitalist exchange and racialized patronage" (2002:288). It seems that the survival of African-Americans as writers in the literature market depended on their ability to adapt to white expectations. Hurston's mimicry can be explained, then, as programmatic inauthenticity that veils authentic cultural performances.

Despite the apparent inauthentic façade which Hurston employs as a cultural performance in itself, the other aspect of her non-place-like cultural space is what H.V. Carby calls Hurston's "discursive displacement of contemporary social crises [by] the creation of a discourse of the 'folk' as a *rural* people" (2000:12). For Hurston, beyond the fact that African-Americans are rooted in southern black culture, the replacement of African-Americans in this cultural realm serves as the solution of the urban crisis. What

seems to be Hurston's anti-urban sentiment is a response to the Modernist crisis that, for African-Americans, is clearly tainted with self-conceptualization, the struggle against racism, and the social problems of urbanization. By placing the problematization of African-Americans in a southern rural environment Hurston establishes a space that geographically re-locates them in a space that politically effects an anti-discourse as far as the expectations of the politics of the Black intelligentsia are concerned.

However, Hurston's cultural politics place her clearly in the centre of the Harlem Renaissance: her concept of culture reflecting both Boas and Locke (*see* Hill, 1996) and showing that Hurston's view integrates both the modern, relativist approach to culture and the Lockean concept of the *New Negro*.

The primary evidence against the claim that Hurston would return to the minstrel tradition is that her cultural space maintains the heterogeneous character she experienced during her research of African-American culture and which she collected in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*. Hurston's cultural space appears, in fact, as ambivalent as that of her time. As Hill points out, "[. . .] she left every inch of contradiction and ambiguity in place. The result is that her work constantly reminds us of unresolved tensions surrounding any mention of racial, cultural, social, and sexual differences and of the power struggles [. . .]" (1996: xxxi). In this way, her way of writing mirrors her ethnographic findings; furthermore, she allows her ethnographic gaze to penetrate the places of her characters.

For Hurston the Deep South constitutes a black non-place in contrast to the Modernist cultural space of the Harlem Renaissance. This sharp distinction is further emphasized when in *Jonah's* the Great Migration is mentioned with irony as "dis Nawth bound fever lak eve'ywhere else" (1990:149). This explicit irony reappears next being pronounced by the narrator, thereby rendering the statement all the more political: "On to the North! The land of promise" (1990:151). On the other hand, however, there is an identifiable schism within black cultural space too, breaking it down into social space and distanced non-place. Hurston's book itself as "the antonym of discipline, order, rationality - the antithesis of 'civilized'" (Lemke, 1998: 4) and not only reifies superficially white conceptions about African Americans but also embodies this schism by standing in sharp contrast to the Harlem Renaissance's self-conception.

This tension within cultural space undermines the claim of Hurston's presumed inauthenticity: despite the façade the spatial orientations reveal this to a great degree. John's close identification with nature proposes this view: "Ah'll tip on 'cross de good

Lawd's green. Ah'll give mah case tuh Miss Bush and let Mother Green stand mah bond" (1990:95). John's confession not only suggests a well-anchored cultural identity, but also an orientation yet distanced even from mainstream Southern black cultural space.

In this way, non-places, or negative spaces, have a clear function in Hurston's work and come to the foreground powerfully in *Jonah's*. As John keeps running away, he always flees from something somewhere to elsewhere which is constituted as a safe haven in the unknown from the point of view of *status quo* society. Alf Pearson verbalizes the normative expectations of transparent space: "Stop running away. Face things out" (1990:67), which aims at keeping John in his place, i.e., in the visible. At the same time, the strangeness of non-places proves to be affirming for refugees from the transparent. As it is narrated, "Distance was escape" (1990:47). This is supported by the title of the book itself. Jonah in the Bible left the city of Nineveh and found shelter under a gourd vine provided by God "to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort" (Jonah,4:6). Non-places elsewhere, i.e., not in the normative framework of social space, but in opposition to it, are regarded in *Jonah's* as something positive and individual(izing).

A similar conceptualization of the road is also present in *Jonah's*. John leaves Ned's place "singing a new song and stomping the beats" (1990:12). The Big Creek visually embodies a sharp contrast to the barrenness of the previous place. It is not only filled with life and vitality, but it appears familiar with its naturalness and even cosiness: the vivid description and the emotionally suggestive words are accompanied by the emergence of African memories embodied by "the drums of the Creek" (1990:12). The freedom John experiences is grounded in both relief from Ned's oppressive nature and the hope of self-fulfilment, but it is importantly first realized outside the boundaries of social space. The in-betweenness of the Creek cannot be conceptualized by either the world that we get to know through Ned's place and Pearson's place. Exactly this character of the roads and locales in nature renders them transient (and rigid for social space's incapability to conceptualize them), i.e., subjective and open for temporary inhabiting. John enlivens and inscribes the place as he passes through it: for example, he incorporates the place into his world when his self-exulting masculinity is shown in the fact that "he breathe[s] lustily" (1990:12) and swims across the river naked.

In *Jonah's* the muck's democratic vision detectable in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* does not come to the foreground as an overt political agenda. However, it is present in an even more culturally implosive way. At Pearson's place a black festival takes place



after the cotton picking. Hurston uses this event as an almost ethnographic account of an anthropologist, yet in this line of analysis the place described gains relevance as an alternative to social space. For one, people come here from their homes, i.e., from their point of view they go to a place undermining their time-space disposition. It is narrated that people stream from three different plantations (1990:28). The designation of their home as 'plantation' is also relevant, since the novel stages events after the abolition of slavery, but the word yet connotes the subservient position of blacks. This is also heightened by the remark that "Alf Pearson gave the hands two hogs to barbecue" (1990:28). In this context the festive event happens as hide-aways used to in the time of slavery when blacks stole away to secret places of sacred grounds.

For the Africanisms present the event possesses a transpatial character, which is why the negative space-like nature in Munn's sense is furthermore complemented by a heterotopous character. This derives from the positioning of the event. Ultimately, the barbecuing takes place on Pearson's *panopticon*-like plantation, which has a transparent character. As it is, the plantation provides the framework and thereby it conditions what can take place there, as well as in what manner. Pearson's person becomes, in this way, the node of possible actions overseen by him as the plantation can be regarded as the embodiment of his self, and, in a like manner, his body as the signifier of the semantics of the social space of the plantation. Pearson is presented thus as the frame, remaining an outsider, yet omniscient simultaneously, and staged as the benevolent benefactor, signifying hierarchy, but also distance.

The juxtaposition of the two, seemingly mutually exclusive, spaces, i.e., African-American cultural space and Pearson's transparent social space, which is constructed on racial bias and embodies white aristocratic values, suggests the relative independence and integrity of both. This derives from the presentation of African American cultural space as an authentic space intruding into the Euro-American spatial framework. The scene is also relevant from the point of view of religious space, indeed, the emphasis upon African religious elements heightens the sense of distinctiveness and of its standing apart from the white cultural framework. The difference establishes palpable boundaries between the two spaces. The scene appears a condensation of the society of the muck in *Their Eyes*, which there, however, becomes a geographical constant for its geographical separation from both black and white social spaces. The series of events underline this: apart from the religio-

cultural character that lends an unmistakably African atmosphere to this event, the types of social interaction firmly anchor it in African American culture.

Inwardly this cultural space is implosive, on the one hand, through an act of transposition of Africa into Alabama, rendering it heterotopous, yet without oscillation between the two worlds; on the other hand, this frame is established as homogeneous within and through African-American cultural praxis and artifacts. Dancing, in the first place, but also musical instruments (e.g., hands, feet, and drums) serve as the performative tools to create the cultural framework, i.e., “hollow-hand clapping” and “heel and toe stomping” (1990:30) as reminders of both tribal vitality and slavery-time conviviality. Hurston connects this series of actions to an African-American primordial self that is for her but a denotation of African-American subjectivity. This subjectivity is able to activate African-Americanness in a trickster-like manner, which is able to transform space into its own likeness. As the narration relates: “The fire died. The moon died. The shores of Africa receded” (1990:31). The end of the barbecue indicates the inwardly implosive nature of this cultural space as evolving and relapsing with the fire, as well as its elsewhere-ness or displacement, as its framework is curtailed by time and space.

The authenticity of the scene can be questioned due to its apparently idealized character, which appears to extinguish social and interpersonal tension. The barbecue is undoubtedly sutured into the narrative, where it almost unexpectedly explodes obliterating anything unlike its character; however, the importance of the scene lies in establishing a space that melts down the distinctives of white and black social space. The awareness of the white frame embodied by Pearson ceases and the differences based on gender and class in the African-American community are not retained. In fact, it is not possible to recover where the whole event takes place on the basis of the subsequent actions because the contours of the plantation dissolve completely. What Hurston does is to glorify African-American cultural identity, and its power and homogeneity render it a statement, rather than a weakness of presentation.

The tie-camp further implores Hurston’s concept of non-place that is inwardly implosive. It is deliberately positioned elsewhere even within black cultural space and has important religio-cultural ramifications. Presenting an anti-picture of urbanism and black middle-class America; and thus, generally, of a homogeneous, static, and transparent society, Hurston constitutes the tie-camp as a site of wilderness experience, staging it as heterogeneous and pluralistic.

The cross-section delineated by time and space is an exact realization of the barbecue on a daily and weekly (i.e., Saturday night) basis. As the barbecue is organized around the fire at night, the organic gatherings are also conducted after work at night, however, growingly around John's personality. By excelling in all types of African-American cultural interaction in the camp, John manages to do the very same as during the crossing of the Creek: he transforms space to his likeness as "he was the centre of camp life" (1990:61). This proves openness of this non-place in the sense that it is in fact transitory and welcoming regarding inscription. He does individually what in the barbecue is constructed on group level: he inscribes his own spatiality, whereby the tie-camp becomes a denotation of his extended self. Praxis, i.e., not only work, which establishes the space of the camp initially through the rhythmic swing of axes and the accompanying chant of the workers (1990:60), but also cultural forms such as wrestling, chinning the bar, balancing axes, or storytelling; enable him to draw in the space around himself. He does what the fire establishes during the barbecue previously. In this sense, his body delimits space as a symbol and as a means of action. Even though John ultimately inscribes space through action, i.e., fighting, when he remains unchallenged, and thereby his space uncontested for the time being, the symbolism used by Hurston is more revealing. It is narrated that "he could stand like a cross, immobile for several seconds with an axe muscled out in each hand" (1990:61). This moment establishes John as the primary agent of this space. The symbolism of the scene reifies this: not only the fact that he only was capable of holding the axes, proving his physical strength, but the scene's religious connotations with his statue posture being similar to the crucified Christ. Furthermore, the two axes establish him as the battle axe of God, both emphasizing his univocal position in the community, as well as foreshadowing his future as a servant of God. (see Jeremiah, 51:20) Later he confesses his calling into the ministry, claiming that "God done called me tuh preach" after the psalm "He's a Battle-Axe in de Time Uh Trouble" (1990:111).

Non-places for Hurston represent hybrid places open for inscription. This rather Modernist notion is the means to overcome the constraints of social and cultural space, on both individual and group level. Indeed apparent mimicry is deconstructed through the tension generated by these non-places. With the help of non-places (and the book is but one such place), Hurston manages to establish a "discursive space" (Sorensen, 2005:4) within Black (and white) Modernism and apart from it. Thus by offering an alternative space in the South, it contests the framework of Black Modernism. Hurston does this

consciously and so she offers a non-place that in a trickster-like fashion appears to fulfil white expectations, but especially through the schisms built in her space, she also distances her space from the ideals of black urbanity.

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**MULTICULTURALISM, GENDER AND IDENTITY IN HANIF  
KUREISHI'S *THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA***

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The novel is set in London in the 1970s and centres around Karim Amir, a seventeen year-old Indo-British teenager. "His English mother and Indian father's marriage is rapidly disintegrating. His father's escape from this disaster is to become the 'Buddha of Suburbia', mouthing trite Indian spiritual sayings for desperate middle aged suburban housewives and the like. When dad and one of his 'disciples' become romantically involved, Karim is introduced into the whirlwind of London punk social life and then thoroughly swept along in the tide, ultimately achieving a measure of true personal success as all around him flounder in overindulgent self-indulgence." (<http://www.amazon.com/Buddha-Suburbia-Hanif-Kureishi/dp/014013168X>)

Kureishi's main attempt is to focus on his characters through the lens of their 'corporeality', more exactly, sexuality. But the body/ mind dichotomy, as well as the finding of one's inner self are also some of the writer's main themes, so he also strives to approach his characters through their ethnic inspiration. Having Indian origins himself, Kureishi has imprinted the same features on most of the individuals portrayed, showing us various facets of multiculturalism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

"Multiculturalism – a portmanteau term for anything from minority discourse to postcolonial critique, from gay and lesbian studies to chicano/ a fiction – has become the most charged sign for describing the scattered social contingencies that characterize contemporary *Kulturkritik*. The multicultural has itself become a 'floating signifier' whose enigma lies less in itself than in the discursive uses of it to mark social processes where differentiation and condensation seem to happen almost synchronically (Homi Bhabha, 1998 quoted in Hesse, 2000:1). As the quotation shows, the term multiculturalism has become universally deployed and invested with a variety of meanings relating to all walks of life. Its floating signifier uncovers the duality between the acceptance or not of racial

entities within a country's culture or, references the strategies and policies adopted to govern the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up.

Contemporary British society has rather a negative view of all sorts of invasive cultures, considering them a way of marking the decay of British society and the corrosion of a true British identity. Hanif Kureishi attempts to reverse this creed of unsympathy against Asian culture and race, but his approach is rather moderate and fits very well into the topic of ethnicity. The writer does not try to embellish the state of things among the Pakistani gangs in his writings, but strives to keep an accurate eye upon his observations. His objective witnessing of the interracial process has not always been well received, but in talking about social issues and racism, Kureishi explains his impartial approach: "I try to reflect the world as I see it, I'm not doing PR. Does Shakespeare present Hamlet as a nice Danish prince? A writer's job in society, is to tell the truth as we see it, to write about the world as we observe it, and the world is a strange place and people are divided, unusual, wicked and good" (<http://www.literaryhistory.com/20thc/kureishi.htm>).

The artistic creed of the British writer and playwright is based on his vision of society as well as of interhuman relations, which he has experienced in Britain, while having the inscriptions of his origins fingerprinted all over his body.

As a confirmation of Kureishi's artistic belief, some critics have noted that the stories depicted by the 'immigrant' writer himself show the characters "neither as victims nor tradition-bound aliens. They're comprehensible, modern people with an eye to the main chance, no better or worse than the rest of us" (<http://www.literaryhistory.com/20thc/kureishi.htm>).

They are bound to make mistakes, able to develop professionally just like white people, but as the writer clearly underlines in his novel, all of his Asian characters are being constantly reminded the origins from which they can never flee. This is the axiom of multiculturalism whether you moved to the adoptive country or you were already born there. The strongest inscription one can bear is the colour of one's skin, and implicitly fighting against all well-anchored beliefs related to the inferiority of the *black*.

Plainly, multiculturalism is a way of learning to live in each other's shoes. Phil Cohen explains: "The multicultural illusion is that dominant and subordinate can somehow swap places and learn how the other half lives, whilst leaving the structures of power intact" (Hesse, 2000:8). Theoretically, it is an assumption about tolerance including a hegemonic homogenous majority and small minorities with their different communities,

cultures, religions which have to be understood, accepted and basically left alone. The greatest predicament in the equation mentioned above is the need to keep straight the balance of powers, because obviously *mother* culture wants to remain the single accepted and dominant one. Multiculturalism cries out people's incapacity for tolerance in a moment of maximum propagation against racism denying all historical facts throughout history.

Karim, the main character and narrator of the novel is a crucial example in presenting ethnicity as well as identity. His story is mainly about identification, about finding his roots as he is caught between 'belonging and not', between his Indian heritage and the desire to assimilate into British society. In the novel, Karim negotiates his hybrid identity, just as sexually he fluctuates between homo- and heterosexuality.

The path the young boy follows in the novel must have been inspired by Kureishi's personal life experience, as neither he nor the narrator actually visited their country of origin at a young age. Karim was born in England from an Indian aristocratic father and a British middle-class mother. And just like the novelist, the character often felt suffocated by his father's heritage. The British writer went to visit his father's relatives in Pakistan at the age of 31 (<http://www.literaryhistory.com/20thc/kureishi.htm>), while Karim's way out of the country led him directly to the U.S.A. Nonetheless, while ripening up, the teenager becomes constantly more aware of the legacy he is carrying, and also of the burden it brings about, feeling ashamed and incomplete for knowing so little about his ancestors.

The predicament in establishing your identity is linked to homelessness, a topic Kureishi juggled with in this universe of social issues. Being unable to define your roots involves also the complexities of finding a place to belong to. The split-up of his parents' marriage unconsciously unbalances Karim, who, despite his fondness for Eva and the great number of new 'homes', finds it difficult to relate to any residence. In moving from London's suburbs to the centre, he starts feeling 'directionless and lost' (Kureishi, 1990:126) for the simple reason that he doesn't feel inclined either to fit in there or to integrate. All these auxiliary aspects of finding his direction, plumb even more the social and racial issues every non-British is submitted to. The centre of London means a much larger amount of money than its periphery, but it is common knowledge that ethnic minorities tend to have lower earnings than the white majority population. Even though Karim's job wasn't developing in some industrial field, acting was no exception to the rule. As the reader, Karim is also reminded several times of the reason for being chosen in

the play: “Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience.” (147) The deployment of this Indo-British Mowgli in the play reveals various facets of the multicultural concern.

The first meeting with the director-to-be of the play has a rather treacherous début for our naïve character. On the verge of modestly imagining himself gifted, implicitly wanted by the director who declares “I’m looking for an actor just like you” (1990:140), Karim suddenly realizes not only that he doesn’t own any flair at all; moreover, nobody would ever care about such an insignificant thing when you have the necessary appearance. Once again, ethnic groups are seen as marginalized and the people who are part of these groups are reduced beyond mind and conscience. They exist through their skin or accent or inherited traditions.

Shadwell, the director, declares his sarcastic amusement about his freshly adopted Mowgli. “He said, ‘What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there’d be. Everyone looks at you, I’m sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we’ll hear now from him. And you’re from Orpington’” (Kureishi, 1990:141)

In the *Jungle Book*, Karim’s part, as well as the roles of his colleagues, were made mainly of mime, voices and bodily inventions. Costumes would be minimal, and the body foremost, implying a lot of jogging in the rehearsal room. At the moment of ‘putting on’ his costume, Mowgli starts feeling that the whole play is mostly a ‘political matter’. His costume consists of a brown make-up from head to toe, which Karim finds really hard to ‘wear’. These layers of dirt or ‘shit’ which cover our protagonist, together with the compulsory Indian accent he doesn’t master are means of indirectly degrading Karim in the eyes of white people. Karim’s personality is reduced to an absence through the discourse when he needs to face his costume which renders him androgynous. Besides this lack of gender through the costume, Mowgli is reduced to silence in the role due to his hissing moments or those when he needs to imitate an accent he is not familiar with. The whole masculinity Kureishi invested his character with is wiped in these passages where the obvious things remain race and the androgynous body covered in dirt. The play resumes Karim’s fluctuating personality to a silent indifference. Along with growing up, the puzzle of his origins increasingly takes up more space in his brain, arriving like that at Anwar’s funeral he discovers his own ignorance. He attends the Indian burial ritual as a stranger,



with no real familiarity about Mecca, the Koran or the mosque. “But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now – the Indians – that in some way these were my people, and that I’d spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them.” (212) In spite of all malicious jokes related to his background, Karim was obliged to undergo this unique experience in his life in order to realize the importance of what *you* feel.

Karim’s identity and belonging are split between the Indian and English ones, as both his parents claim what they believe to own. His English mother is very content after a theatrical representation and emphasizes how conceited she feels for having given birth to an English son: “‘But you’re not an Indian. You’ve never been to India. You’d get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would.’

‘Why don’t you say it a bit louder,’ I said. ‘Aren’t I part Indian?’

‘What about me?’ Mum said ‘Who gave birth to you? You’re an Englishman, I’m glad to say.’” (232)

The decision of attachment to either of the two possible origins should and is left to Karim’s feeling and verdict. He will never be an Englishman only because he does not feel so. He wants to know his Indian origins and possibly now that he has ripened up, he wants to go and meet his roots. Karim’s fluctuating identity fits perfectly well a quotation by Nitin Sawhney written in 1999: “My identity and my history are defined by myself – beyond politics, beyond nationality, beyond religion and Beyond Skin.” (Hesse, 2000: 123)

Haroon, ‘God’, or ‘the Buddha of Suburbia’, as we expect from his epithets, is a spiritual and wise man, who was born in India, then established himself in London, where he started feeling really comfortable. Now in his forties, ‘the Buddha’ came to England after an ‘idyllic childhood’. He was sent by his family to be educated. His aristocratic roots in India woke him to life when he realized how complicated his new life could be without servants. Obviously, life in England was not all milk and honey, but rather a ‘freezing shock’. The arrival in London makes Haroon face suddenly two harsh realities. First, the Indian inscription upon his body was obvious and he could never get rid of it, “people called you ‘Sunny Jim’” (Kureishi, 1990:24). Second, Haroon experienced as cruel his descent into a new world, a world which he always thought superior to the Indian one, and the sheer confrontation of reality is a complete disappointment. The historical and cultural representations he had created in his mind enhanced and mythicised Englishness and the

English identity. Upon his arrival, Haroon felt a heavy frustration since reality was much worse than he had imagined it. And probably much worse than his status in his country of origin. Instead of witnessing the glory and power of a historically mythicised colonial England, he observes a hard and hopeless tangibility from the capital's suburbs.

Coming from a financially stable background, this Indian man becomes slowly aware of the pitfalls brought about by his ethnicity. In a contradictory conversation with his best friend since childhood, Anwar, Haroon states clearly what the Indians' position is in the British society: "The whites will never promote us" (27). 'Buddha' gets professionally obliterated, but paradoxically his strength resides in his Indianness. So eventually, Haroon will succeed in making a decent living out of his Indian culture, tradition and way of thinking, exactly the things that couldn't make him eligible for the national dominant status in Great Britain.

The struggle for supremacy – of all sorts – between the two nations resides in a permanent oscillation and confrontation of values. The English believe themselves superior due to glorious times in history, and also because of the contemporary western predominance, while the Indians base their dominance on matters of heart and soul, and not technology. The strong opposition of the continents is partly explanatory for the dominant significance in each of the camps, moreover it testifies for multicultural issues.

Haroon's position fluctuates between his Indian roots and the devotion for the adoptive country. He is the spiritual character *par excellence*, so all the novel he admits fighting for his inner self and happiness. The position he appears to adopt is a mature posture, with the specific compromises of the age and divine teachings. When Karim shows up with Helen, a white girl whose father hates black people, 'God' has a positive reaction: "He looked approvingly at Helen and winked at me. He liked her; but then, he was keen for me to go out with anyone, as long as they were not boys or Indians. 'Why go out with these Muslims?' he said once, when I brought a Pakistani friend of Jamila's home with me. 'Why not?' I asked. 'Too many problems,' he said imperiously." (1990:73-74) Haroon's directing his son doesn't stand against his principles, it is only the reaction of a father who wants to protect his son from the discrimination he experienced. The shedding of the Indian superficial features is perceived as a means of access into the good world.

Kureishi plays on the contrast of the two cultures, especially in deploying a large amount of positive and negative impressions upon Dad, apparently unable to choose. Haroon's moments often alternate in the first part of the book, as if he were a young

maiden who cannot help herself blushing, but is nonetheless eager to lose her virginity. Dad's desire for internal advancement pushes him into preaching theories about how to obtain a quiet mind, how to be true to oneself, and consequently achieve happiness. But this weighty Indian approach is soon demolished by Haroon's apparent shallowness when he carries a dictionary with him just to learn new words in order to impress certain English people. Multiculturalism has many facets and all Haroon does, he does for integration in the British society. The more information we have about Haroon, the clearer it becomes that the superficiality and duality he discloses constitute themselves into his mechanism against discrimination. And taken on the whole, Dad's evolution is tremendous, from a petty civil clerk at the beginning to the spiritual guru of a London neighbourhood, who has come to truly believe in his own teachings.

Dad learnt coping with England, the hostile home. He sold his Indian spirituality, always keeping in mind his ancestors' values and thus bringing himself a good deal of money. If at first he often asserted his desire to revisit his home town, towards the end, even if only once through his son's thoughts, Haroon admits his attachment to England. The ease and relaxation he got used to in his childhood entitle him to prefer England over India, not because of his perfect assimilation, but for his cosy and comfortable lifestyle. Despite his bond with the new home, the Buddha will never leave behind his roots which eventually brought him money and fame. In the novel, he undergoes a tremendous rise (partly due also to Eva) from a 'petty clerk' in the beginning to 'the guru of the Suburbia selling Indian values'. His unbelievable evolution makes him personally reconsider the matter of his teachings due to the events and people he tries to help. By having such a strong effect on the people to whom he teaches Indian values, Dad will gradually start believing in Buddhism.

In comparing the two countries, Dad favours his adoptive home, but in terms of people and spirituality, the Buddha has no doubts about voting for the Indians. Haroon also transmits his creed of Indian superiority to his son, even though the latter has never been to the country of his roots before. "I began to wonder why I was so strong – what it was that held me together. I thought it was that I'd inherited from Dad a strong survival instinct. Dad has always felt superior to the British: this was the legacy of his Indian childhood – political anger turning into scorn and contempt. For him in India the British were ridiculous, stiff, unconfident, rule-bound. And he'd made me feel that we couldn't allow ourselves the shame of failure in front of these people." (1990:250) The end of the novel

shows us a new Haroon, sure of himself and of the values he engendered throughout all those years. It becomes clearer and clearer that Britain is only a country of ex-colonialists who were exhausted already and their only remedy was to seek inside themselves. This conjuncture helps Dad realize the importance of the Indian soul and teachings, so that after illuminating some people he declares that he has found his own self: “Now I’m going to teach and think and listen. I want to discuss how we live our lives, what our values are, what kind of people we’ve become and what we can be if we want. I aim to encourage people to think, to contemplate, to just let go their obsessions.[...] I want to help others contemplate the deeper wisdom of themselves which is often concealed in the rush of everyday life. I want to live intensely my own life!” (266) This *mise en abîme* from *Buddha*’s side is a testimony about his identity, approach to ethnicity, as well as the recurrent theme of homelessness.

Interestingly enough, the ‘race’/gender intersection is not conceptualized around black masculinity, as we are used to seeing it in white societies. Claire Alexander states that “there exists, then, a curious inversion of ‘race’ and gender blindness whereby black men are rendered effectively silent and invisible within discourse; without substance or life, more a cipher than a presence.[...] Black masculinity then remains, by default, subsumed into an undifferentiated (white) patriarchal masculinity, which ignores the complex struggles, alliances and tensions around black gender relations.” (Alexander, 2000:132) The ‘Buddha of Suburbia’ comes to basically contradict this theory about Asian men. One of the central figures of the novel is definitely much more than a presence, as Haroon is the spiritual black symbol meant to reveal the code of white people. Even though his presence is not constant throughout the novel – he appears especially in the first part and less in the second – the spiritual guru seems to send out rays that reach to both types of characters: black and white. The greatest contribution brought about by Indian spirituality will turn to Haroon himself who comes to honestly appreciate Indian teachings and the richness of the Indian soul; besides, uncle Ted, Karim and a lot of apprentices will take advantage of such preaching. Even the snobbish and arrogant Charlie looks up to Haroon’s manner of being, calling him ‘an inspiration’.

Haroon’s companion from childhood, Anwar, joins him on his route to Britain. They both come in their twenties, but have very different views about almost everything despite their common background. Anwar marries Princess Jeeta, a very shy Indian woman who ‘couldn’t speak English properly’ (26). Jamila, the only child of the Anwar couple

was born in Britain from Indian parents and often exercises her sexual imagination with Karim. Between her and her father, there will be a constant fight for women's rights and supremacy, partly due to her Indian mother's silence. Jammie is a very political daughter who will never be afraid to sharply reply to her father and sustain her own point of view. The contradiction goes back to the birth of Jammie, a daughter, which makes Anwar responsible for 'weak seed' (57). Obviously, this shame could only be his wife's deficiency "It's my wife's fault, you bastard. Her womb has shrivelled like a prune" (57) Later on, when Jammie grows up, starts reading, becomes involved in politics and practices karate; so, for fear she could meet boys and possibly want to marry them, Anwar takes a decision. He himself will import a husband from India just to perpetuate traditions, but mostly the genuine Indian seed. This decision, which was comprehensibly despised by the person concerned and kept under silence by Jeeta, eventually leads to an utter transformation of Anwar. The refusal of his daughter confirms him even more in his verdict, as it is impossible for him to accept a democratic answer. He cares neither about the welfare of his family, nor of his daughter, but he has to win the competitions he sets up between himself and Haroon, and between himself and Jamila.

In his Indian mind, it is humiliating enough not to give birth to a boy at least, and through the chosen Indian man, Anwar wants to prove to his friend not only the perpetuation of a more pure Indianness than Haroon's, but also he must make Jamila aware of who is the leader in the family. He cannot accept her emancipation and her choices, just because these would threaten his position of commander in the family. But there is one aspect Anwar doesn't take into consideration: Jammie is the product of the British society, with British mentalities and a really strong personality.

When Jamila refuses to marry the Indian selected by her father, Anwar goes on a hunger strike. His behaviour changes utterly and he seems to forget his youth when "he loved the prostitutes who hung around Hyde Park" (1990:25). Recently, he has started behaving like a Muslim, though, so far he had never believed in anything. As Anwar and Haroon age, they find it increasingly difficult to keep adjusting to England and its traditions, that is why Haroon declares: "Anwar is my oldest friend in the world.[...] We old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India" (74); "Anwar is a foil to the character of Haroon, another example of the nostalgia that permeates the depictions of many of the characters, the deep seated longing for things in

the past is seen in both of the characters.”  
(<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/uk/kureishi/moloney1.html>)

The India Anwar and Haroon dream about is not the real one, but it is their birth place combined with the most beautiful passages of their childhood. A feeling of nostalgia is normal for people who have left their home places, but it is likely that they embellish the truth. Though friends a lifetime, the end of the novel presents an increasing gap between them. Their huge divergence in points of view has become so wide that Kureishi posits Anwar’s conservatism literally under the ground. Anwar’s duality and impossibility to really integrate to British values will eventually lead to his death. In his mind, life is about competing and winning, without respecting the desires and needs of the people who surround him. Out of objectivity, Kureishi punishes the Muslim character. Obviously, the writer expresses his disagreement towards the narrow mindedness of people who left off their origins and who forget that we live in the emancipated world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Dad had seriously fallen out with Anwar. They weren’t speaking at all now. It was over the fact that Anwar thought Dad should never have left Mum. It was a corrupt thing to do. Have a mistress, Anwar said, and treat both women equally well, but never leave your wife. Anwar insisted that Eva was an immoral woman and that Dad had been seduced by the West, becoming as decadent and lacking in values as the rest of society. He even listened to pop music, didn’t he? ‘He’ll be eating pork pie next,’ Anwar said.” (1990:211) The great opposition between the two men consists mainly in the fact that after coming to Britain, Haroon did everything possible to integrate into the new world, leaving aside as much as he could of his past. Hanif Kureishi punishes Anwar’s lack of consistency, not his origins or lack of respect. The more we read the novel we see the extent to which Anwar is selfish in respect to everybody else, including his wife and daughter; all he desires is to be the winner in the competition with his friend, Haroon. Though he loved goofing around in his youth, Anwar greatly despises the possibility that his daughter might do this.

Anwar’s son-in-law, Changez, gives a powerful meaning to the novel, including its ethnic aspect. He is the Indian national who is arranged to be married to Jamila, and as a form of postmodern perversion she refuses ever to approach him. Unlike all other Indian characters, Changez comes straight from Indian values at a grown-up age in order to celebrate his marriage and subsequent life in Great Britain. The idea the reader creates when first encountering this persona is that of anachronism. He looks as if he has fallen from a different time and space, but mainly from different moral expectations which will

burden him even more on the road towards Englishness, because Changez will strive hard to be adopted by his new country and family. He has the attributes of common sense and good intentions – despite his insignificant errors – of the Easterner who without sacrificing his origins, genuinely wants to harmonize with the new society. Kureishi depicts him as ‘the other’, and in some ways the happiest to adapt. Significantly enough, ‘the man walking towards England’ (78), has a crippled arm, a symbol of incompleteness and his incapacity of being a full English citizen or to make his bride-to-be totally happy. His lack is not mirrored in his soul, but in the lack of physical beauty, which in England values much more than in his home country. As Eva stated in the novel, England’s motto could be: “But you’re beautiful, and the beautiful should be given everything they want” (93). According to this truism, Changez’s existence in Great Britain has a rough path to tread.

His plight is even more desperate than just a native’s struggling to make himself a living. This man is oppressed in almost all walks of life: “Conjugal rights were being denied him; human rights were being suspended at times; unnecessary inconvenience was happening everywhere; abuse was flying around his head like a spit-shower – and he was an important man from a considerable Bombay family!” (100). Still, he never got desperate, but preferred to take action. The human race generally competes for better conditions of living, but for Changez his decline from a respected family in Bombay to being a nobody without rights in an ‘unfriendly cold England’ (101) released an alarm that he should do something.

The attitude he displays is different from all other Indian characters. His determination when taking position in racial assaults exceeds the limits he should have set. He starts the fight against this issue with such a frenzy that he cannot notice the harm he creates upon his own fellows. “And Changez, if I knew my Changez, would be abusing any Pakistanis and Indians he saw in the street.[...] ‘Yes, they have souls, but the reason there is this bad racialism is because they are so dirty, so rough-looking, so bad-mannered. And they are wearing such strange clothes for the Englishman, turbans and all. To be accepted they must take up the English ways and forget their filthy villages! They must decide to be either here or there. Look how much here I am! And why doesn’t that buggar over there look the Englishman in the eye! No wonder the Englishman will hit him!’” (210). The enthusiasm of the beginner is huge and translates an absolute yearning of integration.

Hanif Kureishi's conclusion is that despite the problems it creates, ethnicity can often prove a valuable concept if you have the necessary resources to take advantage of it. Discrimination, so famous for the British, can bring you financial and even spiritual profit by witnessing two national identities.

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# PROTEAN FEMININITIES: SHIFTING STEREOTYPES IN ‘CHICK LIT’

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## 1. Introduction: Paradigms reversed

It is the main assumption of this paper that there has been a shift in terms of paradigms generated and negotiated in gender studies, – as apparent in recent literary products, often bestsellers over the last two decades, that have generated new types of characters, indeed novel taxonomies and a new genre, *chick lit* \*, literature for girls.

Ambivalently acclaimed by criticism, these novels have attracted a faithful readership, as sociological research to date convincingly shows (see, Wallace:1989). Indeed, there is compelling evidence that the addressability of such literary productions, straddles, quite uncannily, categories and taxonomies, ranging from housewives (plus/minus desperate) to upwardly-mobile career-women. A parallel between the – stagnant – addressability of, say, soaps, vs. chick lit is food for thought.

My main preoccupation at this point is informed by the following research questions applied to ‘chick lit’:

1.1 Is the working woman of the 1990’s and 2000’s *barbified*, i.e. is she the new Barbie Doll of the past decade? Therefore:

1.2 Is there a paradigmatic reversal at work when we wish to identify who the – epistemological – underdog is in feminist studies?

## 2. What is ‘chick lit’?

‘Chick lit’ is a term used to denote genre fiction written for and marketed to young women, especially single, working women in their twenties and thirties. The creation of this genre was spurred on, if not exactly created, by Sue Townsend’s *Adrian Mole Diaries* which inspired Adele Lang’s *Confessions of a Sociopathic Social Climber: The Katya Livingston Chronicles* in the mid-1990’s. Another strong early influence can be seen in the

books by M.C. Beaton about Agatha Raisin and Hamish Macbeth. The style can also be seen to be somewhat influenced by female teen Angst movies like *Sixteen Candles* and *Clueless*. Later with the appearance of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* and similar works; the genre continued to sell well in the 2000's, with chick lit titles topping bestseller lists and the creation of imprints devoted entirely to chick lit. (see [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick\\_lit](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick_lit))

### 3. Sample Text Analysis

The extracts am I looking at are from two novels belonging to this genre, i.e. Sophie Kinsella's *Shopaholic Abroad* and Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* that I find relevant to this discussion.

In *Shopaholic Abroad*, Kinsella has her main character Samantha, plus a host of other sales-hungry peers, invade a store on D-Day, sales-day. The urgency, the non-discriminate consumerist urge is rendered here by a plethora of verbs of action (and – significantly – not reflection) and nouns denoting objects of (consumer) desire:

'Twelfth floor,' he says in a bored voice. 'Elevators are in the rear.' I hurry towards the back of the foyer, summon one of the rather elderly lifts and press 12. Slowly and creakily the lift rises – and I begin to hear a kind of faint babble, rising in volume as I get nearer. The lift pings and the doors open and ...Oh my God. Is this the *queue*? A line of girls is snaking back from a door at the end of a corridor. They're pressing forwards, and all have the same urgent look in their eyes. Every so often somebody pushes their way out of the door, holding a carrier bag – and about three girls push their way in. Then just as I join the end of the line, there's a rattling sound, and a woman opens up a door, a few yards behind me. 'Another entrance this way,' she calls. 'Come this way!' In front of me, a whole line of heads whips round. There's a collective intake of breath – and then it's like a tidal wave of girls, all heading towards me. I find myself running towards the door, just to avoid being knocked down – and suddenly I'm in the middle of the room, slightly shaken, as everybody peels off and heads for the rails. (Kinsella, 2001: 168-169; all underlining mine)

There is what I term Object Bulimia at work here, in the *queue scene*, consumerism gone bad.

A close reading of the text reveals pseudo-existentialist overtones (see French existentialism) that has large crowds, indeed masses of, say, passers-by on the streets of the megalopolis – here, the mall, as the new site-for-consumerist-power – (for an analysis of such new topographies of urban significance see Stuart Andrews (1999) –, i.e. his study on the ‘mall’ as ‘NeverNeverland.’ – as Kinsella (2001) says, “ [...] a line of girls snaking back”; ‘They’re pressing forwards’; “all have the same urgent look in their eyes’; ‘[...] a tidal wave of girls”. It is like some huge anthropomorphic mechanism that looks human but is not, that trudges forward in an attempt to grab, but not digest, acquire, but not process. Reification is at work here as the young women, amalgamated, lumped together in sales craze, are reified, treated as objects, both in their immediate dynamics, and in the broader paradigmatic sense. It’s a case of “Abandon all Hope / Ye who enter here!” the Dantean adage relegated to a position of consumer Hell. Or is it Paradise?

Or in: “[...] I’m in the middle of the room, slightly shaken, as everybody peels off and heads for the rails”(169) – a vantage point not a possibility, the narrating subject enmeshed in the turmoil of ‘peer pressure’ gone physical. The verbs used forcefully indicate overarching movement, all the shoppers moving senselessly in one direction, and when some diverge it all looks like this one giant creature, a serpent streaming towards the rails, is ‘peeling off’. (169)

Identification with her taxonomic peers follows as Samantha feels very much at ease in the midst of consumer chaos:

I look around, trying to get my bearings. There are rails and rails of clothes, tables covered in bags and shoes and scarves and girls sorting through them. I can spot Ralph Lauren knitwear [...] a rail full of fabulous coats [...] there’s a stack of Prada bags [...] I mean, this is like a dream come true! Conversation is high-pitched and excited, and as I look around, I can hear snippets floating around.

‘I have to have it,’ a girl is saying, holding up a coat against herself. ‘I just have to have it.’ ‘OK, what I’m going to do is, I’m just going to put the \$450 I spent today on to my mortgage,’ another girl is saying to her friend as they walk out, laden with bags. ‘I mean, what’s \$450 over thirty years?’

‘One hundred per cent cashmere!’ someone else is exclaiming. ‘Did you see this? It’s only \$50! I’m going to take three!’

I look around the bright, buzzing room, at the girls milling about, grabbing at merchandise, trying on scarves, piling their arms full of glossy new stuff. And I feel a sudden warmth:

an overwhelming realization. These are my people. This is where I belong. I've found my HOMELAND. (Kinsella 2001:169; all underlining mine)

The surplus of goods that 'paralyzes' other authors among the supermarket aisles (Wallace:1989) is referred to here: 'rails and rails' etc (169). Lavish quantity is appropriately coupled with number-quantification, i.e. prices are postulated that would nauseate a more Protestant mind: eg, \$450 for an item etc. Object bulimia is at work here (see 'consumerist pornography' in Wallace:1989) "I'm going to take three!"

A new agora ("bright, buzzing room") is thus created for these shopaholics, a topography of excess and indiscriminate consumerism, wherein our narrator feels at large, paradigmatically:

"I look around the bright, buzzing room, at the girls milling about, grabbing at merchandise, trying on scarves, piling their arms full of glossy new stuff. And I feel a sudden warmth; an overwhelming realization. These are my people. This is where I belong. I've found my HOMELAND." (169)

### 3.1: Definition of the 'Female Cyborg'

This new breed of working woman (see Haraway:1989) is re-defined – anatomically, taxonomically and in point of her trajectories in the City – by the electronic extensions of her body and her assigned power-laden or, alternatively, menial, tasks in the workplace. Here the female cyborg is this 'zombified', gadget-dependent workaholic whose trajectories are solely informed by her professional self. As Andrea in Weisberger (2003) notes:

My hands were moist again with sweat, evidenced by the matches that kept slipping to the floor. The light turned green just as I managed to touch the fire to the end of the cigarette, and I was forced to leave it hanging between my lips as I negotiated the intricacies of clutch, gas, shift (neutral to first? OR first to second), release clutch, the smoke wafting in and out of my mouth with each and every breath. It was another three blocks before the car moved smoothly enough for me to remove the cigarette, but it was already too late; the precariously long line of spent ash had found its way directly to the sweat stain on the pants. Awesome. But before I could consider that, counting the Manolos, I'd wrecked \$3,100 worth of merchandise in under three minutes, my cell phone bleated loudly. And as if the very essence of life itself didn't suck enough at that particular moment, the caller ID

confirmed my worst fear: it was HER. Miranda Priestly. My boss.

“Ahn-dre-ah! Ahn-dre-ah! Can you hear me, Ahn-dre-ah?” she trilled the moment I snapped my Motorola open – no small feat considering both of my (bare feet and hands were already contending with various obligations. I propped the phone between my ear and shoulder and tossed the cigarette out the window, where it narrowly missed hitting a bike messenger. [...]

“Yes, Miranda. Hi, I can hear you perfectly.” (Weisberger, 2003:2 – 3; all underlining mine)

Thus *the body beautiful* – turned *body automatic* in the efficiency frenzy of militant feminism fails to multi-task miserably. The paraphernalia of power and expediency (the mobile phones, the head-sets etc) prove hindrances in her trajectories in the city. (For an analysis of postmodern operational knowledge of, and uses and abuses of power tools see Filip-Alb, 2000). The *female cyborg* of the 2000s is disarticulate, her aura of power and effectiveness dispelled. Hence the paradigmatic twist: is the super-working woman of the 2000’s *barbified*, as this portrait of upwardly-mobile Andrea exudes caricature rather than would-be-role-model praise? Is the upwardly-mobile career woman the new Barbie Doll as her paragon-of-unisex success factor seems to have spent itself. Indeed, as Weisberger further suggests, her professional high-stakes also seem to plummet: Andrea is assigned pre-eminently menial tasks by her boss, the much-feared fashion guru Miranda Priestly:

Ahn-dre-ah, where’s my car? Did you drop it off at the garage yet?” The light ahead of me blessedly turned red and looked as though it might be a long one. The car jerked to a stop without hitting anyone or anything, and I breathed a sigh of relief. “I’m in the car right now, Miranda, and I should be at the garage in just a few minutes.” I figured she was probably concerned that everything was going well with the ‘before-after’ photo shoot, so I reassured her that there were no problems whatsoever in that department. “Whatever,’ she said brusquely, cutting me off mid-sentence. “I need you to pick up Madeleine and drop her off at the apartment before you come back to the office.” Click. The phone went dead. I stared at it for a few seconds before I realized that she’d deliberately hung up because she had provided all of the details I could hope to receive. Madeleine. Who the hell was Madeleine? Where was she at the moment? Did she know I was to pick her up? Why was she going back to Miranda’s apartment? And why on earth – considering Miranda had a full-time driver, housekeeper, and nanny – was I the one who had to do it? (Weisberger,

2003:3; a; underlining mine)

This interplay between power-laden tasks and menial ones redefines who the new career woman is. An anti-climax is created when in the midst of urgency and phone hysteria, Andrea imagines that the calls are about important tasks, such as photo shoots, but in fact they are about collecting and transporting people or running errands. Here the myth of *empowerment by position* is deconstructed. All in all there's short-circuiting at work here – an undermining of the very discourse of gender-blind empowerment that Andrea is supposed to inhabit.

#### 4. The 'body' and its trajectories: topographical and social. Two facets of *chick lit* neo-feminism: Object bulimia vs. Lessness.

Yet another divergence from the trodden path of the upwardly-mobile woman is instantiated in another novel by Sophie Kinsella, namely *The Undomestic Goddess*. Londoner yuppie Samantha Sweeting straddles taxonomies in a twist of fate, i.e. professional mishap: from high-powered City lawyer to suburban housekeeper. Issues of class – and race - , as Samantha is uncannily a W.A.S.P. housekeeper, as opposed to an immigrant housekeeper (in this respect, her employer and one of her employer's friends are incredulous about her Englishness:

Where on earth did you find her? ' says Petula to Trish in what she clearly imagines to be a discreet undertone. 'My girl is *hopeless*. Can't cook *and* doesn't understand a word I say.'

'She just applied out of the blue!' Trish murmurs back, still flushed with pleasure.

'Cordon bleu! English! We couldn't believe it!'

They both eye me as though I'm some rare animal with horns sprouting out of my head.

(Kinsella, 2005: 114; all underlining mine)

Taxonomic 'monstrosity', i.e. 'difference' is alluded to here by the unlikelihood that an Englishwoman should be a housekeeper when the menial labour market is saturated with immigrants. Therefore not only does she transcend boundaries of *class*, but equally of *race / ethnicity* and hence she topples the statistical balance of class/race as coterminous with labour force. In this sense she is a *social freak*. (for class see Joyce, 1996)

As the – Barthesian – author is dead, the reader would expect here to have a case of temporary, escapist transgressions of class, race, and professional status with Samantha. Or at least some open-endedness. However, the author is epistemologically resuscitated and a believer in reversed economies of power, hence she has Samantha stay put in her professional location as a housekeeper in the end. This, alongside the *barbification* of the new upwardly-mobile woman is yet another paradigmatic divergence from the working woman stereotype of efficient femininity. As I mentioned before, her *social monstrosity*, i.e. *otherness/difference* in point both of the surprising, non-standard career choice and the unlikelihood of her taxonomic coordinates as a household hired help is what defines her as a protagonist here and indeed accompanies in point of action and description in her picaresque journey across the City and its high-powered companies and the English country-side. Samantha thus becomes a *taxonomic monster*, reveling in difference, or what I term a *social eunuch*, giving up all the perks, material and symbolic, of her previous position as a City lawyer charging 500 pounds sterling an hour. This is referred to as *lessness* and *poor buoyancy* by Coupland (1991), terms he coined in his seminal work *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* and which describe phenomena which have come to undermine the tenets of consumerism.

Samantha's 'travesty' as a housemaid, shedding the paraphernalia of power typical of her job as a lawyer and appropriating those of her newly-acquired status in her time-off from the pressures of upward-mobility, can arguably be decoded as location in the post-*carnavalesque* (see Bakhtin: 1990; Irimia: 1995), as a period of consumerist *fasting* as opposed to *feasting*, a voluntary asceticism both in terms of object bulimia (see section 3 of this paper) and career greed. Her power-laden paraphernalia, the power-tools of her former profession are gone, and so is her power-dressing, i.e. the business suits she used to spend obscene sums on; instead she now wears an apron and operates washing machines and vacuum cleaners. The theory of *costume as travesty* and *difference as monstrosity* includes approaches by such cultural anthropologists as Bakhtin (1981), Bogatyev (1989), Brînzeu (1997), Gavreliuc (2002), Foucault (2000), Mannoni (1995), Percec (2006), Russo (1995).

Thus whilst in Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* our career woman is overwhelmed by the power tools of her trade (see Section 3 of this paper), in Kinsella's *The Undomestic Goddess* she gives them up voluntarily:

The only thing is, now I actually have to be a housekeeper. The next morning I set my alarm early and arrive downstairs in the kitchen before seven, in my overall. The garden is misty and there are no sounds, except a couple of magpies clacking at each other on the lawn. I feel as though I'm the only person awake in the world. As quietly as I can I empty the dishwasher and put everything away in the cupboards. I straighten the chairs under the table. I make a cup of coffee. Then I look around at the gleaming granite counters.

My domain. It doesn't feel like my domain. It feels like someone else's scary kitchen.

So...what do I do now? I feel twitchy, just standing there. I should be occupied. My gaze falls on an old copy of the *Economist* in the magazine rack by the table and I pick it up. I flip through, and start reading an interesting piece on international monetary controls, sipping my coffee. Then, as I hear a sound from upstairs, I hastily put it down again.

Housekeepers aren't supposed to read articles on international monetary controls. I should be bustling around, making jam or something. (Kinsella, 2005: 133–134; all underlining mine)

The overlap of high-powered profession and menial job paraphernalia and the confusion of roles are indicative of the frail and uncomfortable straddling of boundaries that Samantha endeavours. Her *travesty* is fragile and – at first – unconvincing. Her *social monstrosity* exuding from her every pore. As Percec (2006) puts it,

The mask, the travesty, the carnivalesque costume is one possible addition to the naked body – an option for misrule, as the costume is a major nonverbal sign (Bogatyev 1989).

[...]

This is the grotesque body, or the body made to look grotesque, as theorized by Bakhtin (1974 and in Morris, 1994), where the body becomes a counter-cultural image, temporarily usurping the models of the mainstream. (Percec, 2006:156-157; all underlining mine).

My reading of the quote above has *naked body* as *socially* naked, i.e. disinvested of social roles and *the grotesque body* not as *physically* grotesque, but connoting socially-informed *difference* or the *social freak* in a paradigm gone topsy-turvy.

Indeed issues of *identity* emerge as Samantha is at a loss in her new domestic stance:

OK, there wasn't a single recipe for seared foie gras with an apricot glaze. The closest I've found is one for apricot and raspberry flan. Maybe I can amend it.



‘Rub fat into flour till it produces breadcrumbs,’ I read. That makes no sense, for a start. Breadcrumbs? Out of butter and flour? I stare at the page blindly, my mind in turmoil. I have just turned down what may be my only opportunity to start over. I don’t even understand why I did it. I’m a lawyer. That’s what I am. What else am I going to do? What’s happened to me? Oh God. Why is smoke coming out of the oven? (Kinsella, 2005:121; all underlining mine)

Samantha’s volatile location in-between professional worlds is further substantiated by the indecisive mock-militantist stance Kinsella has her appropriate, as urged by the media:

‘Ladies and gentlemen of the press,’ I begin. ‘I would be grateful if you would leave me alone. There isn’t any story here.’

‘Are you going to stay a housekeeper?’ calls a fat guy in jeans.

‘Yes, I am.’ I lift my chin. ‘I’ve made a personal choice, for personal reasons, and I’m very happy here.’

‘What about feminism?’ demands a young girl. ‘Women have fought for years to gain an equal foothold. Now you’re telling them they should go back to the kitchen?’

‘I’m not telling women anything!’ I say, taken aback. ‘I’m just leading my own life.’

‘But you think there’s nothing wrong with women being chained to the kitchen sink?’ A grey-haired woman glares at me.

‘No! I say in alarm. ‘O mean, yes! I think – ‘ My answer is drowned out by a barrage of questions and flashing cameras. (Kinsella, 2005:362; all underlining mine)

As Sections 3 and 4 of this paper show, there is a process of metamorphosis at work in the case of the 1990’s/2000’s career woman, the paradigms she inhabits temporarily or irretrievably reversed: from super female cyborg to inadequate-and-ridiculed upwardly-mobile professional, or housekeeper. She has, in her multiple facets, been *barbified*.

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Notes:

(\*) 'Chick lit' = the genre features hip, stylish female protagonists, usually in their twenties and thirties, in urban settings (usually London or Manhattan), and follows their love lives and struggles in business (often in

the publishing, advertising, public relations or fashion industry). The books usually feature an airy, irreverent tone and frank sexual themes. The genre spawned Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* and its accompanying television series. Popular Chick lit novelists include Ireland's Marian Keyes, and Sophie Kinsella author of the Shopaholic series. Variations have developed to appeal to specific audiences, such as Christian Chick Lit, Mom Lit (a.k.a. Hen Lit), young Adult Chick Lit (also teen Lit), Big Girl Lit, and the novels of Emmy-winning author Lori Bryant-Woolridge, known for her chick lit novels (*Read Between the Lies, Hitts and Mrs., Mourning Glo*) written specifically with women of colour in mind. The genre has also been claimed as a type of post-feminist fiction which covers the breadth of the female experience which deals unconventionally with traditional romantic themes of love, courtship and gender. The male equivalent, spearheaded by authors like Ben Elton, Mike Gayle, and Nick Hornby, has been referred to as 'lad lit' and 'dick lit'. ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick-lit](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick-lit))



# **The Conundrum of Gender**

**VIRGINIA WOOLF'S ORIENTAL DISCOURSE**

## IN *ORLANDO* (1928)

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Virginia Woolf's Oriental discourse is a device of establishing and assessing the author's masculine and/or feminine style, due to the masculine and/or feminine attitude that she adopts towards the 'other-ed', different Orient. According to Orientalists, each individual Oriental discourse was and is heavily gendered that is, it is loaded with certain typical masculine and feminine features.

In the present paper I will investigate the masculine and the feminine features of the Oriental discourse in general. I will then go on to analyse Virginia Woolf's masculine and/or feminine style based on the trope of Orientalism (that is her Oriental discourse), by applying this literary analysis in her novel *Orlando* (1928).

In her entire work, it is definitely *Orlando* in which Woolf presents most extensively and most explicitly her (predominantly masculine) Oriental discourse and language. Thus, I will analyse Woolf's Oriental masculine/feminine discourse in *Orlando* in order to provide a theoretical introduction to her Oriental masculine/feminine. This is why *Orlando* offers the perfect framework and opportunity for an extensive introductive analysis to Virginia Woolf's masculine and/or feminine Oriental style.

It is a fact that *Orlando* is tightly linked to another novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* through a set of motifs, which are connected to the author's Oriental discourse: the characters' ambiguous sexuality and sexual identity issues (Bell, 1972: 118), the same muse who deeply influenced Woolf while writing both novels (*Mrs. Dalloway* 1922-1925 and *Orlando* 1927-1928) and to whom Woolf dedicated both of her novels: Vita Sackville West, "the Kentysh nymph, a blue-blooded dryad" (Bell, 1972:119;131-132), the androgyny of the creator, especially of the female creator, writing as a type of self-empowering *écriture féminine* and defulation. Emphasizing the deep connection between these two wolfing novels, Quentin Bell comments upon the open (homo)sexual topics of *Orlando*, as compared to the much fainter sexual and homosexual hints in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "Orlando is Virginia's most idealised creation; he/she is modelled near to the heart's desire [...]. Compare Virginia's treatment of him/her (*Orlando* as a man first, then as a woman, my explanation) to the cool ironies of *Mrs. Dalloway* or to the floral metamorphosis of

Jinny in *The Waves* [...] or the discreet glimpses of Jacob's lovers" in *Jacob's Room* (1922). This trope of repressed (homo)sexuality is by no means a secondary literary trope in the Woolfian creation. On the contrary, it is a central literary motif, a continuum, developing chronologically in her work. In both novels the main goal of my analysis is to establish Virginia Woolf's gendered language as a female, bisexual writer. Consequently, I shall first establish and investigate the prevailing masculine or feminine elements of her discourse. Secondly, I shall try to provide possible answers or interpretations to the reasons why Woolf as a highly educated bisexual woman adopted the specific Oriental style detectable in these two novels. Based on Yegenoglu's psychoanalytical theory, that the description of the Orient mirrors the author's map of hidden sexual desires (Yegenoglu, 1998:2;11) I will first analyse Woolf's discourse on the Orient in her novel *Orlando* from the point of view of a (sexually repressed) *bisexual*, intellectual woman in the late 1920s.

It should be remembered that Virginia Woolf never was a professional Orientalist, nevertheless this theory can fully be applied and investigated in the case of the present bisexual authoress.

Firstly, certain terms need definitions. Orientalism is the academic science of investigating and writing about the Orient, highly fashionable during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lewis, 1996:6-8). The British Empire being in full bloom, prosperous and with a high standard of life and education, geographical topi such as The Dark Continent (Africa), Asia Minor, the Middle and the Far East and (especially India) became commonplace travelling destinations as well as topics for memoirs, travel diaries, novels and administrative or political official reports, minutes and letters (Lewis, 1996: 12-14).

Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century included, the Orient (that is Asia Minor and the Middle and the Far East) was constantly seen as a mysterious, dark realm (similar to Africa) connected with ambiguous, dirty, fetishes sexuality, especially with non-normal sexuality and with homosexuality, sexual diseases and immorality (Yegenoglu, 1998; Said, 1978/1995; Lewis, 1996; Melman, 1992; Blake 1992).

Men being the administrative and political officials of the British and French Empire, it is only natural that they were the sole administrators and politicians to receive official governmental support to travel and write about the Orient, translating their subjective, gender loaded masculine styled image of the Orient. Thus in western Europe,

the prevailing Oriental discourse became and remained for a long time a highly subjective, gender-stamped masculine one, written and coined by male officials, scientists and merchants. Consequently, Billie Melman concludes: “the explorer’s gaze, however, had been generically and literally, man’s gaze” (Melman, 1992: 9).

This west European, mainstream masculine Oriental discourse is characterised by a highly patriarchal, heteronormative, Eurocentric imperialistic attitude, by self-assumed superiority towards the inferior and to-be-tamed/civilised/educated Orient (Said, 1978: 1-6, 24). Due to the fact that the majority of the then officially acclaimed were men, it is not surprising that one aspect of the Orientalist discourse was to fetish the Orient (Yeegenoglu, 1998:27) and develop its stereotypical image as a sexually mysterious and threatening topos (Yeegenoglu, 1998: 4). Thus cultural differences between the Occident and the Orient could not be considered without the consistent imprint of sexual differences: the mainstream, male and masculine discourse on the ominous Orient (Yeegenoglu, 1998: 1; 11; 26-27).

To this patriarchal, sexuality-loaded discourse was added a particular aspect, being further associated with female sexuality. The Orientalist discourse on female sexuality never considers female sexuality as anything even close to (western)‘normal’ sexuality and morality, but it conveys it as an ominous, threatening, mysterious and tempting female sexuality, usually associated with a highly sensual, sexual, *woman*, who needed to be conquered and tamed at all costs, even through sexual assault if necessary, performed by the western male official or ‘conqueror’ (that is the male officials of the British Empire) (Yeegenoglu, 1998: 4, 23). Thus, in the mainstream, masculine, imperialistic discourse on the Orient, Asia becomes culturally attached to these taboo sexual topics: this mysterious realm is connected to female sexuality, to the ambiguous, threatening and destructive/devouring female (Yeegenoglu, 1998: 23).

This constituted the mainstream, masculine/patriarchal Orientalist discourse of western literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As late as the 1970s Edward Said adds his concern about the western Orientalists’ emphasis on “the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its *feminine penetrability*, its supine malleability” (Said, 1978: 206, emphasis mine).

According to Edward Said’s classic treatise *Orientalism* (1978), this masculine patriarchal discourse thrived in the consciousness of the western world well until the 1970s (Said, 1978:12-14; 26-35). Said’s message is that the conceit and imperialism never truly



disappeared from the western Orientalist discourse, at least not until the time when he published his book in 1978.

In line with the mainstream Orientalist discourse of her times, Woolf attaches to the image of the Orient this unclear, mystery and omen-loaded sexuality in *Orlando* and in *Mrs. Dalloway* too. The ‘corresponding’ topos to these topics can only be in her contemporary mainstream culture: the Orient.

In spite of the overwhelming contemporary masculine discourse on the Orient, there were certain women who could enjoy the first fruits of the post-Victorian sexual liberation movement and grabbed all possible opportunities to travel and discover the mysterious Orient, especially in India. Naturally, lacking any governmental jobs in the Orient (unlike men), any financial aid, or the same official education as men, there were only few western women who could afford to travel alone and write about their land of visions and dreams. What is more few women had the necessary courage and non-conformism to travel alone or the necessary financial self-sufficiency for such a long journey: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, with her piratical publication of her anonymous letters on ‘Turkey’ (the very *first* sample of a secular work by a woman about the Muslim Orient), Lady Anne Noel Blunt, Gertrude Bell, Mabel Virginia Bent, Sarah Belzoni, Lady Hester Lucy Stanhope, the ‘Queen of the Orient’, Julia Sophia Pardoe and Vita Sackville-West.

Although Edward Said’s *Orientalism* clearly announces that no Orientalist author can be fully objective in his/her description of the Orient (Said, 1978: 10, also Yegenoglu, 1998:1,11), nevertheless many specialists have proved that women Orientalists’ discourse on the Orient is often different to that of their male contemporaries’ descriptions of the same geographical and cultural topos. It is much more objective, less imperialistic and superiority-tinged. In her article “A Woman’s Trek: What Difference Does Gender Make” Susan Blake argues that most often, both female and male Orientalists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had a highly condescending and superior tone in their imperialistic discourse on the Orient. Nevertheless both Susan Blake and Reina Lewis advance argument that female Orientalists, unlike male Orientalists, usually adopted a much milder, more emotional, more sympathetic and sensitive discourse in depicting the Orient, seen as the ‘*other*’, the ‘*different*’, the deviant from the norm (the western world and its civilization) (Blake, 1992: 20; 26-32; Lewis, 1996:4). This is applicable not only in the description of the Orient as a geographical place, but also in the description of the Oriental woman (Blake, 1992:20; 27;

Lewis, 1996:4). The topic of this chapter is to investigate this argumentation in Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* (1928).

In my opinion women's milder and more emphatic discourse on the Oriental woman and on the Orient as a cultural space is a direct outcome of their Victorian and post-Victorian education: both sexual and gender education. Women being raised as the sublime, submissive, second gender, always at the disposal of the first gender, men, it is only natural that they proved a deeper philanthropic identification with the present, othered Orient. The image of the inferiorised Orient, controlled utterly by men, served for women as a mirror of their own gender condition in the Occident. At home, in the western world, they lived in the same, inferiorised, heteronormative patriarchy as the Orient they visited and wrote about. Thus the relationship between the Self and the Other (the Orient) is a relationship of empathy-stamped identification: "women travellers, missionaries and writers did not perceive the oriental *woman* as an absolute alien, the ultimate 'other'. Rather oriental *women* became the feminine West's recognisable image in the mirror. The *haremluk* was not the *ne plus ultra* of an exotic décor, but a place comparable to the *bourgeois* home" (Melman, 1992:316).

Nevertheless, Orientalists such as Susan Blake, Reina Lewis and Billie Melman also advance a theory based on middle-ness: they considering that the western woman traveller was caught between, on one hand, her status in the Occident, which was that on an inferiorised submissive gender, ruled by a patriarchal system, and on the other hand, her position as the superior western, white independent woman travelling in a less civilised, barbarian Orient. Thus being trapped between these two poles, the western white woman may sometimes defulate her gender constraints from her Occidental patriarchal home in her attitude towards the Orient: "her effort to affirm herself as a woman, an autonomous Self and traveller, against the position of a Lady, dependent Other, offered by the chivalric myth [...] it is her own divided and self-contradictory position as a woman in English society..." and her superior status towards the colonies that marks the female Oriental discourse (Blake, 1992:30-31). This is how a slightly condescending Oriental gaze may occur in female narratives as well, although it always remains considerably milder than the male Oriental discourse (Blake, 1992:32; Melman, 1992:2, 8, Lewis; 1996:21).

### ***Orlando*, a veiled biography: Vita and Virginia at the height of their lesbian**

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## **affair**

Orlando was directly inspired by the life and personality of Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962). Woolf dedicated this novel to her, while Vita appears in three of its illustrations (“Orlando on her Return to England”, “Orlando about the Year 1840”, and “Orlando at the Present Time”). It is a fact that Woolf never denied her lesbianism, especially her most passionate and only lesbian *sexual* affair, with Vita Sackville-West, between 1925-1929. Nevertheless, due to the post-Victorian sexual etiquette in which she lived (Bell, 1972:138), Woolf often felt more comfortable enjoying their lesbian relationship either in the countryside, at Rodmell or abroad, in France, far from etiquette-normed, vigilant London, (Stape, 1995:34-36; 73-79; Bell, 1972:139,141).

Thus the present novel is often considered to be Woolf’s official literary device for openly identifying with the lesbian cause (Bell, 1972:116; 139-141). That is why Woolf not only created *Orlando* as a veiled biography of her lover, but also dedicated the novel to her, much to Sackville’s delight and honour (Stape, 1995:77).

Sackville-West’s son, Nigel Nicolson, introduced the famous quote in British literary criticism, that *Orlando* is “the longest and most charming love-letter in literature”, written by Virginia to his mother Vita (Nicolson, 1973:201). It stands as “a monument” to Vita, celebrating their affair: “of all Virginia’s novels (*Orlando*) comes nearest to sexual, or rather to homosexual [...] while the hero/heroine undergoes a bodily transformation” (Bell, 1972:118); “the book is interesting biographically [...] because we can trace so many of its elements to the incidents of Virginia’s daily life in those years” (Bell, 1972:132).

It is probably not by chance that it is precisely *this* novel that comes closest to the sexual/homosexual trope, due to the only female sexual affair Woolf was living through, during the time of the creation of this novel. Needless to say the electric intensity of this sexual relationship left a deep mark on Woolf’s life and personality and thus triggered the (to some extent refulated) homosexual and sexual elements of her personality to burst out in her most sexual literary work (Bell, 1972:118). Her own real life events always deeply marked Woolf and thus played a paramount role in her own literary masterpieces. That is why her novels are constantly marked by the blows and strikes of her quotidian life and especially by her psychological oscillations: although Woolf and Sackville-West remained close friends until the end of Virginia’s life, their sexual affair had ended by the year 1929. Nevertheless, as early as 1927 Sackville-West had already started another lesbian

relationship with Mary Campbell, which it was not easy for Virginia to overlook. In fact Virginia could not forgive Vita's infidelity and Mary Campbell topped the line of Sapphist 'friends' that West had, before, during and after her affair with Woolf. Neither could Woolf accept or respect Vita's Sapphist circle, nor could she reconcile herself to Vita's 'giving herself' to another woman (Mary Campbell) during their intimate relationship (Bell, 1972:146).

Consequently, with a tint of jealousy and return fire, Woolf portrayed Vita's lifelong partner Violet Trefusis in *Orlando*, as the sophisticated and ominous Russian Princess Sasha, under a seductive layer of fantasy and irony. Moreover, Woolf even constructed Orlando with a faint suggestion of jealousy and revenge towards Vita. At one point Woolf wrote to Sackville-West warning her: "if you've given yourself to Campbell, I'll have no more to do with you, and so it shall be written, plainly, for all the world to read in *Orlando*" (Virginia Woolf, quoted by Ian Blyth (Blyth, 2002, available at <http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=2988>).

*Orlando* (1928) has typically been read as the literary consequence of Woolf's call for a new "art" of biography that could negotiate the tension between the reality-based facts and her own fiction - between the "granite" and the "rainbow" of life, as Woolf's metaphor figures it, in her essay "The New Biography" (1927). Woolf's revisionary spirit mirrors the bridge, the link that she attempts to build between reality and fiction, in order to provide a true-to-life description of the real person's most private details of his/her life (Westman, 2001: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0403/is\\_1\\_47/ai\\_79208848](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0403/is_1_47/ai_79208848)).

At a first glance, the genre of the literary biography seems the perfect device for Woolf to attempt to build this bridge, especially for those aspects of real life that had to be partially concealed from the post-Victorian social etiquette: her lesbian affair with the subject of the present biography, Vita. Nevertheless a serious issue amounts, namely the incapacity of most biographies (in Woolf's opinion) to express the innermost and thus paramount details of the person's life (Westman, *ibid.*). Woolf's goal of a new art of biography that strives to capture the truth of real life and the truth of fiction, however incompatible those truths may be.

That is why Karin E. Westman considers *Orlando* a "mock" biography, in the sense that it illustrates "Woolf's growing control over her literary inheritance, as she (Woolf) satirically mocks the failures of biography to capture the 'granite' and the 'rainbow' of individuals' lives. For Woolf, the ideological connection between these traditional

narratives of experience must necessarily come under investigation, particularly if a woman's life is to be told" (Westman, 2001).

Ian Blyth further explains Woolf's unconventional *Biography*, that is, *Orlando*: "published in 1928, *Orlando* is a novel that mimics the apparatus of a conventional biography. In addition to the reference to "A Biography" on the title page, it has a preface, an index and eight illustrations. This mimicry caused problems with booksellers in the time leading up to publication: some shops refused to order more than half a dozen copies of the novel on the grounds that "biographies" did not sell. Woolf lamented in her diary that she would have to pay a high price for the fun of calling it a biography (Blyth, 2002, available at <http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=2988>)

Rachel Bowlby reinforces the unconventional structure and lay-out of this woolfian 'biography', referring to *Orlando* as a "parody of the kinds of scholarly enterprise with her introduction ('A Biography') might try to emulate. The novel -but is it a novel?- satirizes the conventions of biographical and historical writing and [...] includes parodies of the conventional front and back, the preface with acknowledgements and the index of names, not to mention a couple of spoof footnotes put in as it were to boot by the pseudo-editor of the pseudo-biographer" (Bowlby, *Orlando*, 'Introduction', 1992:xii).

Woolf's narrator in *Orlando*, the biographer, is a highly self-aware fictional narrator, who interrupts quite often the natural flow of the plot in order to comment, discuss, analyse and criticise the process of writing the present biography: "...it is the effect lists have upon us - we are beginning to yawn..." (Woolf, 1992:105); "And here we may profit by a pause in his soliloquy to reflect how odd it is to see Orlando stretched there on his elbow on a June day..." (98). The paramount issue is naturally the lack of biographical data that the fictional narrator invokes and his/her annoyance due to this: "To give a truthful account of London society at that or indeed at any other time, is beyond the powers of the biographer or the historian" (Woolf, 1992: 184); "It is, indeed, highly unfortunate, and much to be regretted that at this stage of Orlando's career [...] we have least information to go upon [...] the revolution which broke out during his period of office, and the fire which followed, have so damaged or destroyed all those papers from which any trustworthy record could be drawn, that what we can give is lamentably incomplete" (115). Questions about what constitutes the "proper stuff" of a biography are a recurrent motif in the flow of this novel. Thus a number of unexplainable incidents occur, associated with the lack of documentary evidence.

This critical self-analysis of the narrative, by the narrative, gives Orlando a more than passing resemblance to the genre of metafiction. In Blyth's opinion, Woolf applies this meta-narrative method in order to draw the reader's attention to the fact that biographies are incomplete versions of the "truth", that they cannot convey all details, sometimes the most intimate and important details, in the subject's life. Consequently, the line between reality and fiction becomes blurred and the narrator herself admits that "often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even use imagination. Full of complexity, strangeness and subversive humour, Orlando asks important questions about the nature of genre, gender, sexuality, society and history" (Blyth, 2002, available at <http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=2988>).

Woolf herself underlines the importance of phantasy, authorial playfulness, teasing, mockery and satire: "no attempt is to be made to realise the character. Sapphism is to be suggested. Satire is to be the main note-satire and wildness. [...] I want to kick up my heels and be off" (Bell and McNeillie, 1977-1984, vol.iii:131); "the tone of the book, from the very first pages, is a tone of mockery" (Majumdar and McLaurin, 1975:235).

By explicitly calling on both the historiographic and the literary conventions for writing a woman's life, Woolf's biography of Vita Sackville-West proves how biographies may often reduce a woman's existence to a dry historic narrative, missing the psychological or gender-specific particularities. Therefore Woolf explicitly stresses in her biographic novel (*Orlando*) those details that mainstream patriarchal biographies often elide: a woman's individual character, expressed through body and voice, heavily stressing her complex sexuality, gender-and sexuality-related private issues and challenges. As a consequence, the pivotal trope within both *Orlando* and *Mrs. Dalloway* is the main characters' complex sexuality, sexual identity, marriage (failure) and gender specificities.

### **Woolf's Oriental discourse in *Orlando*: masculine features**

No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar (the Orientalist) from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement [...] with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position" (Said, 1978:10). Said's main argument in this quote from his *Orientalism* is that no Orientalist can assume and guarantee utter objectivity when writing about the Orient. Whether a man or a woman, each Orientalist is influenced by his or her educational, cultural, political background.

This influential background is what the social psychologist Ian Burkitt dubbed “the inscription of the *habitus*” (Burkitt, 1999,87-88): the central socio-political and cultural power inscribes on each individual certain social, political and cultural particularities. These then trigger the agent’s ways of acting and of reasoning (*ibid.*).

According to sociologist Meyda Yegenoglu’s psychoanalytical theory, the description of the Orient in the case of any Orientalist author becomes a mapping of the author’s hidden sexual desires, pleasures and fantasies (Yegenoglu, 1998: 2,11). “Therefore we need to subject the Orientalist discourse to a more sexualized reading” (*ibid.*:26). Investigating the author (in our case Virginia Woolf) from this psychoanalytical point of view, we can trace her sexual subconscious in the way she depicts the Oriental woman and in the description of the feminized Orient (Melman, 1992: 316).

I would like to take this theory one step further and to challenge it. To my eye the individual is not influenced only by his/her socio-political and cultural background, he/she is equally ‘inscribed’ by his/her gender and sex. Meyda Yegenoglu’s theory comes in support of the present argument: the Orientalist discourses of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries have been considerably stamped by the sex of the Orientalists, because these discourses represent their sexual “fantasies built upon sexual desire” (Yegenoglu, 1998:2,11,23). That is why narratives and discourses about cultural differences cannot be considered without analyzing first the sexual and gender variables of the authors standing behind the discourses. Hence the different masculine and feminine features of the Oriental discourse.

I will now return to my case study: Virginia Woolf, as a bridled (to a certain extent) lesbian and bisexual writer, represents the androgyne through her double sexual orientation. Feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva argues in her masterpiece essay *Women’s Time*, that heteropatriarchy does not offer women any understanding for their gender-specific needs (Kristeva, 1981:203), in this case Woolf’s repressed bisexuality. Further on Kristeva argues in *A Question of Subjectivity* that the total absence of understanding and support from the normative heteropatriarchy towards women and their gender-specific issues may be a major cause for women’s higher frequency of neuroses (Kristeva, 1986:131). Let us remember that Virginia Woolf herself suffered from severe depressions, madness fits and in the end she committed suicide.

Hélène Cixous finds women’s most effective way of expressing these repressed, gender-specific issues: writing, that is “*écriture féminine*”, as she coined the term. “Writing is woman’s” says Hélène Cixous (Cixous, 1975:92), while speech, especially

public speech, belongs to the male sphere. In writing women can express their deepest, most gender-specific concerns, doubts and happiness. They have the freedom to dive into their subconscious, into their “cave” (as Woolf calls it in her diary, quoted by Michael Cunningham in his novel *The Hours*).

Returning to Cixous, she calls *écriture féminine* a “frantic descent deeper and deeper to where a voice that doesn’t know itself is lost in the sea’s churning [...] women have almost everything to write about femininity: about their *sexuality*, that is to say about the infinite and mobile complexity of their becoming erotic” (Cixous, 1975:100, emphasis mine).

As Elaine Showalter argues, women write and create a different type of writing, a specific “women’s literature” (Showalter, 1993:2-4), in order to use it as a means of defecation, as a weapon against the patriarchy and as self-empowerment. Women write and create differently, in their own repressed (meta-) language in order to express their gender-specific issues. This writing in the case of Virginia Woolf, is her novel *Orlando*, through which she defecates her oppressed androgyny/both-ness/lesbianism and enforced heterosexuality. This discourse of defecation becomes unquestionable, considering a paramount biographical fact: Woolf dedicated her novel *Orlando* (in which ambiguous sexuality and the change of sexuality play such a paramount role) to Vita. As Kermode points out, this is a “tribute to Virginia’s close friendship with Vita Sackville-West” (Kermode, *Orlando*, Preface 1992:ix), these two lesbian women sharing a famously passionate love affair. Moreover the novel was conceived and written at the zenith of their sexual affair, in the winter of 1927-1928 (Bell, 1972:116-118).

It is paramount to mention that although lesbianism and bisexuality were frowned upon in Edwardian (1901-1910) England and later when Woolf wrote her greatest masterpieces (Bell, 1972: 138-139), Virginia Woolf quite often voiced her idea of the androgynous human being especially the androgynous creator. Moreover she stressed the androgynous nature of the *woman* writer most in masterpieces such as *A Room of One’s Own*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* or *Orlando*.

She crossed the socio-cultural boundaries of her ‘habitus’ and wrote about these sexual taboos in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando* or in *A Room of One’s Own*. In this last masterpiece Woolf agrees with Coleridge that a great creative spirit cannot be but an androgynous spirit. A woman or a man cannot create (that is write) thinking *only* as a woman or *only* as a man, respectively. The creator of either sex should be an androgynous



mind (Woolf, 1999:131). Nevertheless never was she so explicit and so sexual as in her novel *Orlando*, this 1928 novel being considered her most sexual novel: of all Woolf's novels, *Orlando* "comes nearest to the sexual, or rather to homosexual feeling" (Bell, 1972:118).

Let us return to chapter III of the novel *Orlando* and following Blake's theory, investigate Woolf's discourse on the Orient. I will analyze the way in which Woolf's sex (female) and gender (male *and* female, 'both-ness') shapes the masculine and feminine particularities of her discourse. Living as a bisexual woman from 1925 to 1929 with Vita, Woolf's bisexuality and her personality were nevertheless "inscribed by the habitus" (Burkitt, 1999:87-88): the central socio-political and cultural power circumscribed the individual's freedom and choice. Consequently this infringement triggered the agent's/the creators's particular ways of acting, reasoning and writing.

At the same time Virginia Woolf also faced the issue of possible public stigma, due to which they often travelled to France or they retreated to the countryside, to either Vita's or Virginia's manors. Oscar Wilde's tragedy (his trial in 1895, his two years' imprisonment and his death in 1900) was still looming in the air of the British society of the 1920's (Bell, 1972:138-139). Paradoxically, this did not impede the Bloomsbury members from homosexuality, lesbianism, 'Sapphism', love triangles and open marriages.

I argue from the beginning for Said's theory that no Orientalist is completely objective (Said, 1978:10), nor is Woolf detached and gender- or sex-neutral when describing the Orient in her novel (*Constantinople and its surroundings*). Being a bisexual woman, she is "inscribed by her habitus" (Burkitt, 1999:87-88), that is she was socially forced accept the heteronormativity at least in the public sphere. The social norms prevented her from completely living out all her sexual desires and fantasies (Yegenoglu, 1998:23) and thus she resorted to the most effective way of defulation: women's special type of writing (Showalter, 1993:2-4) that is a veiled autobiography of her lesbian relation to Vita and at the same time a veiled biography of Vita's tumultuous private life. Woolf's style deeply descends into the fathomless "caves" of female psychology and thus comes very close to the type of writing dubbed by Cixous "*écriture féminine*" (Cixous, 1975:100).

As a starting point in my analysis, I must take into consideration that all prevailing topics in *Orlando* are directly connected to ambiguous sexuality and especially with non-heterosexuality (Bell, 1972:118-119). In line with the Orientalist discourse of her times, Woolf attaches this unclear, mystery and omen-loaded sexuality to its 'corresponding'

topos in her contemporary mainstream culture: the Orient. This is the first masculine specific element in Woolf's discourse on the Orient.

The foremost topic in this sense is the very topos chosen by Woolf for Orlando's surrealistic sex change. Orlando changes his sex in his palace in Constantinople, that is in the Orient, in this sexually charged and mysteriously feminized world. The very fact that Woolf chose the Orient for this surreal, mysterious and meta-natural process of sex change from male to female is a sign of associating any sexual ambiguity with the Orient - a typical element of the masculine discourse on the Orient.

Secondly, it is women (the "three sisters") who trigger this fantastic process, challenging all laws of Nature: Orlando falls into an ominous seven-day slumber. No 'western', reason and science governed doctor is able to wake him up from. Thus the ominous, undecipherable Oriental mystique symbolically defeats western reason, science and medicine. What is important to mention is that this seven-day slumber (the mystique of the number seven should also be noted), happens after his marriage to a simple, yet very *mysterious* Oriental peasant girl (Woolf, 1992:126-127).

Orlando's mysterious marriage to the Oriental peasant girl also deserves attention. It seems to serve as a narratological device deployed by Woolf, to prepare the reader for the following surreal twist of the plot. It creates the necessary looming tension for the upcoming paranormal sex change. The Oriental feminine element (the little peasant girl) is again associated with the above-mentioned negative connotations: she is the one who causes or at least prepares the paranormal slumber of *seven* days and its sequel, the sex change, which constitutes the axis on which the novel revolves. Yet again we meet the masculine-specific association of the mysterious, of the 'beyond-natural' with the ominous Oriental *woman*. In this way Woolf adopts another element of the masculine discourse on the Orient: anything different to or unknown to the western world, and its 'civilized' laws of science and medicine is associated with the mysterious, destructive and devouring Oriental woman.

Thirdly, the supernatural, ambiguous sexuality and sex change is again linked to the Orient, that is to the supernatural, mystical and possible harmful *supernatural female* creatures that may exist only in the Orient, never in the 'civilized', 'reason-driven' West: the "three figures" (Woolf, 1993:129). They remind us of the three witches who open the Shakespearean tragedy *Macbeth* and spin the destiny of the main characters. While their intention and nature is clear in *Macbeth* (they are witches clearly weaving the characters'

fate), the intentions and the origins of the three female “figures” in *Orlando* is not clear at all. Woolf never mentions whether they are good fairies or bad witches, nor is their intention clear. All that the reader is allowed to know is their names and that they are “three figures” (Woolf, 1993:129) and “three sisters” (Woolf, 1993:131) or at most “horrid sisters” (ibid.).

What is more, Woolf creates and stresses upon the highly mystique-loaded, ‘beyond-natural’ atmosphere that these three “Ladies” create when they change Orlando’s sex:

“the doors gently open, as if a breath of the gentles and holiest zephyr had wafted them apart, and three figures enter [...] With gestures of grief and lamentation the three sisters now join hands and dance slowly, tossing their veils and singing [...] here they make as if to cover Orlando with their draperies [...] they wail in unison, still circling and flinging their veils up and down [...] they retire in haste, waving their draperies over their heads, as if to shout out something that they dare not look upon...” (Woolf, 1992:128-132)

What is paramount and typical for the masculinist imperialist discourse on the Orient are these three ominous *female* characters coming from a mystical world, which is shrouded in ambiguity, contravening all laws of western Reason. Also, these mystical possibly harmful creatures are by no means male, but necessarily female, “three sisters” (ibid.). That is why we can trace yet another masculine-specific element of Woolf’s discourse on the Orient. The mysterious and the harmful, both connected to sexual ambiguity and supernatural phenomena are located in the feminine topos (in the Orient) and linked primarily to female characters. The Orient, depicted here by Woolf in typically masculine style, is associated with the sexualized and mysterious female/feminized Orient, as Yegenoglu argues (1998:23).

Fifthly, another proof for this argument is the direction of the sex change. Orlando changes from a man into a woman, not from female into male. Thus he undergoes a process of feminization proper, turning from a man into a woman. Once again, Woolf adopts a male-specific/masculine Oriental discourse, associating feminization (proper) with the Orient, a sexually loaded, mysterious and feminized topos.

Another element that is specific for the male Orientalists’ discourse is the ‘other’-ing of the Orient, viewing it as inferior, savage, weird and different, in need ‘to be civilized’ by the westerner, (Yegenoglu, 1998:22). Orlando’s very first description of the Orient, more precisely his first glance and impression of Constantinople encompasses this

psychological process of inferiorizing, of 'other'-ing, of condescendence towards the 'different' Eastern urban world. Looking out of the mirror of his ambassadorial palace, he notices a misty, mysterious city that seems afloat and unreal, a lot of mysterious undecipherable *female* faces (yet again the ominous female character) covered by "shawls", dozens of "pariah dogs", mules screaming and dark faces "crying to prayer", "the beating of gongs", the "sour odours", the "inhospitable Asian mountains" (Woolf, 1992:116-117). All senses employed, they all convey the same inhospitable, strange, ominous evil realm, as if from another world, an inferior one.

Everything is 'other', different and inferior to England: "nothing he reflected, [...] could be less like the countries of Surrey and Kent or the towns of London and Tunbridge Wells" (Woolf, 1992:116-117). In my opinion this is the highpoint of the novel's imperialist and masculine Oriental discourse, transposed by Woolf onto a verbal level, through Orlando's cynical-nostalgic observation.

Even the Gypsies in whose camp she takes refuge after her unbelievable sex change are too different and even barbarian for the posh western Orlando, and eventually she deserts from their camp, back to the West, to the 'civilized' England: "slowly, she began to feel that there was some difference between her and the gypsies (sic) [...] these gypsies (sic) were ignorant people, not much more than savages" (ibid.:141). She finds Gypsy life "rude and barbarous" (ibid.:143), unfit for her noble ancestry. Again this condescending air of superiority is a masculine specific feature of the Orientalist discourse that Woolf embraces.

### **Woolf's Oriental discourse in *Orlando*: feminine features**

Apart from the above mentioned masculine specificities we may also unveil some feminine elements of the Orientalist discourse, that both Susan Blake (1992: 20, 27) and Reina Lewis argue for: women "produced a gaze on the Orient and on the Orientalized 'other' that registered difference less pejoratively" than Said argued in his book and than most masculine Orientalist's discourse (Lewis, 1996:4). Thus female Orientalists were usually less condescending and emphatic towards the mysterious Orient and towards Oriental women in general.

The first such female specific element in Woolf's discourse on the Orient is the fact that after his maiden encounter with this 'different'/'other' world (Constantinople), Orlando considers it with superiority. Nevertheless he immediately repents and feels true

admiration, “exultation”, “passion” and “affection” for this new and ‘other’ world (Woolf, 1992:116-117).

On the same pages of the novel, Woolf describes how Orlando tries to do all his best in order to fit in this different world, without misjudgements or prejudices and to fulfil his ambassadorial mission (ibid.). All his admiration, empathy and positive attitude towards this new and different world are a second female specific element of Woolf’s discourse on the East.

Orlando manages to fit in at the beginning, but only for a brief span of time, because his male imperialist condescendence takes over and chokes the female empathy within his soul: “That he, who was English root and fibre...” (ibid.:116), naturally cannot fit in with this strange and “wild” world (ibid.). He is incapable of bridging and accepting the cultural differences. He fulfils his diplomatic duty impeccably, but once having changed his sex, she is ready to flee this world of stiff “documents to seal and sign”, ritual meetings and summits. She is ready for a nomadic, free world amidst nature, without any constraints.

Orlando the woman, has absolutely no issues at the beginning with integrating into this nomadic life in the middle of the Gypsy tribe: “she milked the goats; she collected brushwood; she stole a hen’s egg now and then [...] she herded cattle, she stripped vines [...] she filled the goat skin and drank from it...” (ibid.:136). As a woman, Orlando seems to have changed and adopted an attitude closer to the feminine empathy and understanding, more likely for women’s Orientalist discourse. Her identification with Nature, living in the middle of Nature after having given up the exuberant and posh ambassadorial lifestyle - all these infer a typically female attitude and discourse towards the Orient.

Nevertheless, Orlando is a British aristocrat after all, and similar to her integration into the ‘other’ Oriental world, her sense of superiority flares up once again and makes her realize that she cannot live the ‘barbaric’ life of the Gypsies. Thus she returns home to her dear homeland, England, finally feeling comfortable (Woolf, 1992:146-147). Again the male-specific superiority towards the ‘other’ annuls the feminine empathy and positive attitude towards the ‘different’.

It is important to mention that her masculine Oriental discourse and her superiority stamped Britishness purges her feminine empathy completely: as soon as she hastily leaves the Gypsies, she buys herself a set of elegant female *British* clothes, she boards the first ship and she hastily leaves the Orient for her homeland, for good. She never looks back,

she never has any nostalgic feelings for the East and she hardly mentions in the Orient or her life there in the rest of the novel.

That is why my conclusion is that although Woolf's discourse on the Orient encompasses both masculine and feminine elements, yet the former category by far outdoes the latter one. As to answer one of the paramount questions posed in the beginning of the chapter, the masculine discourse definitely is the prevailing one, casting a heavy shadow over the female element. The former also outdoes the latter numerically, because Woolf employs only two elements of positive attitude towards the Orient in her main character: firstly Orlando's short-term affection for the Orient at the beginning of his life as an ambassador in Constantinople; and secondly, her brief affection and integration into the life of the Gypsies, amidst Nature. Nevertheless, both are swiftly outlived and annulled by Orlando's true British nature, and by her British imperialist discourse and sense of superiority.

In the following pages I will investigate whether gender and sex play a role in writing about the Orient, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To perform this task I have to consider first Meyda Yegenoglu's theory that the author's discourse on the Orient is always sexualized, i.e., it is a map of her/his (repressed) sexual desires and fantasies (Yegenoglu, 1998:27). Secondly, one must not forget that Virginia Woolf was a *bisexual* woman, heavily "inscribed by her habitus", by the Victorian and the Edwardian sexual etiquettes that condemned same sex relationships (Burkitt, 1999: 87-88).

Due to mentalities and to the socio-cultural code of the 1920s, Woolf couldn't openly and fully live out her bisexuality, her androgyny, her double sexual orientation with Vita Sackville-West. She was to a certain extent repressed as a bisexual woman, she was smothered and annulled as a 'man-and-woman', and only her feminine side was allowed to be fully uncloseted.

This sexual as well as gender trauma triggered her to resort to writing, the most efficient way of expressing her gender-specific issues and a true blissful catharsis for her (Bell, 1972,100-106). Thus according to Kristeva (1986:131) and Hélène Cixous (1975:92) the best way for any woman, in this case Woolf, as a bisexual woman, was to take up the professional writer's pen and defulate her sexuality and gender related trauma.

Consequently, I argue that Woolf wrote her novel *Orlando* as a way of defulation of her repressed masculine sexuality: "frantically descending deeper and deeper to where a voice that doesn't know itself is lost in the sea's churning [...] about her sexuality, that is

to say about the infinite and mobile complexity of their becoming erotic” (Cixous, 1975:100).

Here we arrive at a point where we can answer another question posed at the beginning of the paper: gender and sexuality *do* play a paramount role in the process of writing an Oriental discourse as well as in the process of analysing it. As I have said, according to Yegenoglu’s theory the Oriental discourse is a mapping of the author’s hidden sexual fantasies, desires and pleasure (Yegenoglu, 1998:2;11;23). We can apply it to Virginia Woolf, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Modernist writer, as well.

As a conclusion, I strongly believe that the major cause due to which Virginia Woolf embraces a far more masculine style than a feminine style in her Oriental discourse, is this above mentioned process of defecation through writing. By resorting to a writing style close to Cixous’ *écriture féminine* as a psychological and psychoanalytical self-counselling device, Woolf relieves herself of much of her trauma: her smothered male-ness, which after all plays a very important part in her sexual and gender identity as well as in her life. At the same time facing her issue and working with them during the process of writing and creation self-empowers her, aiding her to address her sexual- and gender-related trauma and cope with it.

Writing proves to be an efficient method of defecation, of pouring out the personal trauma and of addressing some extremely deep, personal issues: the smothered and traumatized sexuality, sexual identity, identity and everyday life. This also affects the way of thinking, acting and creating in her style of depicting the Orient. That is why, from this psychoanalytical point of view, Woolf embraces a masculine style and discourse, which clearly prevails over the quite few feminine elements of her Oriental discourse.

It is understandable and paradoxical at the same time that the sexual drives, these hidden desires and phantasies were more powerful while writing *Orlando* than Woolf’s education and well-informed nature about the positive features of the Orient. It is noteworthy that her lover Vita, was the wife of the British Ambassador to Teheran. Vita travelled extensively to Persia and wrote a bulky correspondence to Virginia during and about her Oriental excursions (Bell, 1972:115-117;118). She brought Virginia souvenirs from Egypt, Turkey and Iran, mesmerising her with Oriental gifts, such as clothes or jewellery, which Virginia highly appreciated.

It is also noteworthy that Virginia was under Vita’s spell, precisely due to her exotic, Oriental air, due to her handsome elegance and exotic radiance (Bell, 1972: 115-

117). That is why Woolf was by no means unfamiliar with the Oriental world, customs and lifestyle, due to her lover Vita: for example Woolf and Sackville-West themselves took the photos of Vita posing as an Oriental-clad Orlando, for the biography (Stape, 1995:77-78).

Moreover, Woolf herself was a well travelled and a highly educated woman, fascinated by the Oriental culture and literature. She proved this from an early age when she cross-dressed as a dashing young Arabian Prince in the famous Dreadnought Hoax in Weymouth Bay, 10 February 1910.

In spite of all this positive image and educational input about the Orient, Woolf still adopts a prevalingly masculine, 'other-ing' Oriental language both in *Orlando* and in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her sexuality and bridled homosexuality finally burst out, with utmost power, under the spell of the literary cathartic defulation: "the whole book is written in tearing high spirits [...] she appears to have found herself more completely than ever before" (Majumdar and McLaurin, 1975:222). Moreover Woolf herself acknowledges this book to constitute the turning point both in her real life and in her professional one.

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**GENDER ROLES AND FEMINISM IN HARPER LEE'S *TO KILL A  
MOCKINGBIRD***

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Harper Lee's popular Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) is a study of a young girl coming of age in 1930s Alabama, and provides an intimate portrait of emerging identities and socially constructed gender awareness. Gender issues and roles are explored by Lee especially in the main character, Scout. It is no coincidence that young Jean Louise Finch is nicknamed "Scout"; in addition to the obvious symbolism of the term, ('learner'), "Scout" is almost gender-neutral. Lee's examination of racial and class-based issues in *To Kill a Mockingbird* extend to gender roles as well. Scout symbolically moves from boy to girl and back, giving us a glimpse of the woman she will become, much like Lee herself, who questions southern gender stereotypes as a part of the problem of growing up southern.

The book's primary concern with the female protagonist and her perceptions of the male father figure and the adult male world is noteworthy. The novel is very much about the experience of growing up as a female in a racist, segregated Southern society during the Great Depression, a South with very narrow definitions of gender roles and acceptable behaviour.

However, some critics follow Edgar Schuster who, in his article entitled "Discovering Theme and Structure in the Novel", mentions Scout's 'growth' as if it were a side issue. His emphasis on "Jem's physiological and psychological growth", the caste system of Maycomb, the title motif, education and superstition disregards the issue of Scout's gender as crucial to an understanding of the novel.

Scout's problems with gender identity are particularly obvious in two scenes from the novel. During one of their summers with Dill, Jem insults Scout as the three of them approach the Radley home and Scout whines, fearful of what may happen. He tells her she is getting to be more like a girl every day, the implication being that boys are courageous and non-fearful and girls are weak and afraid (a point which is proved false when Jem's fears of Boo Radley and the dark are demonstrated). Nevertheless, what is most important in the scene is Scout's reaction. Knowing that being called a girl is an insult and that being

female is valued less than being male in her small Southern town, she suddenly becomes brave in order to remain acceptable to her brother.

In another scene, as Scout passes by Mrs. Dubose's house and says "hey," she is scolded for poor manners unbecoming a Southern lady, a role which Scout is reluctant to assume.

Traditional views that women should not be aggressive are emphasized in the conversations between Scout and her father Atticus. A relevant scene in this sense is the fight Scout has with Cecil Jacobs for calling Atticus "a nigger lover" (Lee, 1997:95). She states: "Atticus had promised me he would wear me out if he ever heard of me fightin' any more. I was far too old and too big for such childish things, and the sooner I learned to hold in, the better off everybody would be. I soon forgot [...] Cecil Jacob made me forget." (1997:82)

The novel's consistent use of first person makes it clear that the reader is seeing all the events through a female child's eyes. The novel's female-centred narration, i.e. Scout's perceptions of being female in a male-dominated South provides an opportunity for Lee to comment on her own childlike perceptions as well as her recognition of the problems of growing up female in the South.

A number of significant questions about gender, as a consequence of Scout's ambivalence about being a female in an adult male world are raised by Dean Shackelford in "The Female Voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Narrative Strategies in Film and Novel": is Scout (and, by implication, all females) an outsider looking on an adult male world which she knows she will be unable to enter as she grows into womanhood? Is her identification with Atticus due not only to her love for and devotion to a father but also to his maleness, a power and freedom she suspects she will not be allowed to possess within the confines of provincial Southern society? Or is her identification with Atticus due to his androgynous nature (playing the role of mother and father to her and demonstrating stereotypically feminine traits: being conciliatory, passive, tolerant, and partially rejecting the traditional masculine admiration for violence, guns, and honour)? All three of these questions, concludes Shackelford, may lead to possible, even complementary readings which would explain Scout's extreme identification with her father.

It is obvious throughout the novel that Scout's tomboyishness relates to her developing sense of a female self. Also evident is Scout's devotion to her father's opinions. Atticus seems content with the way his daughter is; only when others force him

to do so does he concern himself with traditional stereotypes of the Southern female. Especially significant with regard to Scout's growing sense of womanhood is the novel's very important character, Aunt Alexandra, Atticus's sister. Early in the novel, readers are made aware of Scout's antipathy to her aunt, who wishes to mould her into a Southern lady. Other female authority figures with whom Scout has difficulty agreeing are her first-grade teacher, Miss Fisher, and Calpurnia, the family cook, babysitter, and surrogate mother figure. When the females in authority interfere with Scout's perceptions concerning her father and their relationship, she immediately rebels, a rebellion which Atticus does not discourage – signifying her strong identification with male authority and her recognition that the female authority figures threaten the unique relationship which she has with her father and which empowers her as an individual.

Despite his position as a respected male authority figure in Maycomb, Atticus is far from being a stereotypical Southern male. Most of the time he seems to forget the traditional expectations concerning masculinity (for himself) and femininity (for Scout). Lee seems to suggest that individuals must be allowed to develop their own sense of self without regard to rigid definitions of gender and social roles. While Jem is upset because Atticus will not play tackle football, Mrs Dubose criticizes Atticus for not remarrying. Although at one point Jem and Scout reflect on his abilities and his masculinities (Lee, 1997:93), they are not able to notice their father's bravery when defending Tom Robinson from being lynched by the mob.

Scout's identification with Atticus, notices Shackelford, may also be rooted in her recognition of the superficiality and limitations of being a Southern female. Mrs. Dubose once tells her: "You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady! You'll grow up waiting on tables if somebody doesn't change your ways ... " (112). Scout disagrees, maintaining that such attire is nothing more than a conspiracy "to teach me how to be a lady" (253). This is one of Lee's criticisms of Southern women and their narrow-mindedness concerning gender roles. Even Atticus ridicules the women's attitudes. In one instance he informs Alexandra that he favours "Southern womanhood as much as anybody, but not for preserving polite fiction at the expense of human life." (162) When Scout is "indignant" that women cannot serve on juries, Atticus jokingly says, "I guess it's to protect our frail ladies from sordid cases like Tom's. Besides [...] I doubt if we'd ever get a complete case tried – the ladies'd be interrupting to ask questions" (244). Having established clearly the fact that Atticus does not take many Southern codes seriously, we

can recognize the irony in Atticus's statement that women, including his own independent-minded daughter, are "frail".

Taking a page out of Mrs. Dubose's book of gender etiquette, Aunt Alexandra perpetuates the womanly notion that Scout has grown to despise. The adult Scout observes:

"Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born; furthermore, I should be a ray of sunshine in my father's lonely life. I suggested that one could be a ray of sunshine in pants, as well, but Aunty said that one had to behave like a sunbeam, that I was born good but had grown progressively worse every year. She hurt my feelings and set my teeth permanently on edge, but when I asked Atticus about it, he said there were already enough sunbeams in the family and to go about my business, he didn't mind me much the way I was." (1997:90).

As a matter of fact, few women in the novel are very pleasant, with the exception of Miss Maudie Atkinson, the Finches' neighbour, and Calpurnia.

Miss Maudie Atkinson offers Scout a female role model opposite to that of Alexandra. Scout becomes close to her one summer when Jem and Dill often excluded Scout from their games. Miss Maudie is seen as a good and trustworthy friend because "she never told on them, never played cat-and-mouse with them, and because she was not at all interested in their private lives" (49) unlike most Maycomb people. This is one of the main reasons of Scout's respect for Miss Maudie: "Miss Maudie, you are the best lady I know" (50). Maudie respects the children (they had long talks in the front porch), admires Atticus's lack of hypocrisy: "He's the same in the courtroom as he is on the public streets" (51) and treats people alike, irrespective of the skin colour: "...[Arthur Radley, nicknamed Boo Radley] always spoke nicely to me, no matter what folks said he did". (51)

The same need to respect others, irrespective of race, is preached by Cal, the children's housekeeper and the mother figure since Jem was born. When Walter Cunningham, Scout's classmate is invited to dinner and he pours molasses all over his plate, Scout criticizes him. Cal takes her to the kitchen and tries to explain Walter's situation while Scout remarks he is only a "Cunningham". A disciplinarian in the Finch household, Cal's message to Scout is that no matter who comes to visit them, she should show respect: "There's some folks who don't eat like us [...] but you aint't called on to contradict 'em at the table when they don't. That boy's yo' comp'ny and if he wants to eat up the whole table cloth you let him, you hear?" (27).

Through the first-person Scout's female voice, Southern women are ridiculed as gossips, provincials, weak, extremists, even racists. This is how Scout portrays her superficial Aunt Alexandra: "[...] one of the last of her kind: she has river-boat, boarding school manners; let any moral come along and she would uphold it; she was born in the objective case; she was an incurable gossip." (142) Scout's feelings for Alexandra, who is concerned with family heritage, position, and conformity to traditional gender roles, do alter somewhat as she begins to see Alexandra as a woman who means well and loves her and her father, and as she begins to accept certain aspects of being a Southern female. As Jem and Dill exclude her from their games, Scout gradually learns more about the alien world of being a female through sitting on the porch with Miss Maudie and observing Calpurnia work in the kitchen, which makes her begin "to think there was more skill involved in being a girl" than she has previously thought (127). Nevertheless, the book makes it clear that the adult Scout, who narrates the novel and who has presumably now assumed the feminine name Jean Louise for good, is still ambivalent at best concerning the traditional Southern lady.

Of special importance with regard to Scout's growing perceptions of herself as a female is the meeting of the missionary society women. Aunt Alexandra sees herself as a grand host. Through observing the missionary women, Scout is able to satirize the superficialities and prejudices of Southern women with whom she is willing to identify in order to become that alien being called woman. Dressed in "my pink Sunday dress, shoes, and a petticoat," Scout attends a meeting shortly after Tom Robinson's death, knowing that her aunt makes her participate as "part of [...] her campaign to teach me to be a lady" (253). Commenting on the women, Scout says, "Rather nervous, I took a seat beside Miss Maudie and wondered why ladies put on their hats to go across the street. Ladies in bunches always filled me with vague apprehension and a firm desire to be elsewhere ..." (253).

As the meeting begins, the ladies ridicule Scout for wearing pants and inform her that she cannot become a member of the elite, genteel group of Southern ladyhood unless she mends her ways. Miss Stephanie Crawford, the town gossip, mocks Scout by asking her if she wants to grow up to be a lawyer, a comment to which Scout, coached by Aunt Alexandra, says: "Nome, just a lady" (Lee, 1997:254) with evident social satire. Scout clearly does not want to become a lady. Suspicious, Miss Stephanie replies: "Well, you won't get very far until you start wearing dresses more often" (254). Immediately

thereafter, Lee exposes even further the provincialism and superficiality of the group's appearance of gentility, piety, and morality. Mrs. Grace Meriwether's comments on "those poor Mrunas" who live "in that jungle" (254) and need Christian salvation reflect a haughty, colonialist attitude toward other races. When the women began talking about blacks in America, their bigotry and Scout's disgust with it become obvious.

Rather than the community of gentility and racism represented in the women of Maycomb, Scout clearly prefers the world of her father, as this passage reveals: "[...] I wondered at the world of women [...] . There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water." (258) The female role is far too frivolous and unimportant for Scout to identify with. Furthermore, she says: "But I was more at home in my father's world. People like Mr. Heck Tate did not trap you with innocent questions to make fun of you [...] Ladies seemed to live in faint horror of men, seemed unwilling to approve wholeheartedly of them. But I liked them [...] [N]o matter how undelectable they were, [...] they weren't 'hypocrites'" (Lee, 1997:258). This obviously idealized and childlike portrayal of men nevertheless gets at the core of Scout's conflict. In a world in which men seem to have the advantages and seem to be more non-discriminatory and less intolerant than women with their petty concerns and superficial dress codes, why should she conform to the notion of Southern ladyhood? Ironically, Scout, unlike the reader, is unable to recognize the effects of female powerlessness which may be largely responsible for the attitudes of Southern ladies. If they cannot control the everyday business and legal affairs of their society, they can at least impose their code of manners and morality.

To Scout Atticus and his world represent freedom and power. Atticus is the key representative of the male power which Scout wishes to obtain even though she is growing up as a Southern female. More important, Lee demonstrates that Scout is gradually becoming a feminist in the South, for, with the use of first-person narration, she indicates that Scout/Jean Louise still maintains the ambivalence about being a Southern lady she possessed as a child. She seeks to become empowered with the freedoms the men get in her society; and, indeed, she seems to get them without resorting to trivial and superficial concerns such as wearing a dress and appearing genteel.

Harper Lee's fundamental criticism of gender roles for women (and to a lesser extent for men) may be evident, as critic Shackelford argues in his article on the novel's female voice, especially in her novel's identification with outsider figures such as Tom

Robinson, Mayella Ewell, and Boo Radley. Curiously enough, the critic continues, the outsider figures with whom the novelist identifies most are also males. Undeniably, Tom Robinson, the male African American who has been disempowered and annihilated by a fundamentally racist, white male society, and Boo Radley, the reclusive and eccentric neighbour about whom legends travel regularly, are the two “mockingbirds” of the title. Ironically, they are unable to mock society’s roles for them and, as a result, assume the consequences of living on the margins – Tom through his death, and Boo through “his return to the protection of a desolate isolated existence.” (Shackelford, 1997:109).

Throughout the novel, however, the female voice has emphasized Scout’s growing distance from her provincial Southern society and her identification with her father, a symbol of the empowered. Like her father, Atticus, Scout, too, is unable to be a “mocking bird” of society and as a result, in coming to know Boo Radley as a real human being at the novel’s end, she recognizes the empowerment of being “the Other” as she consents to remain an outsider unable to accept society’s unwillingness to seek and know before judging.

Perceptions of people and places begin in childhood. So, too, value judgments and prejudice. As a child, Scout Finch is learning about the ways of the world, and is struggling with its many contradictions and inconsistencies. Only when she reaches adulthood is she capable of comprehending how these experiences have shaped the person she has become – an intelligent woman who possesses everything she needs to make her own decisions and create her own independent path. The story of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a remarkable journey from girlhood to womanhood. On a much broader level, it is the story of bigotry in the small-town American South, and why it persists, deeply rooted in tradition that is passed down from one generation to the next. But sometimes a child’s point of view strips life of all its complexities, and with its simplicity ultimately leads to greater adult understanding. As seen through the eyes of a child, “There’s just one type of folks. Folks” (Lee, 1997:250).

By incorporating a kind of dual point-of-view literary technique which allows for alternating viewpoints between the child and now-adult Scout (Lenhoff, 2001:20) Lee provides added dimension that offers greater textual depth. Two levels of perception thus emerge: “the innocent view of the child, and the memory of the more knowing adult” (Johnson, 1994:4). This technique allows for portraying a broad spectrum of Southern Womanhood: stereotypes, stereotype challengers, or alternative stereotypes, e.g. ideal back



vs. 'white trash' (Lee, 1997:243), all these despite characters' not explicitly dealing with gender issues.

This on-going oscillation between fitting and getting away from stereotypical "Southern Belle" type of woman, this pain of growing up process with the whole community ends with Scout's becoming one of them: "As I made my way home, I thought Jem and I would get grown but there wasn't much else left for us to learn, except possibly algebra." (308) Beginning as a tomboy, in the end she accepts, on the one hand, the need to play a more conventionally feminine role, which does not mean, on the other hand, that she has to give up her independence. Paradoxically, the loss of innocence is positive in Scout's case: she 'learns' (as her name suggests) to be tolerant with all races: "Shoot all the bluejays you want [Atticus tells his daughter], if you can hit'em but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird". (99)

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**AMERICAN FEMINISM IN THE FICTION OF  
AMANDA CROSS [CAROLYN HEILBRUN]**

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When the feminist intellectual figure Carolyn Gold Heilbrun (1926-2003) committed suicide (McFadden, 2003) it was sad event for her fans, but not something surprising to those who had read her works closely. Suicide was a message vehicle for a key character in one Amanda Cross novel (Knepper, 1992) and Heilbrun herself had and openly expressed negative views about excessive longevity. At one point in her life she had “held a determination to commit suicide at seventy” (1997:7). A suicide, mistaken for a murder, is the central case in her *Death in a Tenured Position* (1981) and suicides are discussed multiple times in *Sweet Death, Kind Death* (1984) in which the murder victim has contemplated suicide and her death is disguised as one. In Heilbrun's non-fiction *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty* (1997) her views about excessive longevity were made clear in multiple passages, but she also explained why she had not ended her life at seventy. She felt that there was a point in a well-lived life when all of one's aims were either met or defeated, and the future would hold no new challenges or interesting opportunities. At that point, life would, in her view, hold not further appeal, and would “fall into indifference” (1997:206). In 1997 she explained her change of heart about ending her existence at seventy, writing, “Each day one can say to oneself: I can always die; do I choose death or life? I daily choose life the more earnestly because it is a choice” (1997:10).

So it was a choice she made in October 2003. Her son, Robert reported that she had not been ill, but only that “She wanted to control her destiny,” [ . . . ] “and she felt her life was a journey that had concluded” (McFadden, 2003). Yet when she took her own life at the age of 77 her suicide also resulted in the deaths of Amanda Cross and Kate Fansler. Collectively the loss of these three women brought many to mourn their collective passing.

Amanda Cross was the pen-name used by Carolyn Heilbrun in her 15 fictional works, and Kate Fansler was the recurring character in most of her fiction, the amateur sleuth who could solve the puzzles in every criminal case.

With a Ph.D. in English Literature from Columbia earned in 1959, Carolyn Gold Heilbrun was a leading advocate of revising the literary “canon” to recognize the contributions of women to literature (Blain, Clements and Grundy, 1990:508-509; Boken, 1996; Cleveland, 1980). Heilbrun was also a well-known academic and feminist, the author or co-author of 11 non-fiction books. Her 15 mysteries are distinctly different from those of both classic and contemporary male writers because of her inclusion of women's issues (Pervushina and Kania, 2000). While later women writers, especially Sara Paretsky, have followed (Kania, 2006) she was among the first to associate the criminal motivations and the circumstances of her novels with the women's issues of the times (Roberts, 1985). Collectively her writings, non-fiction and fiction alike, contributed substantially to women's literature and to the women's movement in the United States by helping create the image of “the new woman” of feminism (Pervushina, 2000).

Carolyn Gold was born on 13 January 1926. Her parents were Jewish but dissociated themselves from Judaism. She moved with her family to New York City at the age of six. Although she very much appreciated intellectual changes of scene, she spent most of her life in New York City. In 1945, while still in college, she married James Heilbrun who “Actively encouraged her academic and literary endeavors; indeed, the probability that her emotional needs were officially settled by the fact of her marriage might have enabled her to focus without distraction on her intellectual work” (Kress, 1997:25).

In her senior year as a student at Wellesley College Heilbrun became deeply involved in the life of the college as a writer. Her interest in women's issues, especially in women's education emerged then, well before the “second wave” of the feminist movement. In the 1960s, as the women's liberation movement began to gain momentum, Heilbrun emerged on the scene as an important woman writer, as the theoretician of feminism and as an advisor for other women scholars. She was willing to speak out for women and she had the position to do so. She also authored her first mystery novel then, *In the Last Analysis* (1964), using the pen-name Amanda Cross to protect her fledgling academic career, fearing that her novels would be viewed as frivolous and might block her path to tenure (Heilbrun, 1988:110; Boken, 1996:58). As a tenured professor of literature at Columbia University and later as the president of the Modern Language Association (Kress, 1977:4), she became a respected and

powerful advocate for women's issues, especially with the problems of female identity in the academic and professional worlds. Heilbrun's views evolved along with the different stages and periods of feminism. Each period -- the beginnings of contemporary feminism, radical feminism and liberal feminism -- affected the creative writing, the social views, and the outlook of this prominent author (Pervushina, 2000; Pervushina and Kania, 2000).

Her recurring fictional character, Kate Fansler, like Heilbrun also a university professor of literature, solved cases with a greater understanding of human nature than the male police officers investigating the crimes, supposedly relying on something vaguely like a woman's intuition. Her greater sensibilities and greater ability to understand is contrasted to male narrow-mindedness, both on the part of university administrators and police. She attacked those two social institutions with some regularity. In some ways her character Kate Fansler resembles the creation of the once popular S.S. Van Dine, the erudite detective Philo Vance, a dabbler in crime, a brilliant amateur sleuth (Loughery, 1992; Pervushina and Kania, 2003; Tuska, 1971), and the plots are vaguely like the British "drawing room mysteries" Heilbrun liked, and are quite unlike the more recently popular "hard-boiled" style of mystery fiction (Walton and Jones, 1999; Pervushina and Kania, 2003).

Kate Fansler had no "Watson," but was often helped by Reed Amhearst, a New York County assistant district attorney when he first appears in the novels. Later he was to be offered a post as a law school professor of criminal procedure (SDKD:71). A bit younger than Kate (SDKD:15), he became her husband early in the series, proposing marriage in *The James Joyce Murder* (49). He provided her with legal knowledge and the access to police and prosecutorial records which Kate needed to solve her cases (SDKD:15). She often explained her solutions to him, or used him as an intelligent sounding board for her ideas.

The narrations usually arise from an omniscience with direct access to Kate's mind, and on occasion to others, amply supplemented with direct quotations. However, in her later books (PZ, HD, EoD) she writes in a more direct chronological descriptive narrative style.

The novels are written as contemporary chronicles, alluding to socio-political events at the time of each novel's writing, almost without exception from a liberal and pro-Democrat perspective. In *The Question of Max* (1976) Cross raised the scandals of Richard Nixon, portraying Max as wrong in defending the ousted president (QoM). She attacked

the Republicans who sought Bill Clinton's impeachment (HD:103). In the words of character Estelle "Woody" Woodhaven:

"'Definitely. Very partisan,' I added, suspecting that was the point she wanted to make. 'The Republicans were out to get him, no other considerations allowed.'" Another woman character, Dean Kimberly adds, "'He was like one of those Congressmen we mentioned, the ones who hated Clinton and didn't care what they did to the country, the ones who couldn't believe they weren't in the right, despite all the signs to the contrary, and despite all the damage they were doing to long-established institutions'" (HD:114). *In The Edge of Doom* (2002) she has her characters make statements critical of George W. Bush (114).

Her character Woody Woodhaven thinks (HD:129), "One speaks to witnesses for what they can tell you, and even if they turn out to be fascist pigs or into family values, you just let them get on with it." This association of fascism and family values certainly is a troubling perspective, suggesting that Heilbrun remains well out of the American political main stream. Another of her professorial characters, Larry Petrillo, expresses another of Heilbrun's anti-right prejudices (HD:138): "The trouble with most of the right-wing boys, frankly, is that they lie so easily there's no reason to believe anything they say." It is her bias which leaves her blind to the fact that the Clinton impeachment arose from the fact that Bill Clinton lied so easily and so often, that it almost cost him his presidency.

In her later books she also began to make even more strident attacks on what she deemed to be conservative values and institutions. She assails the Harvard University Law School for its failure to tenure Afro-American women, and for selling out to the "neoconservatives" for the sake of the endowment (IS:86-87). She cites Richard D. Kahlenberg's book, *Broken Contract: A Memoir of Harvard Law School* (1992) with an actual footnote in the novel (IS:86) to support her attacks on the school.

Heilbrun primarily used her fiction to express her viewpoints on politics, feminism and women's issues (Murphy, 1999:120). Her novels educated reader on women's history, as in her reference to case law, *Bradwell v. Illinois*, an early sex discrimination case which denied the litigant the opportunity to practice law in Illinois (AIS:110-111), referring to another real book and author, Herma Hill Kay and her *Cases and Materials on Sex-Based Discrimination* (1988). She raised such women's issues, yet she was not a "radical feminist" by any measure. Her views were progressive, but rarely extreme. She certainly was not from that radical wing of the women's movement which appears anti-male. Her

Kate Fansler likes the company of men (JJM:129; DiTP:55), is most willing to accept male chivalry and allows Reed the privilege of paying for the dinner out she suggests (JJM:13).

She is also sexually liberal, at least in theory, if not in practice. Heilbrun seemed to give approval to adultery, implying that Kate has had affairs (DiTP), having her object to the moral double standard, having Kate defending her mother's adultery (EoD:92), therefore being sympathetic to the needs of a 1950s woman seeking love and passion over the dull duties of marriage. Heilbrun did consider the importance of fatherhood, but only late in her writings (EoD:70-71).

Her choice of fiction, the mystery, did not fit at all well with her choice of academic subject matter. Other than her passion for Dorothy Sayers, Heilbrun was not a scholar of mystery writers, and, while liking many whom she cited or alluded to in the Amanda Cross novels, she was a bit negative toward the genre. She inserted a critical, unattributed quotation (SDKD:111), saying: "the detective story is only the most banal example, the discourse focuses on the bringing to light of a crucial event, identified as a reality which determines significance." The quotation is found in Jonathan Culler's analysis of narratives (2002; 2004:120) and first appears in his 1981 book, *The Pursuit of Signs*, presumably the source Heilbrun used. Kress (1997: 72) makes a similar point about the Cross and the detective story, where convention takes precedence over character and is not a good vehicle for more "revolutionary ideas."

Her choices of settings did reflect her career and the problems she had encountered as a woman academic in institutions dominated by men. Her conflicts with male power holders are almost legendary. At the time of her retirement she commented critically on them (Heller, 1992; Leatherman, 1992). In her novels she returned to these conflicts repeatedly, most clearly in *Death in a Tenured Position* (1981) and most recently in *Honest Doubt*, in the words of character Kate Fansler (2000:78, 79):

From my point of view, the simplest explanation is that these guys used to rule the roost, and now they're not only expected to share it, and share it with women, they're also expected to change the way they look at the literature they have always taught. They don't like being displaced, they don't like being told they are no longer the final authority on what constitutes the canon. If I were one of them, I might not like it either. [. . .] And remember, with professors, particularly in literature, they don't feel quite certain that theirs is a manly profession. If women start swarming all over it, they might actually begin to feel feminized. But all that's general, and probably true of other English departments in

other colleges, although ours is a bit extreme.

The violence in Amanda Cross novels is “off stage” in most of the stories, the exception being the assault on her teaching partner in *An Imperfect Spy* (IS:131-132). Kate finds herself in the center of *The James Joyce Murder* which occurs at the country house where she is working. But in the other stories, the mystery develops out of her view, and she is invited in to solve the case. In *The Edge of Doom* (2002) there is no mystery. The homicide occurred decades earlier and her encounter is with the two accessories in the long-solved case. The crimes often are bizarre, and sometimes there is no crime at all; only the appearance of one (TM, NWfW). In her 15 novels there are 17 identified victims, although only thirteen murders. Eleven of the victims are women, and the three of the non-murders victims are of women, a mysterious disappearance, one suicide and an accidental death. The killers are ten males and three females, plus a “faculty committee” of twelve suspects, of whom there are eight highly likely suspects actually involved in the murder, five male and three female in *Honest Doubt* (2000), and males loom large as suspects in the three non-murders. There is an additional non-lethal assault on a man by another man. As might be expected from a feminist, women are overly portrayed as victims in these stories. But men are somewhat under-represented as homicidal assailants.

Carolyn Heilbrun, Amanda Cross and Kate Fansler saw the academic world as a dangerous place for women. Most of the mysterious deaths and serious assaults target women. Most of the crime victims in these novels are Euro-American, versus Afro-American, Latino/Latina or Asian-American. Most are middle or upper class, versus only one lower class Afro-American woman (TfF). There are no teen killers in her stories, and the killers are most commonly in their 30s and 40s, a great many being university affiliated. The assailants are mostly male, all middle or upper class, all Euro-America, and all adults. No juvenile criminals appear in her stories, even though the greater proportion of the American crime problem is generated by the urban, lower-class poor, minorities and the young. The only reality in her choice of criminal offenders is that her and in real life, they are male.

For Amanda Cross the cause is straight-forward intellectual feminism, with a healthy dose of ideological liberalism. She is in a struggle against the male-dominant academic power structure within which her own career as Carolyn Heilbrun was conducted (Leatherman, 1992). She supported other liberal causes and ideas, but nothing was more

important than the cause of educated women and Carolyn Heyburn's version of intellectual feminism: women as oppressed and denied intellectual equality with those males unfairly dominating the academy. Marshall (1994:81) suggests that Heilbrun came to the cause later in her novels, with *The Question of Max* in 1976, but there were clear hints of her ideological orientations from the first novel (Roberts, 1985).

In matters of race, Cross was embarrassingly naive, but truly sympathetic toward Afro-American ambitions. Cross initially placed gay men in a negative light, but later accepted liberal political orthodoxy. By *Honest Doubt* (2000) she was writing of “queer studies” from the perspective of gays, “self-named in fact by the practitioners thereof” (2001:90). Kress reports that she had certain comments deemed hostile to homosexuals removed from later editions of the JJM at her own expense (1997:75). [see also *Reinventing Womanhood*, 154.] In all but a few cases the victims are from middle or upper middle classes. Indeed, virtually no one ordinary or lower class dies in a Cross story, the exception being Arabella, a young Afro-American woman, in *A Trap for Fools* (1986).

For gauging the progress and ambitions of American academic women in the pursuit of the Feminist Agenda, Amanda Cross is a must-read, and one hopes that her works, both fictional and scholarly, will not be lost. She was an important social advocate, with obvious political biases and distorted perceptions about crime in America. Even these obvious faults help clarify the positions on social justice that she and others like her brought to the dialog on what flaws American still has and on what American should become. She sparked a lively debate in American academic circles which deserves to be continued long after her death. Even in that death she was true to her beliefs. Her suicide removed a major figure from the American literary scene, but it was one final reaffirmation of her values about life and the timeliness of death.

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*The Question of Max* (1976) - QoM

*Death in a Tenured Position* (1981) - DiTP

*Sweet Death, Kind Death* (1984) - SDKD

*No Word from Winifred* (1986) - NWfW

*A Trap for Fools* (1989) - TtF  
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## **Women Writers Subvert the Canon**

**INTENSITIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS: DELUSION, DREAM, AND  
DELIRIUM IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS. DALLOWAY* AND KATHERINE ANN  
PORTER'S "PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER"**

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The chiming of Big Ben which punctuates and permeates the hours of Clarissa Dalloway's day, "first a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable" celebrates, in part, the recovery of Londoners from the Great War (Woolf, 1925:4). Its following sound, the ringing of the bells of St Margaret's, as conceived by Clarissa's old suitor Peter Walsh, "glides into the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest—like Clarissa herself" (1925:50). The bells embody for Peter a moment of closeness with Clarissa in their youth. But if Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* is in part a celebration of life and recovery, it is as well a conversation with death. Thus for Peter the "languish [ing]" of the bells brings a sense that "the sound expressed languor and suffering" and finally, recalling that Clarissa has been ill and has a weakened heart, "the final stroke tolled for death in the midst of life" (1925:50). Katherine Anne Porter's "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" might well serve as a companion piece for *Mrs. Dalloway*, even to the detail of Miranda, a newspaper writer in a mountain town in the United States, waking to the "gong" of war at the start of the story.

*Mrs. Dalloway* and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" have in common an exploration of intensities of consciousness, including a continuum of delusions, dreams, and moments of integrative, euphoric vision, which in Woolf's work have been much discussed. Both works contain the seeds of a critique of patriarchy and a condemnation of the kind of masculinist quasi-logic which would legitimate, even privilege, the horrors of war. A soldier is offered in each—explicitly by Porter—as an innocent "sacrificial lamb." Embedded in both works are attempts to critique and even bridge the binary oppositions evident when war and peace, male and female identities, logic and feeling, sanity and madness, language and the unspeakable are thrown into relief by the circumstances of the Great War. The attempt to force language past its logical limits, a key phenomenon of

High Modernism, represents in these works, then, an attempt to create, ephemeral as it may be, what we might now call a sort of “third term” which offers an alternative to the limitations of subject and object.

To suggest how these women writers attempted to efface these binaries is of course to participate in these cultural assumptions to some extent, and thus to implicate one’s own thinking. Yet not only the innovative, non-hierarchical and unifying vision expressed in both works, but also the exploration of a fluid, perhaps fragmented self and the suggestions of androgyny in the works serve to interrogate then-current notions of patriarchy, sanity, heterosexuality, and logic, as if to point up the inadequacy of established binary thinking from within the restrictions they impose. Perhaps most interestingly, the intense, unifying vision as expressed in Septimus’ delusions, Miranda’s delirium and near-death experience, and both Miranda and Clarissa’s ultimately coherent identities insist upon a continuum in such areas as logic, sanity, sexual identity, and power, rather than culturally designated polarities.

As *Mrs. Dalloway* begins, the war is, of course, over; emblematic of this relief and recovery is the excitement that unites people in the street as Clarissa walks through London to buy flowers for her party—first all attention turned toward a royal car moving through the street, but superseding this, a small plane spiraling above the heads of passersby, skywriting a message which everyone tries to decipher—and which turns out to be an advertisement for toffee. If the toffee is both trivial and pleasurable, it may be a fitting emblem for everyday renewal after war. But Woolf describes as well a sort of transcendence in her distinctive descriptions of the connectedness of everyone. The playfully swooping plane creates a shared silence, as “All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky [...] and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times” (1925:21). In descriptions such as these, Woolf attempts—as Porter will in Miranda’s delirium—to force language to get at meanings which defy and expand ordinary logic.

While critics like Kathryn Stelmach, for example, discuss Woolf’s writing in terms of the rhetorical device of ekphrasis (2006:304-326), and others cite Joyce’s “epiphanies” or elements of mysticism in Woolf’s prose (Kane,1995: 328-349), or comment upon the interplay of Kristeva’s “semiotic” and “symbolic” in sections of Woolf’s novels (Garvey, 1991:60), this essay skirts these detailed but potentially reductive analyses in favor of a

respectful distance from Woolf's linguistic and semantic intricacies, and attempts to point up as well the parallels evident between *Mrs. Dalloway* and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." Interestingly, in his "Afterword" to the 1962 edition of the title story of the collection Mark Schorer avers that "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," is "so subtle and complex" that he is "unwilling to try to take it apart in any detail," that it is "really about the birth of an artist, the one who has suffered everything, including death, and comes back from it, disabused, all-knowing, or knowing at least all there is to know" (1962:175). Many observant readers of Woolf might concur with Woolf biographer Phyllis Rose that "there is no way fully to explain or analyze the lift of spirit that occurs when one reads certain parts of *Mrs. Dalloway*" (1978:128).

Earlier on the walk that opens *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa has, in fact, contemplated dying and felt the conviction, despite her avowed atheism, that she would live on, that people like her and Peter would "live in each other," in "the trees at home," and that she herself will be "laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist" (1925:9). But if Clarissa espouses an affirmative, even transcendent view of death, the character of Septimus Smith, the shell-shocked soldier whose suicide will be revealed at her party, seems to confirm Peter's notion after hearing the bells - that death inescapably permeates life. As Clarissa thinks about her life, she sees that, although she feels "very young," and that her mind "sliced like a knife through everything" she also feels "unspeakably aged" and outside of life, "out, out, far out to sea and alone" (1925:8). Despite her vitality and her sense of a shared love of life, a connection between people of all classes on the street, a Modernist sense of a sort of redemptive act of artistic clarity, Clarissa "always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (1925:8). Thus Woolf links Clarissa and Septimus in the first pages of the novel, establishing the self-educated, would-be poet as a sort of alter ego to Clarissa, both an opposite and kindred spirit. Septimus, haunted by the death of his officer, Evans, for whom he may have eroticized feelings, and suffering from delusions, has the thought as he stands on the sidewalk while the royal car passes, that he is the cause of a traffic jam, and further, that "the world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames" (1925:15). Yet, since he has lived through just such conflagrations, Septimus' perception is not entirely illogical; the time and place are wrong, but the event can be said to be real. The "unspeakable" experience of sacrificial males like Septimus in wartime, Woolf here links to Clarissa's redemptive vision of the inexpressible. This near-meeting of

Clarissa and Septimus sets the stage for a novel in which, according to Woolf's original plan, Clarissa herself was to commit suicide. Interestingly, Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda will meet a kind of alter ego in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," not her soldier Adam, but a bitter hospitalized soldier who reflects her own state of mind.

If in *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf establishes an atmosphere of sometime euphoria, memory, and connection punctuated by reminders of the immanence of death, Porter offers only a circumscribed time and space for Miranda and her lover Adam in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" within a general atmosphere of war and pestilence. Miranda's sense of the war is of its not just permeating, but poisoning everything; as surely as Clarissa Dalloway's day of preparations for her party is divided by the tolling of London's bells, the young reporter Miranda's time with her soldier Adam is punctuated by her awareness of funerals passing in the street, funerals for deaths caused not by battle wounds but by influenza.

As the novella opens and Miranda, presumably already ill with influenza, dreams of selecting a horse for a race with death, she catalogues her losses: "Where is that lank greenish stranger I remember hanging about the place, welcomed by my grandfather, my great-aunt, my five times removed cousin, my decrepit hound and my silver kitten?" In a house where they are "all tangled together like badly cast fishing lines," the dreaming Miranda asks, "What else besides them did I have in the world? Nothing. Nothing is mine, I have only nothing but it is enough, it is beautiful and it is all mine" (Porter, 1937:114). As a young woman of twenty-four who in an earlier Miranda story had escaped from a Catholic boarding school through a brief marriage, the young writer wryly questions her identity as a coherent self: "Do I even walk around in my own skin or is it something I have borrowed to spare my modesty?" (1962:114). Porter's interest in the notion of the permanence or fluidity of the self, even before she slips into delirium, seems to parallel Woolf's examination of this idea both in her essays and in novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*.

In her dream, Miranda outraces death who "regarded her without meaning, the black stare of mindless malice." She rises in her stirrups and shouts, "I am not going with you this time—ride on!" With this evidence of self-assertive, coherent self, she awakens. It is here that the "gong" of war sounds in her mind, as

Slowly, unwittingly, Miranda drew herself up [...] from the pit of sleep, waited in a daze for life to begin again. A single word struck in her mind, a gong of warning, reminding her for the daylong what she forgot happily in sleep, but only in sleep. The war, said the gong.



(1962:115).

Porter joins then, from the vantage point of a writer in the mid-thirties, in Woolf's Modernist project of making language both express and fail to express nuances of human experience, letting an undefined sound resonate in readers' minds in a way not entirely dissimilar to Woolf's descriptions of the bells of London, whose effect on people can not be reduced to words. If the "gong," the "pale rider," Miranda's near-death perception of unity and restoration of lost friends, the bells and the sky and trees above Clarissa's London function as symbols, they are symbols for complexes of thought and emotion which can not be thoroughly, logically, defined. Johanna Garvey's assertion in a 1991 article about Woolf may be applied to Porter as well, that she uses a "narrative strategy that refuses to dominate, conquer, and contain" (1991:60), in effect subverting hierarchies and binaries.

What Woolf, and Porter as well, are attempting, however, defies categorization; minute analysis may have a reductive effect. In a delirious or a delusional state, language attempts to describe the intuitive, illogical, or spiritual insight that the logic of literary criticism itself, or the quasi-logic of the war machine or of modern medicine, as Woolf felt, does not acknowledge. Woolf's defiance of linear logic also defies what the villain of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Sir William Bradshaw, the doctor who would incarcerate Septimus, will call a "sense of proportion."

The various shapes into which the war has formed an intrusion into Miranda's mind become clear in her memories of the day before. Two men had greeted her at her office, enforcers for the War Bond Committee, bullies who quote jingoistic rhetoric and tell her she is the only person in her office who hasn't bought a \$50 war bond, a bond she can not afford.

Their lie is revealed almost immediately when Miranda finds her colleague "Townie," sobbing in the cloakroom, having been similarly intimidated. She will hear the rhetoric of war propaganda repeated later at a performance she attends for her work. Since she has been "demoted" to the theater and society pages for failing to reveal a juicy scandal about a disgraced young girl in an article, she no longer is permitted to write news stories. She must mingle with well-off young women who attend dances for the soldiers but earn Miranda's scorn for their disdain for the enlisted men, and an odious task of the day is Miranda's joining in bringing gift baskets to hospitalized men. Paralleling Clarissa's

near-meeting of Septimus on the London streets, Miranda has a fleeting vision of a sort of double for herself, a bitter soldier upon whose bed she sets down her basket and flowers, embarrassed at “the idiocy of her errand” of joining in trying to cheer up the soldiers:

He was lying with his eyes closed, his eyebrows in a sad bitter frown [...]. It was like turning a corner absorbed in your own painful thoughts and meeting your state of mind embodied, face to face, “My own feelings about this whole thing, made flesh [...]. Of course I would pick him out. (1962:122).

Porter’s Miranda rails against the bullying and propaganda in the United States, citing not only the inflated rhetoric that describes “those vile Huns,” the “Boche,” bayoneting babies—an image that will occur in Miranda’s delirium when she is at her most gravely ill—but she also describes the “guarded resentment” and defensive attitude of men who can’t fight, like her fellow reporter Chuck, with his bad lungs (1962:136). And she sees housewives collecting peach pits, thought to contain useful materials for explosives, as hoodwinked by the designers of the war effort:

It keeps them busy and makes them feel useful, and all these women running wild with the men away are dangerous, if they aren’t given something to keep their little minds out of mischief [...]. Keeping still and quiet will win the war. (1962:136)

Porter unearths a neat irony in the pacification of potentially “wild” women by having them collect peach pits which will in turn become explosives. Adam, the innocent soldier about to be shipped out, signed up as a sapper instead of a flier to placate his mother, who was unaware that the work of handling explosives is far more dangerous than flying.

Adam and Miranda, who have met ten days earlier, both recognize that Adam will die in the war. Adam, who is thought to be a somewhat idealized depiction of the young soldier Porter fell in love with in 1918, who nursed her through influenza but died himself, is called by Mark Shorer “the beautiful original innocent” (1962:175). Miranda describes him in his officer’s uniform as looking “like a fine healthy apple” (1962:125); Adam nonetheless shares her sense of irony about the war. The two joke about smoking, with Adam saying, “Does it matter so much if you’re going to war anyway?” and Miranda retorts, “No [...] and it matters even less if you’re staying at home knitting socks”

(1962:125). Adam says “matter-of-factly” that, ““If I didn’t go [...] I couldn’t look myself in the face”” (1962:141). Rather than logically sorting out the reasoning behind the war, Adam seems drawn to it by a destiny that he knows will end with his death. Miranda thinks, “it was not good even imagining [a future with Adam], because he was not for her or for any woman, being beyond experience, committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death” (1962:129). Adam, with good health, his engineering training, and his love of cars and boats, is the quintessence of good-hearted manliness. Yet his choice is not free, but rather pre-determined by the social structures that shape and define masculinity. Miranda thinks of him as “pure, all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrificial lamb must be” (1962:141).

Adam’s unreflective masculinity, then, suggests the cultural assumptions that justify male sacrifice; Porter exposes the false logic, not just of the bullying or propaganda, but also of gender-inflected definitions of cowardice and heroism. In England, for example, the large numbers of emotionally damaged men returning from the horrors of trench warfare, so well depicted in Pat Barker’s contemporary novel *Regeneration*, as well as by Woolf, initially provoked proposals that they should be shot for cowardice. However, with over 80,000 incapacitated soldiers, rhetoric in military and medical circles developed to replace the term “hysteria,” associated with women, with the more manly term “shell shock” (Childs, 2000:164).

Woolf’s views on the war are well known, but in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the destructive patriarchal structures she describes are not so much those of the government or the military—men like Richard Dalloway and even Peter Walsh, who has been an administrator in India, unquestionably (and perhaps unquestioningly) attempt to do good. When Peter sees a group of young soldiers marching to place a wreath on a monument, he sees in their uniformity that “Life, with its varieties, its irreticences, had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline” (1925:51). Yet, Peter thinks, “One had to respect it; one might laugh; yet one had to respect it” (1925:51). In *Mrs. Dalloway* the clearest evil lies in the medical profession and its essential arrogance, particularly in the person of Sir William Bradshaw, a more refined and powerful version of Porter’s War Bond enforcers. Rich, honored, and entirely certain of the rightness of his reasoning, he is intensely phallocratic and aligned as well with the imperialist mission of Britain. For Sir William worships “proportion,” and,

Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, and made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion. (1925:99)

This bullying Woolf labels Proportion's sister, "Conversion," which "feasts on the wills of the weakly" (1925:100). Woolf, having suffered from mental illness from a young age, has given Septimus some of her own delusory experiences, like hearing the birds sing in Greek. Clarissa's own characterization of Sir William, watching him at the party, is excoriating. He was "a great doctor yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage - forcing your soul, that was it" (1925:184). She imagines that, "If this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he [Septimus] not have said [...] they make life intolerable, men like that?" (1925:184-5).

Woolf returns to the notion of the indefinable nature of the self when she has Clarissa compare her own experience with Septimus' act of defiance, in these terms: "A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life [...]. This he had preserved" (1925:184). A motive for suicide, Clarissa muses, is found in "people feeling the impossibility of reaching the center which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone" (1925:184). Clarissa feels a kinship with Septimus; "She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty." Woolf has Clarissa immediately drawn back to life after this flirtation with suicide: "But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter" (1925:186).

If Clarissa returns from connection to a suicide to a connection with people she has cared for, and to her party, Miranda, disconnected from her family and past, finds connection as well with those around her. She records her habit of turning and looking back when leaving any friend, regretting the "snapping of even the lightest bond" (1938: 129). Only Adam, in her experience, when she looks back, is still following her with his eyes. So does Woolf try to get at the sense of connection, not only in Clarissa's identification with Septimus or the early scenes in Bond Street and Regents' Park, but also in the "thread" that the powerful, elderly, and androgynous Lady Bruton imagines binding her to her luncheon guests, Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway. It is "as if one's

friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread" which would get thinner as they walk away, becoming "hazy with sound of bells [...] as a single spider's thread is blotted with raindrops, and burdened, sags down" (1925:112). Richard himself feels at the same moment an impulse of love for Clarissa, perceived also as a spider's thread that draws him to go home and tell Clarissa that he loves her. "The time comes," Richard thinks, "when it can't be said; one's too shy to say it"; he thinks of the War and "thousands of poor chaps [...] shoveled together, already half forgotten," and thinks of Clarissa and their life together as "a miracle." He brings Clarissa roses, and, unable to say he loves her, sees that "she understood without his speaking: his Clarissa" (1925:117).

Paralleling Clarissa's understanding of Richard's gift is the wordless communication of Adam and Miranda. Dancing, they "said nothing but smiled continually at each other, odd changing smiles as though they had found a new language" (1962:142). But their most transcendent moments are spent when Adam has recognized that Miranda is very ill, and has taken on the androgynous nurturing role of nurse. He sits on her bed, and they think of prayers, at first rather jokingly, establishing that she is Catholic and he is Presbyterian. Their mutuality is celebrated when they find that they both know a Negro spiritual, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," and they sing alternate verses: "'Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my lover away.'" After mammy, pappy, brother and sister have been taken, verse by verse, Miranda sings the last,

"'Death, oh leave one singer to mourn'" (1962:150-1). That mourner, as foreshadowed in her early dream, will not be the healthy Adam, but the recovered Miranda.

In Miranda's dream delirium, Adam is shot with arrows, a ship sprouts wings, and the kind doctor Hildesheim becomes a German soldier bayoneting babies. She is aware of her mind tottering and her "reasoning coherent self" splitting off. Her very identity seems lost with "no multiple planes of living, tough filaments of memory and hope pulling taut backwards and forwards holding her up between them" (1962:151) Porter describes how "both reason and desire fall away" from Miranda, but there remains "only a fiercely burning particle of being [...] a will to live" (158).

Miranda's vision as she nears death is one of restoration and completeness, as well as a lack of a need for ego or identity:

[T]hrough he shimmering air came a great company of human beings, and Miranda saw in an amazement of joy that they were all the living she had known. Their faces were transfigured, each in its own beauty, beyond what she remembered of them [...] They were pure identities and she knew them every one without calling their names or remembering what relation she bore to them. (159)

What is missing from Miranda's transcendent vision, however, is the presence of those who have died, the ones invoked as the novella opens. Coming back to life in search of what she had "forgotten" - the dead - she finds that Adam is among them. Like Woolf, then, Porter examines the apparent split between the reasoning, seemingly essential self and the fluid self whose boundaries seem permeable. The reasoning self is able to "balance" on the continuum between delirium and sanity, in Miranda's case as well as in Clarissa's.

One aspect of the argument that Woolf's work effaces binary oppositions is found, not only in the attempt to speak the unspeakable, but simply in the continuum between Clarissa's thoughts and those of Septimus. In her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf ponders "what does one mean by the 'unity of the mind'?" [...] for clearly the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any point, at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being" (1929:51-52). Woolf's argument here for the fluid self has an unperturbed tone, and it is this very tone which seems to make Clarissa's musing sane rather than delusional. And when Miranda emerges from her days of illness and delirium, she arms herself to face a life without Adam in a way that suggests a triumph of clear-eyed saneness over delirium and loss. Additionally, if Miranda's independence, intellectual work, and questioning of the War imply a degree of androgyny, the novella's ending reinforces this idea. After Miranda has survived only to find that Adam had died early in her own illness, she hears the celebratory sounds that cancel out the "gong" of the War: the Armistice. Now that there is nothing to live for, Miranda, feeling like "an alien who does not like the country [...] does not understand the language nor wish to learn it," now arms herself with a cologne and lipstick, "a walking stick of silvery wood with a silver knob," and grey "gauntlets," to re-enter life. Her last thought, after allowing herself one last vivid fantasy of Adam, is that she must face "the dead cold light of tomorrow. Now there would be time for everything" (1962:165).

Miranda has faced terrifying delusions in her illness, yet she emerges from her delirium to face life and loss sanely. Further, when near death, she has felt one with others,

perceived as “pure identities,” but not needing to be *named*; this notion of *not* requiring language in order to be one with others touches more on the transcendent than on the delusional. Writing about Woolf, James Naremore has discussed the psychological aspects of Woolf’s attempts to get at “life itself,” an impulse which he says is “increasingly adapted to the blurring of subject object distinctions” (Naremore, 1972:132). The sense of a character’s separateness juxtaposed with a desire to “merge with the world” is identified, as Naremore notes, by R.D. Laing with schizophrenia. Merging with, or being engulfed by the world, may result in “terror.” Laing describes a young man’s fear as debilitating because “he knew of no halfway stage between radical isolation [...] or complete absorption into all there was” (Laing, 1970:91) The terror is of “the loss of identity involved in this merging or fusing of the self” (Laing,1970:91). In Miranda’s heaven and Clarissa’s imagined afterlife there is no identity and no need for one. Both Miranda and Clarissa might be distinguished by the ability of both to hold Laing’s two impulses in balance, even in the face of the loss or imperfection of love. Fighting her way back from death for Adam’s sake, Miranda finds herself alone, but a “salvaged” rather than shattered self.

In the end, female androgyny, achieved in some aspects of Miranda’s and Clarissa’s experience, can enrich the female “branch” of the male-female binary, but its creativity has no power to alter the powerful grip of patriarchal forces of domination. So Sir William will go on enforcing “proportion”; men like Adam will offer themselves in an unreflective response to male destiny; Septimus will throw himself onto the palings. Yet sanity and madness are presented as a continuum, not a polarity, and in Woolf’s and Porter’s use of language, their forcing of its logic, even in language’s failure to represent, a sort of effacing of binaries occurs. Richard fails to tell Clarissa he loves her, but brings flowers, strands of thought and affection bind friends and strangers in London, Miranda finds restoration and transcendence as well as loss in the embrace of death; Clarissa confirms her life even in the moment of admiring Septimus’ act of suicide. Thus in both works, through moments of intensity, whether delusional or not, the unspeakable is expressed, and the inexpressible is spoken.

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**FORM IS CONTENT:**  
**MICHELE ROBERTS' NOVEL *DAUGHTERS OF THE HOUSE***

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The essay challenges the assumption of neo-humanist critics that only realist texts can transmit basic moral values. It argues that experimentation is, above all, ethical, as it is essentially a search for new and more effective ways of presenting universal truths and humanist values. The works of a great number of experimental contemporary writers illustrate the validity of such a view. For example, the British novelist Michele Roberts boldly experiments with form but is also deeply preoccupied with moral issues. She contends that form and content are so tightly interwoven that it is hard to separate them. Therefore, the focus of the present study is on the interdependence between the ethical component and the experimental narrative techniques in such a key novel as Michele Roberts' *Daughters of the House* which was shortlisted for 1992 Booker Prize and won the W.H. Smith Literary Award.

Michele Roberts (born 1949) is often viewed as one of the most original and accomplished contemporary British novelists. Though she is a fervent admirer of Jane Austen as well as of some Victorian women writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Bronte, her fiction can hardly be defined as realist for the focus in it is almost entirely on interior reality, on the subconscious workings of the human mind. In the portrayal of her characters she is above all interested in emotions, reflection, reverie and dreams as well as in the clashing elements within an individual and the fragmented nature of consciousness.

And yet, she is deeply preoccupied with ethical and moral issues. Roberts was raised as a Catholic and accordingly the problems of good and evil, of mortal sin and Catholic guilt are constant concerns for her characters. However, apart from evil in human nature, the novelist also deals with evil in global terms. *Daughters of the House* evokes the horror of the Second World War and the atrocities committed against the Jews. It suggests that the exclusion of the social and racial "other" has led to xenophobia, racism, fascism and the horror of the Holocaust. Like Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*, in *Daughters of the House* Roberts draws parallels between patriarchy and fascism and links the exclusion

of women with the exclusion of the Jews. She thinks that one of the great crimes in our civilisation is what the French feminist critic Luce Irigaray has called “the murder of the mother”. Roberts argues that the repression of the feminine principle in civilisation has been damaging not only politically but also morally and spiritually. Roberts sees the root of all evil in binary thinking as a result of which barriers are set up between different nations, between man and woman, body and soul, civilisation and nature.

Therefore, the highly experimental form of *Daughters of the House* is not an arbitrary, self-conscious game but effectively reflects the state of human consciousness and civilisation. As Roberts argues in an interview, it is the demands of the subject that help you create a form. “There is a quest to find the shape that this particular novel, this particular problem, demands”. (Newman, 2003:5) The structure of *Daughters of the House* is completely unconventional and there is no trace in it of the clearly outlined realist beginning, denouement and ending, because its function is to render the elusiveness of memories and the fragmentation of the self. It is a tripartite structure based on abrupt time-shifts. The first and third sections present the two heroines, Therese and Leonie, as adult women in the present moment. The longer second section is a remembrance of the traumatic events of their adolescence in the postwar period. Furthermore, the novel is characterised by indeterminacy, ambiguity, a lack of omniscience and of an authoritative voice. For instance, it is never clearly stated but only casually implied that Antoinette is rumoured to have been raped by a German Nazi officer and consequently the two girls might be twin sisters rather than cousins. This indeterminacy is not arbitrary but suggests the fluidity of boundaries.

Another characteristic feature of the novel is its deliberate fragmentation and ellipsis. The central part consists of 37 extremely short chapters which invariably have a household item for a heading: The Biscuit Tin, The Ivory Ring, The Baby Book, etc. Like pieces in a mosaic, these chapters offer brief snapshots of the girls’ life. Finally, the various seemingly random episodes produce a detailed, cumulative narrative. The most intriguing thing about the fragmentary structure of the novel, which resembles a spider’s web, is that it is based on the autobiography of Saint Therese, as stated in the Author’s Note. Therefore, the work can be defined as a strange hybrid of fact and fiction. Thus, the list of experimental characteristics that are essential to the novel is long: fragmentation, fluidity, decentring, discontinuity, indeterminacy, hybridity, intertextuality, etc. However, they all have a special function – to question categories and erode boundaries.

A major problem for Roberts in *Daughters of the House* is to overcome the Catholic split between body and soul. The two heroines in the novel appear to represent aspects of a split self. Leonie, who is married and has three daughters, is an embodiment of a materialist as she celebrates the life of the body. She stands for the feminine, maternal principle, the 'semiotic' in Kristeva's terms. Theresa, who denies the body and becomes a nun, is an embodiment of an idealist. She stands for the father, the spirit, language, i.e. the 'symbolic'. As the opposition between the masculine and the feminine principle, between the "symbolic" order and the "semiotic" realm is central to the novel, academic approaches to the novel are often based on French feminist theory and employ Kristevan terminology. It is true that Roberts, being half French, has a great affinity with French feminist thought. For example, she sees childhood and the maternal body in Kristevan terms as paradise. As she says in an interview, what is essential to her fiction is a feeling or a quest which she describes as "religious or mystical": "to get back to some pre-linguistic state of bliss: which is about unity, non-separation [...] You go back into the mythical past, the Golden Age, you get nourishment from some magical stream [...] and then you are born again. You can start your life again" (Newman, 2003:2). Roberts' description of such a blissful state is obviously very close to Julia Kristeva's idea of a "pre-verbal", "pre-Oedipal" state. However, her novels can hardly be seen as "exemplars of critical theory", as in her opinion some scholars view them. As stated earlier, according to Roberts, form is everything to writing but it is created by the demands of the subject. Therefore, what is worthwhile to do is to study the close interrelation between subject and form to establish to what extent Roberts' experimental techniques are prompted by the particular ethical and political issues she is preoccupied with.

Roberts' concern to question boundaries is suggested in the very title of the novel. In the context of the book the word *daughters* is ambiguous as it has multiple meanings. First of all, it becomes clear that the two heroines, Therese and Leonie, are "daughters" of several mothers (biological, adoptive, a wet nurse) and of a father whose identity remains unresolved. Next, they are daughters of the family house as they are both moulded by it and try to possess it. They are further daughters of the village community for which they care a great deal. Besides, they are daughters of the Catholic Church which has exerted a very strong influence on them, particularly on Therese. Last but not least, they are daughters of France as the novel is strongly imbued with patriotic feelings. Furthermore, the word *house* in the title is equally ambivalent. The very first sentences of the novel are

as follows: “It was a changeable house. Sometimes it felt safe as a church, and sometimes it shivered then cracked apart” (1992:4). In fact, the second sentence reveals the two dominant views of the house: its solid solemn position, on the one hand, and its vulnerable state, on the other. These are the views of the respective heroines. For Therese “the house was strict. The rules indicated the forbidden places” (4). However, for Leonie the house, like a human being, has a skin, scars and a memory (44). In other words, the house can stand both for the masculine principle, the symbolic order, and for the feminine principle, the maternal body and the semiotic. Thus, in a succinct way, Roberts sums up the major issues of her novel: the relations of two daughters to the law of the father and to a lost mother as well as the struggle between paternal law and maternal power.

The opening chapter introduces the reader to the dominant concerns of the novel in an equally succinct and powerful way. In it a dead woman, buried in the cellar, “moved under a heap of sand”, clutching “her red handbag, full of shreds of dead flesh” (4). At first sight, such an opening might appear truly eerie and morbid and one might conclude that the author’s design is simply to shock and baffle the reader, which is a typical strategy of thrillers. However, when later it dawns on the reader that it all amounts to a nightmare one of the heroines perpetually has, the shocking opening no longer seems arbitrary but perfectly relevant to the major preoccupations of the novel. As stated earlier, Roberts’ main concern is “the murder of the mother”, the repression of the feminine principle in Western civilisation. Significantly, Antoinette, the mother figure in the house, is buried in the cellar of civilisation, the realm of the unconscious and repression. She is adequately associated with red colours (“red handbags”, “red petticoats”) as red stands for passion, sexuality, femininity but also suggests murder, violence and rape which were perpetrated against her. In a later nightmare, Leonie sees Antoinette at a port, dragging a large suitcase, “red and dangerous”, with a bomb inside it, “timed to explode and tear them all to shreds” (1992:52). The implication undoubtedly is that Antoinette’s femininity, sexuality and disobedience to the symbolic law are dangerous, as they threaten the *status quo*. Accordingly, the feminine spirit is repressed, even murdered and buried in the cellar. The main project of Roberts’ novel is, as she says, “to breathe life into this corpse”, i.e. to resurrect the dead feminine principle. Therefore, the opening chapter is a suggestive and powerful starting point of the novel.

As the dominant theme is the struggle between maternal power and paternal law, respectively embodied by the two heroines, the novel is bound to be characterised by

duality. From the very beginning the two cousins/sisters are presented as radically opposed to each other. Therese is French whereas Leonie is half French and half English and is consistently presented as “a heathen”, the “other” (47). In their childhood Therese is often described as holy, “darling little Therese”, “everybody’s pet”, while Leonie is seen as unruly and disobedient, “a sinner” by nature (23). Further, Therese is fastidious and declares: “Eating sensibly is crucial for health [...] a well-balanced diet and not too much of anything that’s my motto” (15) whereas Leonie admits that “food matters too much” to her and she is “too greedy” (15). The opposition between the two is further emphasised by colour symbolism: “Therese liked white. She liked the words that described it: spotless, pure, immaculate” (55). However, for Leonie “everything she hated was white [...]. The room was as coldly white as death” (55).

The difference between the two stands out most clearly by the choices they make in life. By becoming a nun Therese denies the body in order to advance the spirit. Leonie, who has more worldly visions, marries a local man and has three children, celebrating the life of the body thereby. It is important to point out how the differences between the two are worked out on a narrative level. The use of household items in the headings of the chapters is not arbitrary. As Roberts has noted: “The story of a woman obsessed with material possessions had to be told as the inventory of the contents of the house; the story of the cousin she quarrelled with had to be a saint’s autobiography that could quarrel with the version contained in the inventory” (Roe, 1994:172). Therefore, two different types of discourse alternate in the novel: the discourse of domesticity and the discourse of sanctity. Roberts says she found such alternations fascinating: “I preferred to invent new forms of the novel in which you might have several voices telling a story because they make a quarrel.” (Newman, 2003:5) These narrative voices are so radically different that they really “quarrel” and make the novel a dual text. Here are some examples:

Leonie lay back, tried to reassert control over her world [...] She listed her numerous possessions one by one. She caressed her well-tended furniture. She chanted her triumphs of domestic organisation, she recited her litany of solid objects [...] She counted and inspected the contents of larders, china, cabinets, cupboards. She raised her hand and set it all going [...] It was hers. It was her house. Her kingdom, firmly in her control. Peopled with daughters who looked like their mother and loved her comfortably and did as they were told (1992:168).

The text above clashes strongly with the discourse of sanctity:

The love of human beings, Therese knew from the lives of the saints, was unreliable and let you down. Only God [...] was an inexhaustible source of love. He never failed you [...] He never went away. He simply waited for sinners to return to him. And sometimes [...] he came in person and snatched them in his everlasting arms (1992:133).

The contrast between these two discourses is so stark that reconciliation between the two characters appears almost inconceivable. These discourses usually alternate in separate chapters where the events described filter through the consciousness of the respective heroine. Sometimes, however, they alternate within the frames of a single chapter and then the polarity between the two characters stands out most clearly. For example, in the chapter entitled “The Frying Pan” two completely different responses to adult conversations are registered: while Therese piously “said prayers under her breath. For the souls of the dying and the dead” (77), Leonie’s response is a rebellious one. “She swore to herself that when she grew up [...] she would eat fast if she felt like it [...] She would talk loudly and at length” [71]. Thereby, through a subtle alternation of two different voices Roberts effectively delineates the distinction between the two characters. A similar alternation of two narratives is employed by Jeanette Winterson in her novel *The Passion* (1989), where she juxtaposes a male and a female character, who stand in an ego/anima relationship.

The contrast between the two heroines is further emphasised by the opposing visions they have of the Virgin Mary. Leonie sees a dark-skinned woman dressed in red, a pagan goddess, a symbol of fertility and sexuality. In this episode Roberts employs the technique of *l’écriture féminine* which, with its rhythmical fluidity, evokes the pre-Oedipal semiotic stage of fusion with the mother. All the elements, characteristic of the semiotic experience, are suggested in the episode – above all, Leonie’s sensation of pleasure, *jouissance* and plenitude (“the deepest pleasure she had ever known possessed her”, “aching”, “sweet” (86)). Next, linear time is suspended (“Time stilled, and suspended itself” (86)). The images of fluidity, suggesting fusion and transcendence of boundaries, are abundant in the passage: “the underground stream that forced through her like a river”, “the pulling jet of a fountain”, “the fine spray”. What is restored to her is the “secret language” “she once knew but had forgotten about” (86). This is obviously a reference to Kristeva’s semiotic term “the blissful babble”. When later Leonie tries to describe the

experience to the servant, she was unable to do it, as “she struggled with inadequate words” (86). The implication undoubtedly is that the language of the symbolic order is inadequate to express a semiotic experience.

Unlike Leonie, Therese sees a conventional Virgin figure that conforms to the religious tradition and she describes her in a conventional way, using the language of the symbolic.

Therese recited happily. She had a long blue dress. Her hair, which was long and fair, was almost entirely covered by her white veil. Her hands were clasped, and she carried a crystal rosary over one arm. Her feet were bare, and there was a golden rose resting on the toes of each one. (1992:95)

The spontaneous response of Therese’s aunt to the description of her vision is: “just like the statue at the side of your bed. You made it up, didn’t you?” (95). The remark implies that at the very beginning Therese’s vision is viewed as a fabrication. Thereby, through the juxtaposition of two stylistically different descriptions, Roberts implicitly suggests the idea that Leonie is the real visionary and Therese is a fraud.

Though the contrast between the two women is clearly emphasised, the novel also draws attention to what they have in common. At times they are even seen as identical, as real twins, the two sides of a coin: “Therese thought: in the darkness we’re equal [...] It doesn’t matter any more, our difference [...] Sisters together under the skin, made identical” (1992:21). Their inherent sameness is repeatedly suggested by visual images: e.g. the photograph where “the children’s faces were a smiling blur. You couldn’t properly tell which was which” (29). The visual image that most powerfully suggests identification is the mirror:

The mirror opposite [Leonie] flickered a warning. Which of us is which? [...] Yes, she existed, the mirror told her over those years [...] Now that other one was turning up, to disrupt her steady gaze [...] If she smashed her fist into Therese’s face, would she hear the crack and splinter of glass? (1992:4)

These visual images suggest, above all, that the heroines are physically alike. However, what they further have in common is their childhood experience when Rose fed

them both. Roberts again resorts to *l'écriture féminine* to evoke a picture of semiotic bliss in their early infancy which Leonie vaguely remembers:

[S]he seized the world and leapt into it [...] her two hands grasping, her mouth demanding and receiving the lively flow [...] Rose sat easily, a baby on each arm. She looked from Leonie to Therese and smiled. Of course I fed you both, silly. I had plenty of milk, didn't I [...] Rose in her chair [...] a lapful of babies, a shout of joy, the smell of milk (1992:169).

Again, the key words in this semiotic fusion with the mother are *plenty, joy, the smell of milk*. Significantly, Therese, who is accustomed to the symbolic language and is mainly concerned with words like *soul, God, sin, miracle, prayer*, also remembers “her second mother”, Rose, the wet nurse. She has a similar semiotic experience of non-separation, unity, love, bliss and plenitude: “Bliss. Feeding and being fed. Love was this milky fullness, Therese born a second time, into a land of plenty [...] Rose was the world” (33). Another important experience the two babies have in common is that Rose “baptises” them both in the holy spring near the shrine. She dips their feet in its magical waters because she wants them to live, not die like her child. Thus, life begins in the same way for the two girls or, as the critic King puts it in Kristeva’s terminology, the two “subjects in process” have the same starting point in life (King, 2000:72). Later on, they both experience a double loss as they feel abandoned by their biological mother as well as by their “second mother”.

And yet the most important similarity between the two is that both undergo a process of repression. This process takes them in different directions though the roles they both adopt are validated by the symbolic order. Leonie displaces her sense of loss and abandonment onto the role of a mother and wife and rejects all other roles. It is a role constructed for women in the symbolic order which often involves suppression of the self. For her the house is a substitute onto which she displaces her true claims. As for Therese, she displaces her sense of loss and bereavement onto the ideal of the Virgin Mary which is also sanctioned by patriarchal society. She wants to replace her lost mother with the Virgin Mary who she thinks will never let her down:

She'd found herself another mother, she'd been sold one ready-made by the priests of her Church. Perfect, that Mother of God, the pure Virgin, a holy doll who never felt angry or sexy and never went away. (1992:165)



It should be noted that both heroines are acutely aware they have repressed a vital part of themselves. As Hanson points out, in their attempts to overcome the split within and attain wholeness they perform a series of symbolic acts (Hanson, 2000:249). Therese has a dream in which together with her sisters from the convent she stitches her mother's corpse back together, makes it whole again, preparing it for a proper burial. By this ritual she appears to get reconciled with the mother's body that she has rejected. The dream is usually seen as a symbol of regeneration, as Therese comes to terms with femininity and no longer associates it only with death and decay. Her next move is to go down to the cellar, which stands for the unconscious and the repressed maternal principle. What she finds in the hidden part of the house is the broken statue of the ancient saint, which her mother buried there to save it from destruction and keep it whole for the village community. This goddess with "a dark gold face" merges with Leonie's red gold vision. The broken statue undoubtedly stands for the repressed maternal principle which Therese rediscovers. Next, she goes to the church where she rejects the image of the Virgin sold to her "ready-made" by priests. She becomes painfully aware that the convent "was the only place where [she] could preserve that image intact. Away from there it melted in the heat of her hands" (1992:165-66). Therese realizes that by accepting the Church's view of woman as virginal and spiritual she has betrayed her mother as well as her own femininity. Finally she sets fire to the church and is reunited with the maternal principle: "Then, at last, [...] she saw her for the first time, that red and gold lady [...] she held out her hands to her daughter, to pull her in, to teach her the steps of the dance" (166).

Just as Therese is drawn to the cellar, Leonie is drawn to another secret and forbidden place in the house, the *back* (not the front) room. What appears to have been hidden there is a memory she has had at the back of her mind all her adult life. Now she is determined to rediscover words and names that she has persistently repressed: the names of the Jews who were massacred in the war and the identity of their informer (the present priest). The last sentence of the novel reads: "She stepped forward, into the darkness, to find words" (172).

The ending of the novel is usually interpreted in positive terms: finally the heroines learn to accept "otherness" and overcome the split. Theresa comes to recognize the importance of the mother and the body and Leonie comes to recognize the importance of the father, the spirit and language. The novel ends by balancing the feminine and

masculine principle or the semiotic and the symbolic. It could be the right reading of the novel for Roberts firmly believes that the masculine and feminine principle can co-exist creatively and even be integrated in a new plural subjectivity. She claims her ultimate purpose as an artist is to heal the split. She says: “That is my myth: the quest for wholeness” (Radford, 1986:222). It is relevant to point out here that her preoccupation with fragmentation and wholeness can be accounted for by the fact that she is not only half French and half English but also a twin.

However, the obvious inconclusiveness of the novel suggests another reading too. The last the reader hears of Therese after she sets fire to the church and runs down the aisle is, “She cried Maman, and flung herself at the church door” (Roberts, 1992:186). The sentence is deliberately vague and ambiguous and some readers/critics interpret it as a suggestion of an escape and a promise for a new beginning in Therese’s life (Parker, 2000:174), while others definitely view it as an implication of death (Hanson, 2000:240). As for Leonie, we hear of her determination to confess to her silence about the identity of the informer but not of the actual act. The ambiguity of the ending is obviously intentional. Its inconclusiveness implies that though the heroines desperately seek wholeness it is hard to attain. For they live in a society where the split between body and spirit is persistent, where women are identified either by their bodily function as mothers or by the repression of the body and a life of spirituality. In such terms, the conflict between the two sisters appears irreconcilable and wholeness impossible. In my opinion, the possibility of completeness, of a new beginning is suggested but what is more powerful is the idea of the impossibility of wholeness. The more plausible ending of the novel is that Therese can be reunited with the maternal principle only in death.

To come back to the issues of form and content, the novel undoubtedly shares some characteristics with realism. And yet, as Roberts says, she often distrusts old forms and breaks them, wanting to make new ones. Her strategy is that of postmodernists who subvert the very concepts they challenge. Thus, on the one hand, her novel is *not* plotless and, following the realist tradition, it tells a highly intriguing story, for Roberts firmly believes storytelling is essential to fiction. However, what is important is how a story is told. The narrative in *Daughters of the House* is not a monologic, hegemonic discourse, because the realist omniscient narrator is almost non-existent in it. Roberts employs the technique of the limited, subjective point of view and the narrative is mainly a dialogue between two radically different characters, two voices at a different pitch which often

quarrel. As said earlier, it is an alternation or juxtaposition of two distinctly different discourses – the discourse of domesticity and the discourse of sanctity. The dialogical aspect of the novel imposes a structure which is not forward moving, linear and metonymic, based on a principle of contiguity. Instead, it is circular, metaphoric, based on a principle of dis/similarity. What is more, it is fragmentary, elliptical, disrupted by frequent time-shifts in order to reveal the fragmentation of the self and the haziness of memories. And yet, in a realist manner the outside world in it is quite palpable and identifiable because of the rich, sensuous, descriptive use of language and the abundance of circumstantial detail. However, outside events are not presented objectively, from an omniscient point of view, as in a realist novel, but only by the fleeting impressions they make upon the characters, and even through the subconscious workings of the human mind.

Furthermore, *Daughters of the House* has affinities with realist fiction because of its obvious interest in history, in such issues as the destructive effect of the Second World War on human life, the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis, etc. However, it does not involve the objective, panoramic, method typical of realism. Instead, public history is powerfully recreated by purely personal and fragmented memories, sensations, dreams and nightmares. In this way, public and private histories become tightly interwoven, as a result of which the distinction between history and fiction is blurred. Besides, the author's note poses an interesting problem concerning history. In it Roberts says that a major source of inspiration for her novel was the autobiography of a historical figure, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. To a large extent, the fictional Therese follows her historical model but most of the biographical details have been transformed by Roberts, as her novel is an imaginative re-reading of Therese's biography. Thus, the playful re-appropriation of historical evidence further undermines the boundaries between fact and fiction and points to the subjective quality of all historical narratives. The effect of playfulness in Roberts' approach to history is further heightened by the fact that the story about history is told by two little girls. As the author says, "the idea of a historian being a small girl is not one our culture believes in" (Newman, 2003:5).

Last but not least, the novel deals with ethical issues which is definitely a hallmark of realism. Roberts subtly discusses such significant humanist issues as the impact of war, the repression of the feminine principle in modern civilisation, the encounter with the other, the quest for wholeness, etc. However, she never ceases to search for innovative

forms through which she can convey these ethical issues most powerfully. Hence, the moral sense in the novel is not foregrounded and explicated in a didactic way, but conveyed by a subtle use of imagery, symbols and diverse narrative techniques. What is more, Roberts' fiction is impressively economical and terse, as she relies on understatement. In other words, the claim that there is no ethical message in experimental fiction is a perfect example of binary thinking, as Roberts might suggest. For an ethical component and experiment are not mutually exclusive binary oppositions that cannot be reconciled but are closely interwoven. Let me conclude by quoting Roberts on this point: "Form is content, form shapes content and it is shaped by it" (British Council Seminar).

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**CHRISTINE DE PIZAN AND *THE QUERELLE DE FEMMES***

**REGHINA DASCĂL**

This essay is centred on the crucial role played by Christine de Pizan in initiating a four-century-long polemical tradition better known as *la querelle de femmes*. It is my intention to open up for the reader the context of this extraordinary author's emergence onto the literary scene as well as the socio-political and cultural circumstances of her joining this polemical, agonistic tradition. I shall do this by providing a brief survey of her predecessors and of the principal 'feminist' ideas that had already been circulating in various circles, societies and milieus.

The main focus of this study is Christine's confrontation, on her own terms, of the misogynist tradition in literature. This can be seen above all in the exchange of letters between her and the greatest humanist intellectuals in the Parisian society of her day, a correspondence which has come down to us as *la querelle de la rose* (the Debate on the *Romance of the Rose*). Christine herself started and publicised this first significant literary fray in European literature and thus opened up to the general public, for the first time, questions relating to the defamation of women and to consequent authorial responsibility.

*La querelle des femmes* as a literary convention had existed before Christine's time, but with only men on both sides of the argument. Christine entered the field at a most inauspicious moment in history but with an extraordinary vehemence and stamina that were to irreversibly affect the substance and terms of the debate.

It is my contention that the late Middle Ages and the dawn of the Renaissance can be considered a period of misogynist backlash against earlier gains by women in various domains such as power, autonomy, authority and even equality with men.

After a masculine age that was often forced to acknowledge the power of women, in the Renaissance we witness a weakening of women's power of reshaping, challenging and questioning masculine canons. In her seminal essay *Did Women Have a Renaissance?*, Joan Kelly answers without hesitation: there was no renaissance for women, at least not during the Renaissance. It is interesting to note that events that further the historical development of men, freeing them from natural, social or ideological constraints, have quite different and even opposite effects upon women (Kelly, 1984:19). Kelly's arguments are based on such criteria as: the regulation of feminine sexuality as compared to masculine sexuality; women's economic and political roles, the kind of work they performed as compared with men, access to property, training, cultural roles in shaping the

outlook of their society, access to education and institutions that would make this possible; ideology about women, the sex-role system displayed or advocated in the symbolic products of the given society (20). With regard to female sexuality, for example, despite some notable exceptions (Boccaccio and Ariosto) the dominant discourse of the time established chastity as the female norm and restructured the relation of the sexes into one of female dependency and male domination.

As Marina Warner remarks in her *Alone of all her Sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, in those 14<sup>th</sup> century handbooks for women that enjoyed the widest circulation obedience to one's menfolk and long-suffering compliance with their every wish are enjoined as religious duties. In *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*, written around 1372 by a father for his daughters, the chevalier quotes approvingly the monstrous unpleasantness of the story of the patient Griselda and describes as exemplary the conduct of the wife who, ordered by her husband "Sal sur la table", leapt onto the table, when he was merely asking her to pass the salt (1983:184).

In *Le Menagier de Paris*, written in 1393, a rich old husband teaches his child bride her daily tasks. *Le Menagier* is made up of three books with topics ranging from how to treat servants to how to effectively eradicate fleas from the home and clothes, through recipes, to Christian morality, and, when focusing on the capital value of female chastity, the author invokes two sources of wide circulation at the time: the Rape of Lucrece and *Le Roman de la Rose* (McWebb, 2007:33). The book is both a treasure store of information about the late Middle Ages and a treatise on moral and domestic economy, but at the same time it is riddled with gender stereotypes: the woman is an evil creature; she is the vehicle that enabled the introduction of sin into the world with all its accompanying existential and social disorder. He therefore recommends that she show her husband animal-like devotion. The treatise gives ample illustration of the strictness of the social code of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century with regard to the role of women, which was seen as twofold: "the salvation of your soul and the comfort of your husband" (Warner, 1983:185). At the same time as the *Menagier* was being written, the intelligent and rebarbative Christine de Pizan was composing a treatise on women's education, the *Book of the Three Virtues* (or *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*), whose substance and message run counter to the male authors' didactic writings for women, the very books which she exposes and constantly attacks as the main vehicle for misogynist assertions: the weaker sex must not be exposed to reality or to the outside world, female education was therefore dangerous and men and

women could not read the same books (Sir John Paston was advised not to let his wife read Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (*Technique of Love*), and in the third part of Christine's *Vision* we read: "once a man criticized my desire for knowledge by saying that it was not fitting for a woman to possess learning because there was so little of it; I replied that it was even less fitting for a man to possess ignorance because there was so much of it" (*Selected Writings*, 1997:193)). As late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Mary Ward (founder of The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary) opened schools for girls in England she incurred the anger of the Pope for her horrifying independence and 'unwomanly' enterprise.

Although they were the vehicle for new and progressive ideas, the Renaissance writings on education, domestic life and society map out an inferior domestic realm as opposed to a superior public realm and place severe restrictions on women's attempts to gain even a modest degree of autonomy. As Joan Kelly remarks, the Renaissance was a revival of the concepts and practices of classical Athens, where the domestic imprisonment of citizen wives was the norm (1984:21-22).

Neither is the affective experience of the Renaissance noblewoman comparable to that of a man or of her medieval predecessor. Medieval literature and the medieval imagination in general gave woman an unprecedented degree of emotional latitude. Medieval courtly love extended vassalage to the love relationship. Because of this metaphorical treatment of love, freedom and the ideas of homage and mutuality entered the concept of love, establishing a relation of parity between the lovers, as Marie de Ventadour, a female troubadour or *trobairitz*, was to point out: "A lady must honour her lover as a friend and not as a master" (Valency, 1961:64).

Women participated in the creation of courtly literature and their voice was sonorous and distinct. There were more than twenty Provençal *trobairitz*, of whom the most famous is Countess (Beatrice?) of Die who in her poetry states with boldness and self-confidence her love for a fellow troubadour, although she was a married noblewoman: "Handsome friend, charming and kind,/ when shall I have you in my power? / If only I could lie beside you for an hour and embrace you lovingly /- Know this, I would give almost anything to see you in my husband's place,/ but only under the condition that you swear to do my bidding" (quoted in Kelly, 1984:29). Whilst at times the *trobairitz* take over the rhetoric of the troubadours, the most individual expressions are those of a woman who voices her desires candidly, who chooses her man, "who in the game of love is as much a hunter as she is a prey" (Dronke, 1988:99). Women supported and/or participated



in the recitation and singing of poems and romances and acted out mock trials, usually presided over by queens, that settled questions of love (Kelly, 1984:29).

Marie de France, a shining example of the medieval woman writer, was a member of the most illustrious love court of all – that of Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Courtly love, which flourished outside the institution of patriarchal marriage, was both sacramental and sexual and defied the almost universal demand of patriarchal society for female chastity. Religious feelings of passion and ecstasy (which were gaining increasing spiritual meaning in Christian Europe) and feudal values both fed into a conception of passionate love that because of its mutuality required men and women to partake equally of passion and of adulterous sexual love. This led to the creation of an elite that set itself apart from conventions of chastity and marriage. Duby speaks about courtly love in terms of ‘fantasy’, of ‘fiction’, although he acknowledges the opportunities it created for women to exert authority and power. What he nevertheless emphasises is the restricted sphere of that power, confined as it was within the realm of fantasy and play, a game designed by men (who also invented its rules).

It was meant to inculcate, in the main, a morality based on the virtues of self-restraint and friendship - the lovers were encouraged to display continence and self-control, while brutal physical violence and abduction were outlawed. It implied a feminization, a refinement of the courtship ritual, making place for a decent way of conquering women of good society (Duby, 1992: 250-266). It was also a showcase for virility (262), conceived to please unmarried knights, since the pivotal element of feudalism - property - required that wealth not be fragmented through marital alliances, with the result that only the eldest son was encouraged to marry. In this context it is easier to understand why the husband showed relative tolerance of his wife’s amorous diversions, if discreetly pursued, as Emily James Putnam remarks in her study of medieval ladies: “It would perhaps be paradoxical to say that a baron would prefer to be sure that his tenure was secure than that his son was legitimate, but it is certain that the relative value of the two things has shifted” (1970:118). This apparent lack of concern about legitimacy can be better understood if we take into account the socio-political underpinnings of the *amour courtois*: the courtly idea that love only thrives in adultery in fact buttressed and reinforced the stability of arranged marriages, as well as the political role of women and the indivisibility of the fief, so that in fact there was no contradiction involved in a Christian society promoting the ideal of courtly love.

Therefore, significant as it was and for all its substantial contribution to the overall revalorization of womanhood in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, courtly love was a cultural ideal that did not really subvert the male-dominated social order, nor did it threaten Christian feelings any more than chivalry had done. As Joan Kelly demonstrates in her essay, courtly love did indeed celebrate sexual love, yet it enriched and deepened it by means of the Christian notion of passion (1984:26). Like many ideologies that tolerate sexual parity, courtly love did nothing to undermine the institutions of the patriarchal society, and of course men, the rulers within the ruling order, stood to benefit from it. While the double standard so typical of patriarchal order certainly benefits men, whilst it rendered women pawns of political and/or economic interests, it certainly gave women lovers peers rather than masters. It also gave them agency in the way they conducted love relations and offered them a justifying ideology for adultery, with the result that women in this period experimented with various avenues of power and assumed cultural agency and political subjecthood, actively shaping ideas and values that corresponded so well with their particular interests.

Feudalism associated power with property and permitted both inheritance and administration of this by women; hence, matronymics were quite common in medieval society. Women could hold both vast groupings of counties and ordinary fiefs, while in the religious realm abbesses exercised spiritual as well as temporal jurisdiction. In the tenth and eleventh centuries an ever-growing number of women appear in feudal decrees as chatelaines or mistresses of landed property and castles with attached rights of justice and military command. Moreover, powerful women on a par with powerful men were the *de facto* patrons of churches and thus women were acknowledged participants in ecclesiastical as well as secular assemblies (cf. Stuard, 1998:129-150). As early as the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries the Ottonian dynasty, as heir to the Carolingian tradition, was idealising its queens, Edith, Mathilde and Adelaide, who were portrayed both as model wives and as saintly women. Even a bare list of the great female figures of power and intellectual authority in the High Middle Ages would occupy a considerable amount of space, but Eleanor of Aquitaine and her grand-daughter Blanche of Castile, Hrotsvitha, Hildegard of Bingen, Herrad of Landsberg, Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Genoa; Heloise and Marguerite of Porete are surely sufficient to prove how, against seemingly impossible odds, the spirit of such women could not be crushed. Such testimonies endure across the centuries as a marvel and an inspiration.

The exercise of political power by women during the Renaissance was far more rare, as may be clearly illustrated from Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier*. In this handbook for the nobility Castiglione stresses that on the one hand the lady appears as the equivalent of the courtier in education and virtues (almost equivalent, since her education covers knowledge of letters, of music, of painting *and how to dance and how to be festive*). Whilst culture is an accomplishment for both sexes and is used as much to charm others as to assert the self, charm is the primary occupation and aim of a woman. She is urged to be pleasingly affable and to graciously entertain every kind of man (1967:207). Unbecoming physical activities such as riding and the use of weapons should be given up. Elisabetta Gonzaga, the idealized duchess of Castiglione's *Courtier*, came close in real life to his normative portrayal of her type. Removed from any direct exercise of power, Elisabetta disregarded the pursuits and pleasures associated with it. She was docile and submissive, as she was trained to be; any adversity was met with fortitude but never opposed. She complied with rather than challenged or shaped the conventions of her society and court. Elisabetta was educated to become the wife of a prince, not a prince. In this capacity she would also draw artists and people of talent to her court and would be their patron, yet the court was her husband's and they celebrated *his* status and values. At his idealized court of Urbino there are only four women among the fifteen people carefully listed as taking part in the evening conversations that were the court's second most important occupation (the first being the profession of arms, from which women were in any case excluded). In fact only two women speak, and then not initiating any exchange but rather moderating or directing discussion by proposing games and questions. The other two dance. The former two do not make any significant contribution to discussions: "When signor Gasparo had spoken thus, signora Emilia made a sign to madam Constanza Fregosa, as she sat next in order, that she should speak; and she was making ready to do so, when suddenly the Duchess said: 'Since signora Emilia does not choose to go to the trouble of devising a game, it would be quite right for the other ladies to share in this ease, and thus be exempt from such a burden this evening, especially since there are so many men here that we risk no lack of games.'" (1967:37-38).

In the third book of the *Courtier* Cesare Gonzaga makes it clear that women are important as ornaments of the court; any court, no matter how majestic, would be lacklustre without women and downright dull. Chastity, discretion, submissiveness and prudence are recommended, with no attempt to imitate or "take up the harsh and strenuous

manly enterprises” (212); at the same time the whole gamut of illustrious examples of female power, bravery and wisdom is met with scepticism by Cesare and Gasparo and openly challenged by the other participants in the verbal games, their comments reminding us of Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale* (e.g. the impossibility of finding in the present any avatars of the saintly Griselda): “indeed, it is seldom that women of the present day would live up to such glorious deeds” (253). Yet, if beauty is hailed as women’s greatest asset, in the final fourth book where true beauty is defined by *messer* Pietro according to Plato and his Renaissance disciples: love is nothing but the desire to enjoy beauty, which is not of the body or of the senses. Only flight from the prison of the soul - which is embodiment - could lift it to the heights of beauty.

The finale is an apotheosis of love as universal contemplation of divine beauty, truth and goodness, with a Christian twist that shows Castiglione’s debt to the Neo-Platonism of his time: “And be steadfast in the belief that the body, wherein that beauty shines, is not the fountain from whence beauty stems, but rather because beauty is bodiless, and as we have said, a heavenly shining beam, she loses much of her honour when she is spliced with that base subject and full of corruption, because the less she is a partner of the body, the more perfect she is; and when completely severed from it, is most perfect. And as we cannot hear with our mouth, nor smell with our ears, in like manner we cannot enjoy beauty, nor satisfy the desire that she stirs up in our minds, by the touch, but with the sense that makes beauty its very target: namely, the virtue of seeing” (1967:337; *all translations from Castiglione are mine*).

Although humanism is generally thought to have benefited male as well as female descendants of the noble class, although it is thought to represent an advance for women, both men and women were under male cultural authority. Only men could act as professional teachers. So, overall the Renaissance spelled a decline in the lady’s influence over courtly society (Kelly, 1984:35). The great medieval ladies, unschooled as they were themselves, saw to the tutoring of medieval aristocratic daughters. Furthermore, humanism no longer promoted romance and chivalry but rather classical culture, with all its patriarchal and misogynous bias. In the developing of this new noble code women played a secondary role. Medieval courtesy as illustrated in etiquette books, romances and rules of love shaped the man primarily to please the lady. But this trend was reversed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and particularly in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when patriarchal rules for women entered French and Italian etiquette books, so that in the Renaissance this dramatic shift in courtly manners

and love becomes clearly evident. The relation of the sexes now assumed its modern form and nowhere is this more visible than in love relations (Kelly, 1984:36).

Courtly love that included sexual consummation, and a relationship between peers was modified in the direction of asexuality. This becomes immediately understandable if one takes even a cursory look at Dante's and Petrarch's poetry.

In Dante's *Vita Nuova*, written in the *dolce stil nuovo* of late 13<sup>th</sup> century Tuscany, love still appears as a vassal's homage to a lady who is someone else's wife.

Yet the desire of the lover is frustrated and thwarted and transferred ultimately to the realm of spiritual quest and to a deepening of the poet's sense of his inner life as he analyses the spiritual effects of unrequited love, so that instead of the mutuality and interaction of the lovers we here come upon a melancholy form of narcissism. The beloved becomes a mediator, a kind of Diotima or Beatrice guiding the poet or the philosopher to transcendental goodness, beauty and truth and playing a symbolic or even allegorical role (reinforcing the Platonic definition of love as the desire to enjoy beauty) "This too I pray of thee, Queen, who canst what thou wilt, that thou keep his affections pure after so great a vision. Let thy guardianship control his human impulse". (*Paradise*, 33: 33-7)

Petrarch's *Canzoniere* brings even more compelling evidence of the shift we have mentioned. Although his Laura is often paired with Dante's Beatrice, Petrarch's deepening faith and his increased reading of Christian philosophers, particularly Augustine, inspired him to retract his claims that the love of a fellow creature could raise the mind from the mundane to the sublime (Warner, 1983:172). After a lifetime spent in bondage to Laura and a sonnet cycle chronicling the finest movements of his psyche, Petrarch sinks to his knees before the mother of God and begs forgiveness for his weakness. This palinode lashes out at the heresy of the troubadours – the innocence and nobility of carnal love – the Virgin's name being invoked in the battle: "Mortal beauty, acts and words have encumbered all my soul / Holy and gentle virgin, do not delay,/ for perhaps I've reached the last of my years/ And if I used to love with such a wonderful faith/ a little mortal dust, what should I feel for thee, sweet thing? (*Oxford Book of Italian Verse*, 1952:112-113).

With cultural and political power held almost entirely by men, the norm of female chastity came to express the concerns of Renaissance noblemen as they moved into a new situation as a hereditary, dependent class (Kelly, 1984:42). A new division between personal and public life becomes evident as the state came to organize Renaissance society, and along with it the modern relation of the sexes also made its appearance. Renaissance ideas on

love and manners, more classical than medieval and almost exclusively a male product, expressed this new subordination of women to the interests of husbands and male-dominated kin groups and served to justify the removal of women from an unladylike position of power and erotic independence.

The whole extraordinary progress of Renaissance humanistic culture, of the newly-formed states, of the proto-capitalist economy worked to mould the noblewoman into an aesthetic object: decorous, chaste and doubly dependent – on her husband as well as on the prince. While men of the Renaissance were defined by what they accomplished, women were defined by their sexual status, their value coming from their reputation for chaste behaviour rather than from any other accomplishment; avenues for power were male-defined, leaving most women powerless, especially those at the bottom of the social structure (Levin, 1998:168-169).

It was, nevertheless, during the Renaissance that broad-minded men - fathers, brothers, husbands - pioneered efforts to extend humanist training to women. Thomas More established a school at his house not only for his son but also for his three daughters and other dependents, the star being his eldest daughter Margaret who developed in time into an excellent classical scholar - Margaret More Roper. More was extremely proud of his daughter, yet warned her that he and her husband William were a large enough audience for her erudition, even though More himself showed her work to others. Rachel Speght was most probably educated by her schoolteacher father, Mary Astell by her clergyman uncle; Batshua Makin and Judith Drake were the sisters of Oxbridge fellows and shared in their learning. Christine herself, as we know, had been encouraged to study both by her father and then later by her husband. Sofonisba Anguissola, the great woman painter of the Renaissance, was educated by her father Amilcare Anguissola, a broad-minded humanist. At the same time, sharing in private the outlook and learning of their humanist relations and teachers had a dramatic effect on these women. They discovered that the seemingly universal ideal of *humanitas*, the new learning which fostered the concepts of educating and cultivating the human in man, was not meant for 'man' male and female, any more than the occupations of the *litterati* had been. No sooner had a humanistic outlook started to form among the upper reaches of lay society and among its authors and teachers than a fateful dialectic began between its female and male proponents. Imbued with ideas of civic virtue and a liberal republican ethos, humanism was far narrower in its views of women than was traditional Christian culture (Kelly, 1984:70). Despite being

misogynist in many ways, the religious conception of women regarded them as equally capable of the highest states man could attain: salvation and sainthood. Classical republican thought, rooted in a society that adhered to a nascent double sphere ideology, cast doubt upon the sense of a single human destiny. When Boccaccio commemorates illustrious women in his *De claris mulieribus* (1355-1359) he remarks: “What can we think except that it was an error of nature to give female sex to a body which had been endowed by God with a magnificent virile spirit?” Only as exceptional exemplars, as viragos, could they aspire to the ideal status of Renaissance man.

Whilst on the one hand it is true that Renaissance women lost considerable economic, political and cultural power as compared to the men of their class and to their feudal predecessors, on the other hand an important group of educated women engaged with the cultural structures of their time in an attempt to both broaden and revise them.

Christine de Pizan has been identified as the first person to hold modern feminist views. In an earlier paper I have tried to give reasons for people’s caution in calling her a feminist and to insist that her pro-woman position and the germs of feminist consciousness to be found in her writings enable us to call her a feminist. Joan Kelly describes her as “the first of the early feminist theorists who resisted the cultural and social colonization of women by men” (1984:28).

In recent decades feminist research has contributed immensely to demonstrating the coherence, richness and continuity of the four-hundred-year long feminist tradition that we now call proto-feminism or early feminism, a tradition of women thinking about women and sexual politics in European society. Feminist theorizing emerged in the 15<sup>th</sup> century along with the development of a secular culture based on classical antiquity and is related to the birth of the modern European state and bourgeois society. The voice of literate, highly educated women was finally heard speaking up on behalf of unjustly maligned and disparaged womanhood. It was now empowered to speak in women’s defence. Christine de Pizan was the first such feminist thinker, and the four-hundred-year-long debate on women that she started, known as the *querelle des femmes*, became the vehicle through which most early feminist thought evolved. The *querelle* possesses a number of characteristic traits: the participants are almost always polemical, they are women responding to attacks on them, they argue against the many social and cultural constraints on women, and they focus in their argumentation on what we call today ‘gender’, that is, an awareness of the fact that the sexes are culturally and socially much more than biologically determined.

Their immediate aim was to oppose the mistreatment of women. Their main concern was for women to become aware and thus gain the knowledge and the confidence to reject misogynist claims.

The struggle of the *querelle* was carried out principally by the members of a distinctively modern, literate class that served the upper echelons of a hierarchical society, or less often by women who actually belonged to these higher ranks. They were the forebears of what Virginia Woolf called 'the daughters of educated men', daughters in rebellion against the fathers who schooled some of them for a society that denied entry to all women. Some of them, such as Jane Anger, Aemilia Bassano Lanyer and Margaret Fox, drew on the Scriptures - the source whose authority had been used for so long to disparage womanhood - in order to demonstrate that it was a particular ideologically biased reading of the Bible that was being practised by misogynist authors. Thus they often put entirely new glosses upon Genesis ch.3, particularly on the notion of the 'posterior and inferior' ontological status of women.

The polemical nature of such revisionist attempts and women's preference for battles of the mind - *psychomachias* - is further illustrated by Rachel Speght's *A Muzzle for Melastomus* (1617) and Sarah Fyge Egerton's *The Female Advocate* (1686), which were in direct confrontation with the misogynists of their own time. Rachel Speght took issue specifically with a scandalous attack on women by Joseph Swetnam in his *Arraignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women*. This appeared in 1615 and proved extremely popular, not unlike the didactic writings of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, so that between 1615 and 1690 it went through 12 editions. Sarah Fyge seems to have written her *Female Advocate* at the tender age of 14 in response to another misogynist writer, the Restoration author Robert Gould, whose scurrilous satires on women's whorishness and corruption were also very popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, we can also witness in the same century the construction of a female literary tradition or community and the beginnings of female solidarity in this field, so that three women, Delariviere Manley, Mary Pix and Catherine Trotter, who were all professional playwrights, not only supported one another but proudly claimed in their works to have inherited the mantle of Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips, their more glorious predecessors. Manley wrote in the verse preface to Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* (1696): "Orinda [Katherine Philips] and the Fair Astrea [Aphra Behn] gone/Not one was



found to fill the Vacant Throne:/ [.....] Till you (Natures third start, in favour of our Kind)/ With stronger Arms, their Empire have disjoined, /And snatched a Laurel which they thought their prize” (see Hodgson-Wright, 2001: 3-15; Kelly, 1984:65-109).

If Petrarch is - according to Jacob Burckhardt - the first modern man, then the woman who introduced the works of her countrymen Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio to the Parisian court and culture of the early 1400s is surely the first modern woman. She is famous for being the first female author to make a living by her pen. A poliscibrator, she wrote on a dazzling range of topics, leaving behind 15 volumes of work in 70 large notebooks. A profoundly religious woman, Christine was at the same time conversant with classical secular culture; she was also very subversive, using the pretext of a manual for women on prudent behaviour to advise them on how to fashion a separate identity for themselves, on how to refashion the cultural discourse and the language of male authority to create a tongue and a community of their own. She suffered a variety of humiliations when she attended the royal court in on her own right and had to run the gauntlet of whistles and catcalls on the streets as well as in the palace, as she was treading a very fine line between the public and the private spheres. It was a division that was soon to be marked out with increasing clarity for middle-class and even noble women: “The troubles arose from all sides, and as is the common fare of widows, lawsuits and legal disputes came to me from everywhere.[...] Soon obstacles were put in my way in the matter of a property my husband had purchased. For as it was put into the king’s hands, I had to pay rent on it and could not profit from it. And in the Chambers of Accounts I pleaded a lengthy lawsuit against a man who was and still is one of the masters and rulers from whom I cannot have justice; from him I received injustice and great harm [...] And God knows how my heart suffered when bailiffs took action against me and my dearest things were taken from me. I greatly felt the loss, but even more I feared the shame. When I had to borrow from someone, even if it was in order to avoid greater troubles, dear Lord God, how I was ashamed, how I blushed when I asked for it, even if it was from a friend. [...] What greater evil and unpleasantness can befall an innocent person, what can cause greater impatience than to hear oneself accused without cause.[...] Was it not said about me throughout the town that I had lovers?” (*Selected Writings*, 1997:188-190). None of the feminists who followed her were to lead so independent and public a life until the 17<sup>th</sup> century dramatist Aphra Behn.

Around the year 1399 Christine wrote a series of works in which she set herself, as a defender of her sex, to criticize and rebut the sharp turn toward misogyny in the attitudes and the writings of her time. For a woman to talk back to misogyny, to obscene and ribald attacks on women, was something new, at least in writing and in the language of literature and learning. Christine was fully aware of the novelty of her position and was also extremely proud of her role as an author. This too was new territory to be staked out by this extraordinary woman who revelled in affirming “I, Christine”, who iconographically clothed the whole situation in flatteringly biblical garb: a new Mary and a self-styled Annunciation whose meaning she fully and proudly assumed for herself.

By 1300 the courtly tradition was generally pro-women in the sense of chivalric, but there were also clerical and secular bourgeois traditions that were decidedly misogynous. And around 1400 the earlier gentle attitudes of the court were losing ground before the fabliaux and the satirical poems of bourgeois origin which could be extremely crude in their criticism of nobility, clergy, women, love and marriage. Jean de Meun’s section of *Le Roman de la Rose* is the classic statement of this kind of mockery of women and chivalric love. It echoed a century-long tradition of invectives against women, and gave sanction to them, in a work that won numerous accolades on account of its great literary merit. Against this onslaught of bourgeois satires efforts were made to reinstate and reinvigorate the waning spirit of courtesy. In 1399 the knightly *Ordre de l’Escu Vert a la Dame Blanche* was founded in France to defend women’s interests and honour and in 1400 the dukes of Bourbon and Burgundy organized a Court of Love for the same purpose. Christine was a member of this Court and it was in this context that she wrote her poem *Epitre au Dieu d’Amour* (1399) decrying the great vogue of *Le Roman de la Rose* and the attitudes it promoted towards women, its reduction of romance to sexual conquest (the decisive gesture of plucking the mythical rose). The poem exposes before the whole court of the God of Love “the myriad deceits behind which men hide, striking a false pose as lovers, to blame, shame, defame and deceive the ladies” (McWebb, 2007:53). What comes as a surprise in Christine’s medium for launching her critique is her use of allegory. She exploits a literary medium that is particularly and traditionally the stamping ground of authors who defame women. The Epistle warns women against such men, asking them to “step cautiously” unless they want to be deluded time and time again (55) She rages against male authors’ tendency to take out their frustrations on women in general “reproaching her, /Whether it is one, or two, or womankind (61) The man who knows an

evil woman should/Keep clear of her and not defame all /of womankind, or charge them all /Decrying every trait that's feminine." In contrast with the false and hypocritical lovers mentioned, she gives the names of great champions of women such as Hutin de Vermeilles and Othe de Grandson. Next, Christine takes issue with the misogynist education to which children's minds were exposed from an early age, saying that this stark example of the institutionalization of misogyny is deeply injurious to public morality: "they give these texts out to their youngest lads,/ To schoolboys who are young and new in class/Examples given to indoctrinate/So they will retain such doctrine when they are grown (64-65)". Christine casts an analytical eye over misogynist literature and lists the main arguments of the clerks: "they're treacherous, another clerk opines/ And false and cunning; they're not good at all [...]. They're dreadful liars, other them pronounce/ They're faithless, fickle, they are low and loose" concluding that these attacks are predicated on men's frustrations and their impotence or ugliness: "Ovid comes to mind, who desired many, then he slandered them/[...] This rake who thinks they are all for his delight, /Then thinks when he is grown old and impotent /That he has concealed his shame so very well,/ Betraying her with learned arguments? (67) Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* is particularly targeted as in it he did "openly/ Elucidate a way to trick the girls/ By means of subterfuge and have their love/Although it does not teach the terms or ways /Of loving well, but quite the opposite/ [...] Because of that its title is misconceived /Its subject is *The Art of Great Deceit, Of False Appearances* –I dub it that!" She takes great delight in making fun of the logical inconsistency of misogynist arguments: "But now if women are such easy marks, /If they are the fickle foolish, faithless lot /That certain clerks maintain they are, then why /Must men pursuing them resort to schemes, /To clever subterfuge and trickery?" (69) Significantly, Christine gives pride of place in her poem to Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*: "Oh what a long affair! How difficult! / The erudition clear and murky both [...] So many efforts made and ruses found/ To trick a virgin – that and nothing more! [...] Such force applied against so frail a place". The 'plaintiff' decries the injustice of these attacks that are entrenched in the work of male authors, whilst women's voices and pens have been rendered ineffective throughout history: "To this I say that books were not composed/By women, nor did they record the things/That we may read against them and their ways. Yet men write on, quite to their hearts' content,/The ones plead their case without debate/They give no quarter, take the winner's part/Themselves for readily do quarrellers /Attack all those who do not defend themselves. /If women though had written

all the books/ I know the works would read quite differently, /For well do women know this blame is wrong” (71). Christine employs an unexpected strategy to rebut this undercurrent of misogyny in Western culture: misogynists are nothing short of heretics, since they go against the grain of the Holy Scriptures: “And yet, whoever is said or written ill/ Of women, only good is said of them/ In books that speak of Jesus, or His life,[...] The Gospel speaks no ill of them, but all/ Record their high responsibilities,/ Great prudence, great good sense, great constancy,/ Their perfect love, their lasting faithfulness,/ Their ample charity, their fervent will./ With firm and steadfast hearts and minds they longed/To serve the Lord, as they indeed did show, /For never did they leave Him, live or dead; /Except for by women, all alone was/ Sweet Jesus left - wounded, dead and stricken”(79). Not only are the tone and critical vehemence of Christine’s stance in the *Debate over the Rose* traceable in this poem, but the revisionist theme of the *City* is already prefigured here: “She does not kill or wound or mutilate/Or foster any treasonous misdeeds; /Or dispossess another; set afire/ or poison; pilfer silver, steal one’s gold;/ or cheat of wealth or one’s inheritance/Through bogus contracts; nor does she bring harm/To empires or duchies or to realms [...] And so, whoever would search history/ Or in the Bible just to prove me wrong (83)[...] I demonstrate that reasonable men/ Should value women, love and cherish them; And should not have a mind to deprecate/The female sex, from whom each man is born” (87).

Christine’s intervention in defence of women was to launch the first literary fray in European literature, *la querelle de la rose*: a sequence of letters and poems in which Christine was reproached for her daring and her reputation was called into question (she had called de Meun’s work an exhortation to vice). The *querelle de la Rose*, the epistolary exchange during which Christine develops her argument about women, is considered to be the first ‘séance’ of the *querelle des femmes*. It is important to mention that the problem of verbal injury gained significant momentum from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards and the polemical tradition which developed thenceforth hinged on the idea that words can harm, that they can damage a person’s fame. Since Christine believed women were a vital part of human society, of the polis, of the body politic, defamation of them automatically translates into an issue of generalized concern. This emphasis on the public dimension of the defamation of women added a powerful ethical overtone to all her polemical writings (Solterer, 1995:15-16).

In her Epistle to Jean Montreuil she charges head-on, lambasting the lack of usefulness of Meun's work which makes it harmful to the common good (2007:131) This Epistle, like those addressed to her opponents in the *Debate over the Roman*, demonstrates beyond any doubt that although Christine's polemic shares a disputational form with many works by her followers, she goes one better, as Solterer argues, by targeting an even wider public and by situating her disputations in the *agora*, in the midst of the city, involving the clerical community but also the citizenry at large. Thus, in a way that is almost revolutionary, she dislocates intellectual debates from the traditional space of closed academic circles. The social impact of misogynist works, Christine argues, is so destructive that the defamation of women constitutes a matter of civic concern because it jeopardizes the very language that helps to define a particular community (1995:153). Christine calls in aid the Roman model of regulating language on behalf of the people. This model indicts defamatory language as a potential threat to the commonwealth and interprets the individual speech act functionally, binding it tightly together with the welfare of the *polis*, so that the defamer is seen as one whose transgressive language assaults the integrity of the group. In the late medieval intellectual milieu of the *Debate* Cicero and Aristotle feature prominently as sources. In the words of Cicero in his *De re publica*, IV, x, 12, quoted in Solterer: "Though they provided the death penalty for only a few crimes (The Twelve Tables) they did provide it for any person who sang or composed a song which contained a slander or insult to anyone else. This was an excellent rule; for our mode of life ought to be liable to judgement by the magistrates and the courts of law, but not by clever poets; nor ought we to be subject to disgrace unless we have an opportunity to answer and defend ourselves in a court of law" (1995:153). Christine stigmatizes the defamers but in doing this she herself becomes a defamer and is thus caught in a double bind. At the same time she places her disputation in the public forum from which women have been banned and thus reclaims both physical and symbolic space for women in her society, making inroads into men's exclusive preserve of humanism, encroaching not only upon the territory of humanist intellectuals but also upon the more extensive public arena: "Let us consider the example of the victorious Romans who, in former times, attributed no praise or honour to something which did not serve a public purpose. Then let us decide whether we are able to crown this romance with laurels" (2007:131). It comes as no surprise that her opponents were to target their attacks on her presumptuous trespass into public territory, in Gontier Col's words "your outrageous presumptuousness", while for

Montreuil she is associated with a proverbial range of outcasts - heretics and Jews (2007:207-209). As Solterer demonstrates, she assumes the persona of the Roman censor, of the chief guardian of the domain: she evaluates utility, she bestows honour, praise and blame (155).

The sharpness of Christine's critique of Jean de Meun and of the whole misogynist tradition that formed so very large a part of the literary canon, coupled with the sheer breadth of her own writing, made her a powerful vehicle for critical identification, as Solterer remarks (214). Her polemical and sapiential/vatic writings on women all share a strong sense of solidarity and also a sense that "medieval culture could be critically recast *a la femme*".

Although troubled by the storm she had aroused, Christine was apparently undaunted, for in 1404 she took on a highly popular work that expressed the other - clerical - strain of medieval misogyny, Jehan le Fèvre's *Les lamentations de Matheolus*, written about a decade after the *Roman de la Rose*, yet in very much the same satirical vein. Le Fèvre had (in about 1371) translated a Latin manuscript dating from 1295, a classic of misogynous literature. In it the cleric Mathieu marries a widow and enumerates his endless complaints about marriage and the evil of womanhood. The problem was not so much the complaints about marriage, which were in a way understandable (meant as they were to dissuade fellow clerics from marrying), but the fact that they were filled with so much hate and loathing of women and the female body.

What is new in Christine's undertaking is that she approaches the matter with a theoretical intention, with a desire to investigate and analyse as well as rebut. There had been poems in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (*Dit des femmes, Bien des Femmes*) which had praised women in response to the vile things said about them. With Christine the debate is no longer a matter of two male-defined sides of the issue, as had been the case with the clerical debates on marriage and the bourgeois satires and responses. The novel thing is that women now enter the debate, that they seize the opportunity to rebut for themselves the misogynist voice of literate opinion. The example of Christine's citadel was to serve women for centuries, for she succeeded in carving out a space for women to oppose the onslaught of vilification and contempt.

Inclusion of women's texts and implicitly of women's voices in "the big picture" of early modern literature reveals fascinating intertextual connections that shed new light on

the rich context in which writers were engaged. It also suggests how much is lost if we continue to ignore the extraordinary gains of scholarship over the last decades by failing to include women's texts in the curriculum. In addition, it indicates how shallow and even devoid of any meaning whatsoever are our attempts at 'gender mainstreaming'. The devotees of conformity with EU dictates fail to understand that no change will be effected in the deeper structure of society without an internalization of the concept of 'gender mainstreaming'. Otherwise it is just style without substance.

It is so important, now that the names of so many great female creators have been unearthed from under the successive layers of oblivion to which they had been consigned over the course of history, that we read works by male and female writers together, in pairs or groups, instead of isolating texts by each sex, segregating works by women into special, elective, optional courses or, far worse, continuing to exclude women's texts altogether and unreflectively and uncritically adopting such labels as 'the masculine Middle Ages'. Ultimately, the exploration of men's and women's approaches to topics from the *querelle des femmes* in the context of writings produced by various literary circle members provides a window onto the debates that are perpetually sparked off by these issues, debates which travel so fluidly across national, cultural and gender boundaries and shed new light on the mental and discursive body of society as well as on the socio-political assumptions of the time.

The *querelle des femmes* definitely remains, in Kelly's words "the era's legacy to the modern period which was never to die out even in the darkest days of witch-hunting" (Kelly, 1984:94).

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## **Visions of Power/Powers of Vision**



**GAZES, MIRRORS, AND GENDERED POSITIONS  
IN THE LOGE PAINTINGS OF MARY CASSATT**

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### **1. Introduction**

One area of research within contemporary feminist art criticism has been the (male) gaze and its power in spectatorship. This paper examines the web of gazes present in a selection of loge paintings by a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Parisian Impressionist painter, the American-born Mary S. Cassatt (1844-1926), and argues that through various devices, such as the mirror, (1) her paintings disrupt traditional dynamics of gazing; and instead (2) reflect a new hierarchy of gazes, in which (3) leisured women are also positioned as gazers. The paper proposes that Cassatt's structuring of gazes reflected, and ultimately confirmed, the new bourgeois gendered social landscape and did not intend to disrupt or subvert it, as is frequently claimed.

### **2. Cassatt's paintings**

The daughter of a wealthy Philadelphia banker, Cassatt lived and worked mainly in Paris, leading the lifestyle of a rich single American woman. But she was also talented and, much like Berthe Morrisot, devoted to painting as a profession. She also earned great fame early in her life as an Impressionist painter. Although she experimented with various other styles later, her topical interest does not seem to have changed. In her paintings, she captured what Pollock (1988:50) refers to as "spaces of femininity": leisure-class women in their regular environments, both public and private, in their various life-cycles, performing various activities or "social rituals" (Pollock, 1988:56) that were associated with the constitution of the new polite society.

In her early paintings, her figures of elegant women depicted in the public "spaces of bourgeois recreation" (Pollock, 1988:56) – in theatre loges, drawing rooms, parks and public gardens – were reflective of Cassatt's status as a gentlewoman, which, by definition, precluded her from painting night-time scenes in bars, cafes, streets, etc., which were regarded as sites for males and women of lower status (Shackelford, 1998:112). Well-known Cassatt paintings from this period that capture leisured women in the public domain include *Five o'Clock Tea* (1880), *Woman in Black at the Opera* (1878), *Summertime* (1893-94), and *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* (1879). Cassatt's later paintings

tend to focus more on the private space of femininity, including bathing and toilette scenes with women and children, along with images of motherhood, as exemplified in such paintings as *Woman Bathing* (1890-91), *Woman about to Wash her Sleepy Child* (1880) and *Mother and Child* (1905).

Certain motifs remained with Cassatt throughout her artistic periods, such as the mirror and, related to it, the gaze. The present paper examines a small selection of her loge paintings, which she completed in her early period, in their depiction of upper-class women in specific public realms that had traditionally been structured around looking. The theatrical environment is an excellent site to examine when we are seeking to map the various intersections and dynamisms, as well as the gendered nature, of public gazing in Cassatt's time, and to observe the players involved and the various devices applied, such as mirrors, opera glasses and fans, through which the artist successfully reflected a new social landscape and the resultant public order of gazing.

### **3. Gazes, theatres and mirrors**

Gaze has become a key concept in studying the gendered landscape, especially in the visual arts. The gaze is “not just a look or a glance. It is a means of constituting the identity of the gazer by distinguishing her or him from that which is gazed at. At the same time, the gaze makes us aware that we may be looked at, so that this awareness becomes a part of identity in itself” (Mizhoeff, 2003:164). In his *Ways of Seeing* (1972), Berger discusses conventions of gazing in the European visual arts as in those of the Renaissance and concludes that they have been framed by a dynamism based upon which “men act and women appear” (1972:45), that is women tend to be depicted in order “to flatter” (1972:64) the male gazer, who usually functions as both the owner and the viewer of the painting.

This refers to two sets of key attributes related to gazing in the dominant European traditions. (1) Gaze has been tied to the power and ownership of the gazer over the object of the gaze, that is, both the painting itself and the site/figure depicted in it. (2) The superior status and dominance of the gazer have also been defined in terms of gender and sexuality, especially by feminist art critics, such as Pearce (1991), Chadwick (1996) and Pollock (1988). The female body interpreted as the visual signifier of its Other, the gazer, thus functions as the mirror of masculinity, the object of male desire, and the sign of male power over it. Gazing becomes a seemingly natural force in the constitution as well as operation of gender-specific behaviour, of both manliness and femininity.

The site of gazing in the case of the Cassatt paintings selected is the theatre, a place created around the social act of looking. Traditionally round-shaped, with various levels of seating for the audience, the amphitheatre was centred around a focal element, the stage. In the world of theatre, especially in the West, by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the dynamics of seeing, and of being seen there, had changed dramatically: the theatre had evolved into a dominant form of leisured activity for the new bourgeois society – with a power to seemingly assist in its constitution – and had transformed into an institution that reflected in its operation the modern system of visibility.

In studying the modern prison system, Foucault (1979) concludes that the panopticon, in its structure and operation, represented the disciplinary nature of modern societies, in that surveillance was practiced there via the system of visibility. The disciplinary power was present as “a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception” (Foucault, 1979:214). Inherent in Modernism, therefore, was the experience of being visible, and thus also being aware of the possibility of being watched. Although I do not identify the theatre with the prison model, there are a number of parallels, especially when it comes to the culture of visibility.

As one of the most prominent sites of the new bourgeois entertainment, the theatre was the place where viewers consciously accepted the dual position of being both a spectator and a spectacle. This, in and of itself, was already a form of discipline through visibility: appearance, dress styles, taste, manners, financial and social status, were all on display for everyone else who gazed, and at once also under their surveillance. This, one may find, is in fact a democratic system of gazing, in which, at least seemingly, everyone – regardless of gender, age, status – was an equal partner in gazing and being gazed at, organized by some faceless ideology expressed in contemporary social conventions, expectations and traditions.

Monneret (2005) commented on the human product of this new site and system of gazing in discussing Renoir’s *La Loge* (1874). She quotes from an article by Catulle Mendes published in *Le Rappel* in 1877, in which he stated that Renoir “relied on current morals when painting *La Loge*, and represents the figures in a real-life-like manner” (Monneret, 2005:60). Then he went on to comment on the positionality of contemporary women: “This is a woman who is concerned about the drama on stage as little as about the man next to her, leaning a bit behind her back: this is your future, and I am afraid, you are not a bit worried about it” (Monnerett, 2005:60).

Probably the most common object related to the gaze was the mirror. The mirror, however, had a threefold role during Cassatt's time. (1) For the Impressionists, mirrors were a popular tool employed to capture reflections, to study hues and contours, and to grasp changes in colour. (2) Mirrors also often appeared in illustrations of popular fashion magazines (Barter, 1998:47-49), used as the most effective "double-figure compositional device" (Barter, 1998:48), which displayed female dresses and hair-styles to their full effect. The mirror thus emerged as a trendy element in advertising, as in modern consumerism. (3) Mirrors had also become associated with female figures in painting, representing "a tradition dependent on notions of women's vanity and women's acquiescence in their status as beautiful objects of others' and their own gaze" (Chessman, 1993:257).

All of this seems to indicate that there was a new set of relations in the modern structure of gazing, definitely present in the theatrical domain, that calls for the examination of the new structure, especially in terms of gender positionings in spectatorship; and Cassatt's *Loge* paintings seem to offer an excellent ground for such an investigation. .

#### **4. Gazing in the theatre**

I regard *Woman in Black at the Opera* (1878) as Cassatt's barest comment on the contemporary social positionings captured by gazing. Although the scene is the opera the most important part, the stage, is still not shown, the painting depicting a section of the audience, implying that the greater significance in the theatre at the time was assigned not to the performance itself but to the relations between the viewers there. The central figure is a spectator: a woman in black, leaning on her elbow, watching the performance through her opera glasses, fully engaged in the production.

There is a second figure, however: a man also dressed in black, also leaning on his elbow, also looking attentively through a pair of opera glasses – but he is watching her and not the performance. The female figure gazes and is being gazed at simultaneously, by a man of possibly equal economic standing, but of higher social status – because of his gender. This is suggested by the fact that he is not bothered by having a female companion in his *loge* (just as Renoir's male figure in *La Loge* is not either), nor by engaging in an obviously, almost intrusively direct gaze, which is targeted in such a way that ultimately we, the viewers of the painting, feel as if we were within the realm of his gaze – and thus

also under his power. Interestingly, however, the woman in black does not seem to notice the man gazing at her, or has decided to ignore him, thus he does not seem to be able to possess the same power over her as he does over us, the viewers of the painting, who are facing, and thus cannot help not noticing his gaze.

This painting seems to convey the changing structure of the viewing field in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which leisured women occupied a dual position: they remained in the centre of the field as objects of male attention and desire; they also operated as status symbols for their husbands or male relations; and they had to display immaculate behaviour, in line with social expectations reflective of what the Anglo-Saxon world defined as Victorian domesticity, which placed women on a pedestal and viewed them as the moral guardians of the family, of the home, and by extension, of society (see Welter, 1966; Howe, 1975 and Broude, 2000-1). Women were expected to remain reserved, immune to temptation, by the guarantee of their preferred asexuality.

At the same time, however, upper-class women, due to their dominant socio-economic and moral standing, also started to appear in the public field as gazers, not only in the realm of the opera and the theatre, but also as socially-minded public activists, as they did in the temperance and suffrage movements. They also took over the public domain shaped by modern consumerism, both in the newly mushrooming shops and department stores, such as Macy's and Wanamaker's in the US, as well as in the decorated art studios, such as William Merritt Chase's and Eliot Gregory's, all of which reflected the sensuous luxury, aesthetic wealth and striving for unique exoticism reflected in a "feminizing space" (Burns, 1993:235) so attractive to the leisured women of the age.

The seeds of this duality – the awareness of the permanent possibility of being on display and the emergence of the feminine power of gazing – frame Cassatt's painting *The Loge* (1882). The young woman on the right captures traditional womanhood as subjected to the male gaze: sitting uncomfortably, exposing her beauty by showing her bare shoulders, and holding a lovely bouquet of flowers, itself a metaphor for blossoming femininity. However, she does not actively invite the gaze; she passively endures it, taking it as an undesirable fact of life. Her companion behind her, however, is mainly protected from the gazer, covering part of her face with a fan; but she is in fact looking out from the place she has created as her own: where she feels safer, behind the visually protective power of the fan.

The fan is quite an interesting device: here it offers a hiding place for the female, both as the subject of the gaze as well as a gazer. The fan had become a tool that signified an interesting duality related to female behaviour, tied to the act of hiding from or disrupting perspectivity in gazing. Holding the fan has frequently been associated with innocent femininity, chastity and sexual purity and with the shyness with which women reacted to the male gaze and wished to disrupt it. However, it also functioned as an instrument that covered up the woman: her gaze or perhaps undesired action, such as flirtation, as illustrated in Cassatt's *On the Balcony* (1873), and allowed for secret whispers and personal messages that may have gone unnoticed by others. The fan functioned as a key tool for visually separating the woman from others, but could also provide her power to act in a traditionally unexpected manner. Ultimately, by manipulating the fan women could gain certain autonomy and power in the public domain.

This painting also reflects Cassatt's play with mirrors: a closer look reveals how the background is in fact a mirror which reflects the scene these young women are facing. Their seemingly stiff, awkward position is a response to the "impersonal sea of gazes" (Pollock, 1998:145) that they seem to be inundated with. Moreover, the back of one of them is reflected on the right-hand side, like a double-figured compositional device that shows the female body in her full attire offered for symbolic consumption.

### **5. The new order of gazing**

An excellent illustration of the new order in gazing can be observed in the portrait of Cassatt's sister, Lydia, entitled *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* (1879). The painting captures the excitement, fantasy, joy, energy and elegance that theatres instituted in city life, the marked place associated with Modernism. Lydia is depicted as a figure who fits into this environment: a woman who is beautifully dressed, wealthy, happy and carefree, but unlike the other two young women in the painting discussed above, also self-confident, strong and mature, located in the centre of the composition, with an air of being completely at ease with her position.

Just like the previous painting, this picture also offers a double visual perception: through the mirror behind her, we see what Lydia sees, including all her possible gazers. The viewing scene also includes us, spectators – although not through Lydia's direct look – and we can enjoy ultimate power over the whole sight as well as full anonymity. Lydia is looking toward the audience: she seems willing to take any gaze coming from there with

ease. In fact, the faceless mass located in opposition to Lydia's openly revealed face seems to have lost its gazing power over her. Lydia is depicted as an autonomous figure with noticeable gazing power. She is leaning back comfortably in her chair, carelessly holding her fan, closed, on her lap. She does not use opera glasses either, even though they could provide anonymity for her spectacle, thus handing more power to her as the gazer by relieving her from the responsibility that comes from open gazing. Cassatt, thus, offers a new hierarchy of gazes, with the woman sharing equally in the theatrical gaze, and thus subverting former traditions of gazing.

Moreover, like most of her women, Cassatt depicts Lydia as not looking straight at us viewers. This has been interpreted by many as proof of Cassatt's rejection of the male gaze with its implied male power and sexual desire, and thus also as indicative of her feminism. While it is true that Cassatt's women do not tend to invite the gaze, it is also obvious that they gaze within their milieu. It seems to me that Cassatt could signify the presence of a new female bourgeois gaze by changing traditional directions associated with the female gaze. I propose that this change was introduced by Cassatt in order to subvert what had been the traditional gaze for her, but not to contest the new, contemporary bourgeois relations of gazing. Her depictions seem to register the change and her contemporary reality in which gazing had been restructured to offer overall more viewing space to women.

## **6. Conclusion**

Cassatt's *In the Box* (c. 1879) depicts women more as spectators than spectacles. Depicted as if looking out through a window, they command the gaze. Protected from the viewer of the painting by the wall of the box on one side and by the back and the fan of one woman, along with the opera glasses in the front, the central figure seems to be able to gaze freely. This, along with Cassatt's other paintings, indicates how women of privilege did indeed also become spectators in a number of public spaces, such as the theatre, thus they express the emergent new bourgeois spatial order. Cassatt seems to have secured the changing roles of women in her paintings and encouraged them to grasp and make full use of the options opening up for them in areas of the new gendered topography of modernity – but without reaching beyond and already contesting it.

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## THE FEMALE BODY IN DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S LATE WORK

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Whenever we read an illustrated literary work, we cannot help connecting the text and the image: in most cases the two illuminate each other. The same is the case if we happen to read a poem inspired a painting, illustrating or even interpreting it. This paper is interested in the relationship between image and text, in the way these media are able to correspond and relate to each other. This will be examined with reference to the painter – poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti's late portraits of women.

### **The form: double works**

Rossetti's work provides rich material for such examinations. He, as a double talent, often wrote poems to interpret his own paintings, or the other way round, painted images for his verse. These works consisting of two (or more) parts can be read both separately and as a whole: as the visual and the textual elements of a *gesamtkunstwerk*. Both the image and the text have their own free-standing identity, but in following the artist's intention (and he often also attached the two physically), my intention is to show how important it is to take both (or all) parts of the work into consideration when interpreting them.

The so-called double works consist of a textual and a visual part, which may have various kinds of relationship with one another. There are several ways of grouping these types; I have chosen the one which seemed to be the simplest: one of the ways of grouping the double works is according their relationship to time and space.

By the issue of time I mean which of the two parts of the work was made earlier. This is important because in most cases Rossetti wrote the poem after he had painted the picture (as in the case of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*), and he also wrote poems for pictures (under the same title) for paintings by other painters like Giotto, Titian or Michelangelo. Sometimes he wrote the poem at the same time as the painting was being executed (as *Lady Lilith*), and there is only one case I know of when the painting was "written" earlier: *The Blessed Damosel*.

The issue of space is a much more interesting one. Most works, such as the *Sonnets for Pictures* have their parts presented separately, but the members of some pairs show an interesting relation with each other. In works like *Proserpine*, the poem is inscribed in the

painting, that is, the text is an organic part of the picture, within the frame. There is another case when the text and the image is even more interwoven, in Rossetti's works which he carried out using Blake's technique, as in the case of *The Sonnet*.



A third variation is, when the text of the poem (either some stanzas or in the case of the sonnets the entire work) is attached to the frame, or to the back of the painting. For the first case a famous example would be *The Blessed Damosel* or the later version of *Lady Lilith*, and the earlier version of the latter is a good example for the second one. As in these cases text and image are closely related not only through the content, but also because of their positioning, it is much more interesting to interpret them together and not separately. Either can reveal more information about their content, they can illuminate each other.

### **The content: art, love and beauty**

Rossetti's topics in painting and in literature were mainly the same: art, love and beauty, though these three notions meant the same for him. Love and Beauty manifest themselves as an ideal to be pursued in art and life: "the 'Lady Beauty' of the sonnet *Soul's Beauty* is an emblem of the artistic vision which claims the unremitting pursuit of the poet/painter Rossetti" (Rees, 1981:121).

He was looking for an ideal, the ideal woman, the perfect female body and soul as shown in the title of a pair of his sonnets: *Soul's Beauty* and *Body's Beauty*. He was after his *Femme Fatale*, but he could only find all this in art: in his own dreams depicted either by paint or by words. The woman was an object, a *prima materia*, which he could form

according to his desires, that is why, although he used different models, the images of these women all look very much the same.

From the time when, in *Hand and Soul*, his soul appeared to him in the form of a woman all that he most valued was represented by a female figure and that Beauty should be Art and Art a woman was only natural (Rees, 1981:121).

Rossetti seems to have been obsessed with the female body, especially with certain parts of the body. He emphasized the face, the neck, the arms and hands and the hair. For the face (eyes and lips) we could say that his 'obsession' may be due to the Petrarchian and troubadour tradition, as he was fond of this kind of poetry even translating it from the Italian. But the others, the massive, long column-like neck he depicted, the long arms and hands, the rich, curly hair are all his own, parts of the picture he had of the ideal beauty. These body parts are emphasized in all of his portraits, but there are some which concentrate on one of them especially. *La Bella Mano*, for instance, is the title of a painting and a sonnet on and to the hand of the ideal woman. The poem (and the painting) was not written to a woman, but it addresses the woman's hand:

O lovely hand, that thy sweet self dost have  
In that thy pure and proper element,  
Whence erst the Lady of Love's high advent  
Was born...

In royal wise ring-girt and bracelet-spann'd,  
A flower of Venus' own Virginity,  
Go shine among thy sisterly sweet band;  
In maiden-minded converse delicately  
Evermore white and soft; until thou be,  
O hand! Heart-handsel'd in a lover's hand.



*La Bella Mano*

Typical is the long neck, the thick crimson lips, and – in the case of this picture, the arm and the hands. Besides the parts of the body themselves, the way they are represented is also interesting and characteristic of Rossetti: the gestures and the position of the head suggest a dream-like state of mind. While the two smaller figures look directly at the central character, she looks dreamily out of the picture, in a direction that cannot be defined. The position of the hands is remarkable also in the case of another painting: *La Ghirlandata*: it recalls (just as in *La Bella Mano*) the late renaissance sophisticated, ‘mannered’ style, that of mannerism.



*La Ghirlandata*

Rossetti writes in one of his poems from *The House of Life*:

Your hands lie open on the long fresh grass,-  
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms

(From *Silent Noon*)

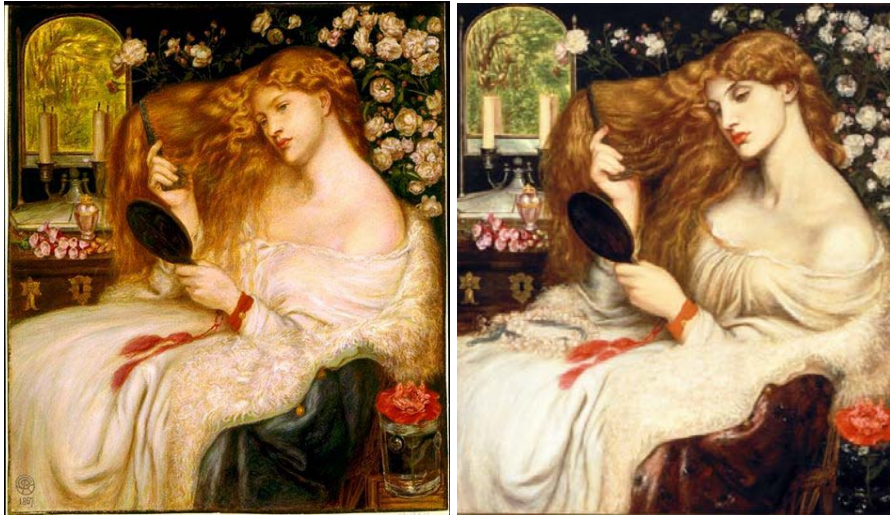
In his long ballad, *Jenny*, in which he writes about a prostitute, the poet lists all the fetishized bodyparts:

Whose eyes are blue skies, whose hair  
Is countless gold incomparable:  
Fresh Flower, scarce touched with signs that tell  
Of Love's exuberant hotbed...  
...  
Why, Jenny, as I watch you there,--  
For all your wealth of loosened hair,  
Your silk ungirdled and unlac'd  
And warm sweets open to the waist,  
All golden in the lamplight's gleam,--  
You know not what a book you seem,  
Half-read by lightning in a dream!  
...  
Ah! Lazy lily hand, more bless'd  
If ne'er in rings it had been dress'd  
Not ever by a glove conceal'd!...

This text, through describing the woman as if she were a painting – in a long ekphrasis – has a certain erotic force and it also has the decorativeness of the previously mentioned Petrarchian and troubadour lyrics, like that of the Venetian painter models, like Titian. In the late portraits Rossetti's works become more and more decorative and aesthetic in their effects, he saw painting "as decoration", he "approached Venetian art [...] as if it *were* "merely decorative". The figures in his "series of obsessional portraits of women that preoccupied him for the rest of his life (McGann, 2000:126;118) became emblems, "visual metaphor[s] for art itself" (McGann, 2000:123).

One of these portraits is *Lady Lilith*, theme of which was depicted in many variations by Rossetti. McGann (2000:97) calls it one of his "most disturbing and sinister pictures".

### **The example: Lady Lilith**



*Lady Lilith*: first version second version

The hair is also important – just like the other parts of the body mentioned – in all of Rossetti’s paintings, but it is especially significant in *Lady Lilith*. Here is the case, when we also have to take into consideration the text, not only the image. According to Jan Marsh (1988:23) the “loose, luxuriant hair was an emblem of female sexuality in pre-Raphaelite painting”, especially in Rossetti’s late work. The hair as a symbol has a central position both in the painting(s) and in the poem: it becomes here a sign of erotic power and a means of entrapment.

The textual part of the work in the case of the first version was taken from Goethe’s *Faust* – Mephisto talks about Margaret to Faust – appears on a slip of paper pasted on the back of the painting (Shelley’s translation):

Beware of her fair hair, for she excels  
 All women in the magic of her locks;  
 And when she winds them round a young man’s neck,  
 She will not ever set him free again.

The text assigns magic force to the hair with the help of which the woman is able to entrap the man and take him prisoner forever. This corresponds to the ancient Jewish myth of Lilith, according to which because she refused to subject herself to Adam’s will, and aspired after sovereignty, she had to leave Paradise. After her exile she became a demon, some called her the Mistress of Vampires, some the Queen of the Succubus. It is said that

she visited her late husband, Adam at night while he was asleep, and she sapped his vitality through erotic dreams.

The focus in Rossetti's work is on Lilith's sensuality and womanhood expressed also through the title: *Lady Lilith*. The setting is an intimate, boudoir-like inner sphere, where the spectator feels as if s/he were an intruder. Rossetti's inner view point stresses the female figure's disturbing indolence. By means of the mirror in her hand she is occupied in self-contemplation excluding both the spectator and the painter (her creator: not allowing control over herself, just as Lilith refused control by *her* creator).

The surroundings and the position remain unaltered in the later version except for the head: the face of the first model, Fanny Conforth was exchanged for the face of Alexa Wilding. This becomes important if we consider the fact the Wilding was the model for another double work which is *Lady Lilith's* counterpart: *Sibylla Palmifera*.



While *Lady Lilith* is called by the poet *Body's Beauty*, *Sibylla Palmifera* is called *Soul's Beauty* in the textual part of the work. The fact that the model was the same shows, that the two pictures show the two sides of the same woman; as it is also signalled within the painting *Sibylla Palmifera*: there is a child Cupid's face on her one side, and a skull's face on the other: love and death surround her (just as they did Lilith).

The text attached to the later version (on the frame of the painting) is a sonnet written by Rossetti:



Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told  
(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,  
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,  
And her enchanted hair was the first gold.  
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,  
And, subtly of herself contemplative,  
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,  
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where  
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent  
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?  
Lo! As that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went  
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent  
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

According to the common view the sonnet – just like the painting – is the representation of the Rossettian *Femme Fatale*. The key element is the “strangling golden hair”, Rossetti elaborates Goethe's conceit into a sonnet. According to his own remarks about the painting

The picture (...) represents a 'Modern Lilith' combing out her abundant golden hair and gazing in the glass with that self-absorption by whose strange fascination such natures draw others within their own circle. (The Rossetti Archive)

This is that inner standing point, because of which the figure of Lady Lilith is threatening, though if the painting is interpreted separately Lilith's figure does not appear as an evil demon, but as an essential woman, but if we read the textual and the visual parts of the work together, we get from the text the information about her magic power and evil nature in addition. In her self-contemplating position Lady Lilith does not appear to invite the spectator to watch her, instead – being fully aware of her power – she looks at herself only, satisfied with what she can see in the mirror, not allowing voyeurism. She is both sexual and selfish, gazing upon herself with satisfaction, symbolizing the rejection of 'man' and simply of everyone else. She does not look back at the spectator to engage in any eye-contact – except for her own. This passive self-observation and lack of acceptance

of a voyeur results in a threat to the identity and presence – and even the existence – of the spectator: she is strangling the spectator with her position and with her dangerous “golden hair” which does not let our look wander over the painting, it draws us back again and again.

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**ARCHETYPES IN MOTION – APPROPRIATING THE ANCIENT IN MODERN  
MASS CULTURE**

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The word “culture” and the concept behind it remain to the present day enigmas, mysteries to be solved and interpreted, due to the multitude and flexibility of approaches that have been employed, by scholars as well as the general public. One of the most slippery, procrustean concepts ever, “culture” deliberately escapes definition and continuously surprises by ever expanding its borders. Although even the separation of “high” culture and “low” culture incites debates and kindles arguments (see postmodernism!), the present study will accept the artificial categorization which includes T.V. in the field of “low” culture; the aim is to ‘deconstruct’ the metamorphosis of ancient archetypes and their modern re-appropriation for the palate of contemporary consumers of culture. The first part of the present paper will concentrate on the archetypes of the Androgyne, Senex God, Shadow, Mother Goddess, Self, and Puer/Puella Eternus.

Jung is almost unanimously acknowledged as the ‘guru’ of archetypes in psychology, in the same way that Freud retains his reputation as the ‘father of psychoanalysis’. Whereas the aim of the present paper is not to summarize Jung’s views on archetypes – an impossible task due to the impressive dimensions of his works -, I will emphasize only what serves my analysis. Thus, Jung wrote that archetypes are ideas *in potential*, whose realization depends on the emergence within the content of a particular culture and historical epoch. This leaves considerable space for the reading of archetypes *only* in relation to culture; as Jung explained, the influence of culture on archetypes is so paramount that the spirit archetype as it manifests itself in France cannot be substituted for the same archetype as it manifests itself in India, for example: “If we now try to cover our nakedness with the gorgeous trappings of the East, [. . .] we would be playing our own history false.”(1953:14). Moreover, Jung claimed that the development and interpretation of archetypes are inseparable from language, history and culture. Such statements clearly challenge those who would rush to stoning Jung for what is publicly perceived as his unabashed *essentialism* and would encourage us to employ the method of *archetypal* reading of facts of culture and emphasize both their *endurance* in time, as well as their capacity for *metamorphosis*.

So how can one approach TV, or media generally speaking, with a Jungian view in mind? Jung himself never explicitly wrote about TV as such, but he did pay attention to the development of the *psyche* which is *image-based*, in other words *archetype-based*; therefore, my argument here is that television's tremendous impact on our daily lives would not have reached half of its potential if it had not possessed the *mythical, archetypal load* to support it. Thus, as Pollette (2005:94) states, the key to understanding the significance of TV, the code for deciphering its *spell*, lies in *seeing* the mythical figures, even the God/s behind it. A renowned Jungian, James Hillman, writes that: "There is no place without Gods and no activity that does not enact them. Every fantasy, every experience has its archetypal reason. There is nothing that does not belong to one God or another." (1975:168-69). The appeal of TV, in my opinion, lies not only in the fact that it seems to mediate between Gods and mortals, but that it offers the psyche the possibility of contemplation and of losing itself, mostly unconsciously, in the image of an *androgynous deity*, therefore in the image of the very *perfection*. Why *androgynous*, why *deity*, and why *perfect*, the sceptical reader might ask? In order to answer these questions, I will provide a brief review of these concepts and then link them to the characteristics of TV.

The myth of the *androgynous* is present in many cultures which feature androgynous divinities. Generally speaking, such stories attribute the very beginnings of the world to primordial chaos or to a primordial egg, a mixture of male and female principles and portray the bisexuality of humankind's ancestors. According to Brunel (1992:42), the three most important Western foundation myths exhibit common influences: the myth of an androgynous Adam, that of Plato's androgynes and that of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. These features refer to the *cosmogonic* aspect, the *aetiological* one (explaining sufferings and or aspirations that would be inexplicable without them), the fact of their *ensorship* or *distortion* in the course of their transmission (possibly because their revelations were considered too shocking) and their long history in Western culture.

I find these common features of these three myths distinguishable in contemporary television. Modern houses owned by the privileged of this world display T.V. sets in the living-room, the kitchen, the bedrooms, often even in the bathrooms. Therefore, it would hardly be far-fetched to consider TV in its *cosmogonic* aspect, embodying a world ruled by a sort of an *omnipresent, omnipotent deity*, the modern shrine of the ancient household. So overwhelming is the voice of such a deity, that one can hardly escape its echoes, even when outside the house; TV reigns supreme in restaurants as well, bars, bus stations,

airports, hairdressers, hotels, and the list could continue. Paying it daily homage has become a manner of living, escaping the net of its influence a futile enterprise for most of our contemporaries. TV's *androgynous* quality can be recognized in the fact that it displays both male and female characteristics and because of that, it seems to have the ability to appeal to everybody, regardless of sex. To quote Hillman (1979:208) again it is "the main image of God in our culture [is] omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, seated [. . .] The high god of our culture is a senex god." To paraphrase Hillman, one may also say that "the high god of our culture is TV" Our modern world is not any longer peopled with worshippers in churches, temples, mosques or synagogues, but most human beings do not fail to pay their daily homage to the television sublimated into the universal panaceum with an *aetiological* function. The *omnipresence* of T.V as senex god once established, its *omnipotence* follows quite effortlessly. One has to recall only the overpowering influence of advertisements, very often accompanied by telephone calls to the selling companies, the bold challenges set up by action movies, be they action ones, or love-stories, the promise of sudden fortunes contained in Quiz-shows, and it is obvious that T.V can be acclaimed as the all-giving, benevolent father god. However, as pointed by Pollette (2005:97)

By banning extreme voices, T.V. silences all Others who, one-sided or not, would act as counterbalancing, meaningful forces. The senex in T.V. will admit no voices that do not harmonize with its dominant, one-sided voice: the voice that is simple, spare, specific, dramatic, feeling-oriented, sensational, nonreflective, bipolar, judgemental, conservative and capitalistic.

Therefore, whatever is seen as a distortion of the omnipotent, omnipresent voice is mercilessly silenced by the senex god himself. It is a well-known truth that generally speaking, except some private channels – not very numerous, not in all countries, and certainly not influential – anarchist, radical Marxist, existential, feminist voices are not incorporated in TV as senex deity. Thus, individual growth ('individuation' in Jungian terms) is mimed, but never accomplished, since the confrontation between 'ego' and 'shadow' is either completely absent or lacking authenticity, in that it is carefully supervised by the supreme authority. The senex god extends his influence not only to individuals, but to groups as such. As the personal shadow may develop through interaction with some specific person, so can a cultural shadow develop through a group interacting with a collective Other. TV as senex god sees to it that as he indoctrinates us

with the ideology of his culture, we repress the parts of our self that do not readily fit into our culture's views of the admirable, the sacred and the acceptable. Hence, the repressed aspects of our selves *become* the very characteristics of groups that our culture marginalizes, so that we are eager to project the evil side of our culture onto these groups, and see them as more different, more threatening than they really are. Whenever TV airs programmes less than objective about Others (be they minority groups, other nations, politically different factions), the audience actually watch the senex god in the process of minimizing the political importance of the shadow. It is a deliberate process, since the god knows that when and if the individual has managed to come to terms with his or her shadow, he/she is less vulnerable to discourses that repress Others. In Bhabha's words, such an individual would be more capable to discover "a sense of political and personal agency." Another aspect of T.V as the senex god, omnipotent and omnipresent refers to its ability to rule supreme over our *time*. As stated by Marc (1995:22):

[. . .] television has made us so thoroughly interested in drama, current events, spectator sports, illustrated music, monology, travelogues, the weather, old movies, new movies, gastronomy, animated cartoons, shopping, politically didactic religious sermons, sexual voyeurism, gossip, home improvement techniques, and Jeopardy that we are too busy for almost anything else, such as, say reading.

Not only does TV monopolize our time, it also advertizes itself as a heroic insomniac (Pollette, 2005:98) or a perennially watchful god; unlike the Bible God, our T.V does not even take the seventh day off. As a matter of fact, that is the day when its network shrinks around the viewers at full capacity. Although it is obvious that this god demands and exists through acts of daily worship, it manages to disguise the subtly-imposed adoration as a bold manifestation of *free will*. In spite of the fact that the viewers are actually trapped into the T.V time, stuck in the moment of airing, more often than once they cherish the illusion that they are watching in order to *escape* time and commute onto a higher level reality that may just solve their daily struggles. The illusion of *free will* is also maintained if one considers the receding postures adopted by TV viewers. As Pollette (2005:99) states: "some slouch in an overstuffed easy chair, others lounge on the sofa, and still others sprawl on the floor with a bag of chips within easy reach." However, no one is crawling on their knees as would either an ancient or a contemporary worshipper; consequently, a sense of *democratic interaction* viewer-TV god is skilfully induced. The

act of communal worship is obvious though; if, at the beginning of the programme, the worshippers-viewers still make comments, make attempts at initiating conversations, exchange opinions, gradually all those metamorphosize into complete silence and hence, blind adoration of TV as senex god.

TV does not display only the characteristics of a male god. As mentioned before, the female aspect is also encompassed in it, so that the *androgynous* quality ensures its universal appeal. The Goddess in her capacity of both Great and/or Terrible Mother informs our daily drug. As stated by Campbell (1991:207-208):

There have been systems of religion where the mother is the prime parent, the source. The mother is really a more immediate parent than the father because one is born from the mother, and the first experience of any infant is the mother [ . . . ] The idea of the Goddess is related to the fact that you're born from your mother and your father may be unknown to you, or the father may have died. Frequently, in the epics, when the hero is born, his father has died, or his father is in some other place, and then the hero has to go in quest of his father.

If one thinks of the modern viewers as mythical heroes living their unpretentious but nevertheless self-defining odyssey, comfortably seated in front of the TV, then it follows that whatever equipment they need in their father quest, is kindly provided by TV as the omnipotent mother. There seems to be nothing that this nourishing Mother Goddess can refuse her children, nothing that the Penelope of the screen can refuse her son Telemachus in his search for Odysseus. Jung (1953:82) remarks that: "The qualities associated with [the mother archetype] are maternal solitude and sympathy; [...] any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility." The generosity and the all-giving qualities of TV as Mother Goddess can hardly be surpassed and they do seem to cover all the aspects of daily needs. The benevolent screen offers luxury cars, fast food, knowledge in the form of talk shows, MTV as not quite-but still-music as accompanying sounds on the journey to reach the father, comfortable cruises, and the list could go on endlessly. Apparently, the road to 'individuation' – both the psychological and the material one, is paved with good intentions by this Mother Goddess.

However, she only unleashes Hell, for TV images only sell illusions and impose a pattern that subsists through a network of false expectations. As Gitlin (1986:139) states:



“Surface is all; what you see is what you get. [TV’s] images are proud of their standing as images. They suggest that the highest destiny of our time is to become cleansed of depth and specificity altogether.” In the act of “cleaning” us of “depth and specificity”, the Good Mother transforms into the Terrible one and overtly displays her refusal to cut the umbilical cord. Thus, the ‘individuation’ that the senex god prevented from maturing by cutting short the voices of the Others, encounters other obstacles that the seemingly benevolent-but-soon turned- into-destructive mother places in the viewers’ way, in a different but equally effective manner. As stated by Pollette (2005:108): “In Jungian terms, TV’s surface-only images evoke that childish side of the psyche – one side of the puer/puella archetype – that “feels but fails to differentiate the subtleties and perplexities of feeling.” For the sake of clarification, it should be mentioned that Jung himself wrote on the *puer/puella* archetype in many-folded ways and that the identification of TV viewers with *eternal children* is true only in a very specifically defined way. Thus, aspects of the *puer* in mythology, as Jung sees it, closely parallel the psychological meaning that this figure has for the individual soul in dreams and inner experiences. The Divine Child, one aspect of the *puer* archetype, refers to a symbol of future hopes, the seedling, the potentiality of life, the superhuman or possessed of astounding gifts at a tender age (Baby Jesus, Hercules, etc.) However, the other aspect of the *puer* archetype is the Peter Pan one, who stands for frivolity, pleasure, play, instant gratification of desires, and, most importantly, who refuses to grow up. A *puer/puella* identification of the TV viewer with the TV seen as Mother may lead to a superficially entrancing but basically immature child-man/woman, incapable of commitment or generativity, a flighty Little Prince/Princess, cherishing hopes and dreams divorced from reality.

The world that TV as Mother Goddess provides for its viewers as eternal children is as attractive as it is harmful to a real maturation of the self, embedded as it is in a wish-fulfilment dimension that seemingly parallels but actually dissolves reality. Jung (1953:29) employs the term “paralysis” in order to describe the failure to achieve individuation via the “identification with the Mother.” It is indeed, “paralysis” the state which prevents TV viewers from differentiating one TV image from the other, one sound from the other, due to the whirlwind in which TV programmes seem to broadcast and at the same time trap the viewers.

Pollette (2005:109) also notices the “simplistic aesthetic forms” functioning as “another way” in which “TV’s mother-myth locks her viewers into a childish condition.”

Thus, most of what is broadcasted is reduced to elementary structures, the type that can be easily comprehended by children. Violence, sentimentality, technical wizardry concur in an eternal problem-solving pattern and all during two hours of broadcasting (the average length of a talk show), so that the psyche purposely kept in a childish state can enjoy instant gratification. The *archetypal* appeal that TV plays on, does buy high audience rates, but is also responsible for the “brainwashing” of the psyche which is insufficiently challenged. Nevertheless, in my opinion, rather than disparaging the *archetypal* as a kindergarten game, one should attempt to recognize its various shapes disguised in TV stories, and then proceed to a “deconstruction” of it socially, politically, culturally speaking. Scheuer (1992:71-72) writes about TV being:

[. . .] essentially narrative and episodic rather than thematic or analytical in character. It can show and tell, but is best at showing; unlike the written word, it cannot readily escape its own immediacy in the here-and-now to examine, define, deconstruct, infer, deduce, analyze, hypothesize, suggest relations among ostensibly remote entities, or glide across different levels of abstraction.

It follows that the average TV viewer should attempt to break the immediacy bond with this archetypal mother; it could be done via continuing “watching” even after the programme has ended, so that a larger, preferably beyond the “narrative and episodic” network of relations to the TV world, often a substitute for the real one, can be achieved. The greatest challenges, simultaneously the greatest foils of postmodernism reside in its complete refusal to dwell on the *narrative*, to draw conclusions and to offer landmarks. Looking at TV through the lenses of postmodernism, one can distinguish a major contradiction in terms; on the one hand, it operates with very well-known, hence recognizable patterns, *archetypes* some might say, on the other hand, the *form* speaks of excess, gaudiness, and a ‘bad taste’ mixture of qualities, leaving the viewers either easy preys to over-simplifications, or victims to exaggerated pastiche. Therefore, due to this problematic combination, TV both succeeds and fails in its capacity for being a “postmodern equivalent of the ancient household shrine”.

#### **The X-Files – a case in point:**

[. . .] He (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) stood alone facing the earth and the sky, the sun and the darkness, the heat and the frost, confronting any outsider, whom he had to learn to kill in

order not to be killed himself. He stood alone – and not alone: he was a part of a whole-extended family, a clan, a community and only among “his own” he was a human being: only in the community into which he was born, where he was nurtured; not one imposed upon him by an alien will or by artificial conventions (Diakonoff, 1995:18)

From the perspective of the above quotation, it can be stated that the X-Files TV programme holds its appeal for the audience all over the world, due to a constant preoccupation with *the Other*, or, in Jungian terms, *the Shadow*. Its complexity resides in its interpretation as a double-folded Other. Throughout the many episodes of the programme, one does not learn how much the extraterrestrial, alien presence is responsible for the threat posed to humanity, and how much danger can originate with the Other *within* human structures and modes of organization. A quick search on the Internet (Wikipedia) reveals the basics of the X-Files. Thus the programme is conceptualized as a combination and an alternation of *mytharc* (mythology episodes) – actually an on-going tale of governmental conspiracy – and *stand-alone* episodes (monster-of-the week and freak-of-the-week). Both alternating TV formats focus on various confrontations with the Other, be it in outer space or through inner social and political structures.

The X-Files as a *mythology show* have been proved to attract lively, game audiences; this may very well be due to its ability to reawaken dormant tendencies and constellating archetypes in each and every viewer. Thus people watching the programme metamorphosise into cosmic Sherlocks, looking for truth in a universe that lacks the components of the known and therefore is only partially recognizable. By means of what Jung called *association* (a spontaneous flow of interconnected thoughts and images around a specific idea, determined by unconscious connections), the viewers – not all of them exactly fans, but certainly interested! – turn their theories into communal shrine acts. One can notice the overt dedication to labyrinthine puzzles taking over the psyche, and the reproduction of a *participation mystique*, a psychological connection between viewers themselves and viewers and characters alike.

What incites more and more debates around the programme, in spite of its having been on air for years, is the different perceptions that it generates. On the one hand, the traditionalist view maintains that The X-Files is a strange “embodiment of a failed mythology show.” According to this, the creator failed to assemble the pieces into a satisfying, sensible whole – so much for instant gratification! -, squandered the audience’s good faith and drew the viewers into a relentlessly circular carousel, alienating them from

*ultimate meanings*. The opposing view praises precisely what the ‘traditionalists’ criticize, i.e. the *lack of final answers* as *virtue*. Consequently, the very fact that even a glimpse of the entire puzzle is forever postponed, the viewers’ curiosity never fully answered and an intelligible picture of the whole plot never provided, becomes a bonus for the formation of a modern psyche, unencumbered by the absence of recognizable patterns. It seems that for those who are keen on praising the programme, the more we acknowledge that “The Truth is *not* out there!”, or even that “There is not truth!”, the closer we are getting to finally coming into its possession.

However, it should be noted that no matter which particular perspective on the X-Files one adopts, the programme does operate with easily recognizable archetypes from the point of view of both characters and situations. Fox Mulder, the FBI agent assigned or self-assigned to discover the ‘truth’, displays characteristics of a certain set of archetypal characters. He is what may be called *a lost soul*, a sensitive human being, someone who understands, and is tortured by understanding, secretive, brooding, unforgiving and vulnerable, a wanderer, an outcast, creative and lonely. From a Western religious perspective, he does remind one of the crucified Jesus, the Prophet who *knows* and willingly submits himself to playing the *scapegoat* (see his ‘abduction’ by the spaceship, an abduction that is obviously a matter of choice). His female counterpart, Dana Scully made her debut into the series as the *sceptic*, the scientific spirit eager to reject and prove the falsity of any hypothesis promoted by Mulder. She appeared to the viewers as the *librarian* type, always controlled, clever, holding back, prim and proper, only to reveal herself as a passionate woman underneath, albeit dressed to repress. Gradually, she becomes the Mary Magdalene of Mulder/Jesus, his most fervent follower and promoter of his values. The Egyptian mythology perspective employed, Mulder and Scully impersonate the ancient Osiris and Isis, and their offspring (presumably their offspring!) becomes Horus, the Divine Child, the promised one, with extreme possibilities and extraordinary powers, who will one day save the world. Another recognizable set of characters with archetypal value can be said to activate in Mulder and Dogget, with Mulder as a Don Quijote type, paying daily homage to Imagination and inner search, whereas Dogget serves as a Sancho Panza, the voice of Reason counterbalancing the excesses of Imagination. The Smoking Man stands out as the very symbol of the demonic, absolute evil, mysterious because it appears to be without a cause. His is an apparent unmotivated malignancy, which delights in destruction for its own sake.

In terms of recognizable, and therefore with an *archetypal* content, *situations* or *truths*, The X-Files seems to be informed by five of them, all interrelated and all leading again to Mulder; one detects conspiracies, lies, the state, the paranoia (both *out* there and *in* here), and an attack by monsters who want to conquer the world by taking over the very top of human structures. Perhaps the simplest way to express the conflict in The X-Files is by emphasizing the horror of it, derived from Chaos intruding on Order, a reversed kind of *cosmogony*, where Mulder's mission as the *Hero*, is to find and stop the Chaotic forces.

In conclusion, it can be argued that The X-Files is a sample of programmes offered by TV in which archetypes/traditionalism and postmodernism join forces to side-track the viewer from the possibility of taking one path only in "looking for the truth." By refusing to give a straight answer to the issues raised in so many episodes, Chris Carter, the producer of The X Files, has clearly succeeded in making the programme a postmodern work of art. If there is any message contained in the programme, any code to be deciphered is that it reflects truth as seen by a certain culture – some may even call it sub-culture! - and that all which is really important is that *some people* believe it to be true. On the other hand, it can be stated that the combination of social critique and aesthetic complexity frequently challenges the logic on mainstream TV, which probably explains why the programme was the most controversial, watched TV show of the 1990s. In the hope that the present paper has succeeded in emphasizing the survival of archetypes in their postmodern garments, I will end it by quoting Jung: "Ultimate truth, if there be such a thing, demands the concert of many voices."

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## **FAIRY TALES IN STEPHEN KING'S *CARRIE***

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The name of Stephen King still has a not-too-positive ring to it for academics; he is not yet accorded the critical attention which his works warrant. His status as a bestselling writer seems to work against him, because being popular is seen to be mutually exclusive

with the status of being a serious writer. King is well aware of this prejudice against him and he has already dedicated a novel, entitled *Misery*, to the examination of this phenomenon and how it affects a writer, and his conception of himself.

To quote Joseph Citro, “to deny King’s worth, it seems to me, is to deny the society in which we live” (Magistrale, 1992:xiv). Even though his characters are small-town Americans, their problems are universal. In spite of the supernatural elements and the heroes with special abilities, it is easy to identify ourselves with this familiar world. The factors which enhance this reader identification are the average, middle-class heroes, the transparent, easy-to-understand prose and the use of brand-names. Though sometimes he is ridiculed by critics for this, Ben P. Indick points out that King is not the first to rely on this technique to establish a stronger attachment with contemporary reality, referring to the example of James Jones (Herron, 1988:149).

According to Tamás Bényei, the canon marginalizes these popular novels. Maybe because of their ex-centric position, these genres are often better able to point out the phobias, latent fears and collective desires of society than mainstream genres. They demarcate the borders surrounding a society, they show what can and what cannot be done within a certain community (Bényei, 2000:42).

The subject of my essay is the first published novel of King, *Carrie*, from 1974. Owing to the very popular film version directed by Brian de Palma, most people are familiar with the story. In fact, *Carrie* has become part of American popular culture: the name pops up in sitcoms, it is alluded to in other novels, and films. But I am not concerned with the film adaptation; instead I would like to highlight the main motifs of the story, putting special emphasis upon fairy tales as possible sources of the work.

The story offers the reader an analysis of an average American high school, which King himself characterizes as a “place of bottomless conservatism and bigotry, a place where the adolescents who attend are no more allowed to “rise above their stations” than a Hindu would be allowed to rise above his or her caste” (King, 1981:171). He did not rely only upon his childhood memories, because at the time of the writing he was teaching at a high school: so he had a double perspective on what was going on in a high school in the 1970s.

The protagonist of the novel, Carrie White, is considered by her peers an outcast, a socially awkward, ugly girl. She is the one who is tripped up in the school corridor, whose books get thrust out of her hands, who is the constant butt of every joke. The students

humiliate her and alienate her at every step and by distancing themselves from her very markedly, they also hope to distance themselves from that fate and the roles associated with her. “She looked the part of the sacrificial goat, the constant butt [...] and she was.” (King, 1993:10)

She tries to break free from this stereotype, but her rebellion and attempt to establish a new identity ultimately fails, bringing destruction not just upon herself but upon the entire town. She has a hidden power, a latent talent: telekinesis. This means the ability to move objects with the power of the mind. King had read an article which claimed that “at least some reported poltergeist activity might actually be telekinetic phenomena [...] There was some evidence to suggest that young people might have such powers [...] especially girls in early adolescence...” (King, 2000:75)

Even though Carrie almost destroys an entire town, King tries to elicit the sympathy of the reader and takes a lot of pains to show the strange coincidence of certain factors which led to the inevitable tragedy. “I never viewed Carrie as evil [...] I saw her as good. When she pulls down the house at the end, she is not responsible.” (Winter, 1989:37)

The opening scene of the novel takes place in a girls’ shower. This setting posed quite a challenge for King, and if it was not for his wife’s encouragement, he would not have continued with the novel. As he remarked: “I was in a totally foreign environment – a girls’ shower room – and writing about teenage girls. I felt completely at sea.” (Underwood, 1990:20) When Carrie steps out of the shower, she realizes that blood is flowing down on her legs. She has no idea what is happening to her and thinks she is bleeding to death. Her classmates look at her with contempt and revulsion and start to bombard the poor girl with tampons and sanitary napkins. Since responsibility seems to dissolve in a mob, otherwise nice students also participate in her humiliation. “You wouldn’t expect a trick like that from Sue. She’s never seemed the type for this kind of a – stunt.” (King, 1993:24)

The intervention of the gym teacher is needed to create order in the chaotic locker room. Miss Desjardin has some mixed feelings when she arrives: as a teacher, she knows she has to help the girl, but as a woman, she also feels repelled and disgusted by the sight of the cowering, weeping, bloody, hysterical Carrie. After her initial reaction, she tries to soothe the terrified Carrie and enlighten her about female biology. Thus, she assumes a maternal role: telling a daughter about menstruation is clearly a role belonging to the mother, but Carrie’s mother is a special case. Margaret White, a widow, is a religious



fundamentalist, a fanatic who has filled their house with religious icons and paintings and placed an almost life-size crucifix with the bleeding Jesus in the middle of their living-room. She has not taught her daughter anything about sexuality, as if she thought that by keeping Carrie ignorant, she would also remain innocent and free from sin. Margaret considers everything connected to sexuality a sin and interprets the arrival of Carrie's period in the following way: "O Lord, [...] help this sinning woman beside me here see the sin of her days and ways. Show her that if she had remained sinless the Curse of Blood never would have come on her. She may have committed the Sin of Lustful Thoughts." (King, 1993:55)

Blood acquires a symbolic value in the novel: the arrival of her period signifies that Carrie has crossed a threshold, as if she has passed through a rite of passage (which is a recurring theme in King's novels). Now that she is a biologically mature woman, she has left behind her ignorance regarding sexuality, into which her mother forced her. Something else happens on that terrifying day: she discovers that her telekinetic ability, which was only present in small traces so far in her life, has become stronger. She will be able to control and direct it and in fact in one scene she consciously sets her mind to the exercise of its weird ability by lifting heavy objects from the floor.

This power belongs exclusively to her, it cannot be taken away, no one can claim it, appropriate it. People react to this power with both fear and respect, a kind of awe. That is why King says "Carrie is largely about how women find their own channels of power, and what men fear about women and women's sexuality." (King, 1981:171) Readers have mixed feelings about her as she is wavering on the borderline between the sacrificial figure and the Fiery Angel of Destruction.

The girls who took part in her humiliation in the shower are punished by the school, but more important than the physical punishment is the psychological punishment which one of them experiences. A change is occurring in the soul of Sue and she starts to view herself, her acts, and her place in the world and in the school system in a different way. But this enlightenment, indirectly caused by Carrie, is not something which Sue was looking forward to. She realizes the utter otherness and strangeness of Carrie, an atypical teenager, unmoulded by peer expectations and society's pressure on women. Sue also realizes how much they depend upon Carrie, and other victims, because they use them to define, to construct their own identities. All that pressure towards conformity suddenly starts to assume a negative colouring in Sue's eyes. "The word she was avoiding was

expressed To Conform, in the infinitive, and it conjured up miserable images of hair in rollers, long afternoons in front of the ironing board in front of the soap operas while hubby was off busting heavies in an anonymous Office.” (King, 1993:46)

As an act of atonement, she decides to “lend” her boyfriend, Tommy, the most popular guy in the school, to Carrie for the Prom. It is a brave step because in a certain sense she runs the risk of losing Tommy in the process, as has been pointed out by Joseph Reino (1988:15). The fact that Tommy acquiesces to Sue’s request is proof both of his love for the girl but it also shows that he has no ego problems, his self-image is not overly determined by other people and their opinions or reactions. “He apparently had a high enough tolerance to verbal abuse and enough independence from his peer group to ask Carrie in the first place.” (King, 1993:85) He is brave enough to invite the most despised girl to go with him and he will not repent his decision: Carrie will look wonderful at the ball and they will have a good time until the nightmare strikes and shatters the enchanted atmosphere.

In fact, fairy tales could be pointed out as one possible source for King’s work. For all its setting in contemporary small-town America, the novel has undertones of Cinderella. We might say that King re-introduced some of the gory elements of the older versions of the tale which Perrault was careful to omit (the stepsisters cut off parts of their feet and the pigeons pluck out their eyes). Bettelheim claims that Cinderella details the various phases in the development of the personality (1985:357). An individual has to pass these stages if s/he wants to achieve self-realisation. This final stage, that of the fully developed human being, is something which Carrie is never going to achieve.

What are the parallels then with the famous tale? We have a gentle, humble heroine who seems to occupy the lowest caste in the school hierarchy. The cruel stepmother is replaced by a cruel mother, and the cruel stepsisters of Cinderella are Carrie’s classmates who torture her all the time. Sue could be the fairy godmother, who provides her with the Prince Charming, instead of the carriage and the glass slippers. The ball occupies a central position in both narratives, and while Carrie does not have to return by midnight, her enchantment is also temporary: she has to give back Tommy to Sue. As she returns home after the Prom night, she loses both of her slippers, which clearly shows that King was conscious of writing a dark Cinderella story, a fractured fairy tale as Douglas E. Winter (1989:34) puts it.

But why did King decide to replace magic with destruction and death? A girl called Chris refused to comply with the school punishments following the shower scene and consequently was barred from the Prom. She decides to take revenge upon Carrie for her exclusion. She asks her shady boyfriend to kill a pig and collect its blood in buckets, which they place on the beams high above the stage where the coronation ceremony is going to take place. Her revenge depends upon Carrie and Tommy being elected the Queen and the King of the Prom, but with her widespread connections and influence she gets a lot of people to vote for the unlikely couple.

The blood bath which Carrie receives when the contents of the buckets are dumped on her is eerily reminiscent of the blood bath of the first chapter of the novel. She is again exposed to public humiliation and ridicule and she stands in front of a faceless crowd. Unfortunately, after the first seconds of shock and terror, someone starts to laugh out aloud, finding the blood-drenched Carrie a particularly ridiculous sight. “now the fairy tale was green with corruption and evil...” (King, 1993:168). She cannot take this any more and flees the place. She thought for a moment that she could be really accepted, that she could become a member of that community which previously rejected her so vehemently, but she has to realize that it cannot be so. Before leaving the building she bars the doors of the gymnasium with all the students trapped inside, and with her telekinetic abilities sets the school on fire as well as wreaking havoc on a large part of the town on her way home.

Unfortunately, her home is not a nurturing, loving place either, and her mother, completely deranged by this time, awaits her daughter with a butcher’s knife. She seriously wounds Carrie, but she still has time to stop Margaret’s heart with the power of her mind. The dying Carrie is subsequently found by Sue in a parking lot and stays with her during the final moments of her life. A telepathic connection is established between them and Sue witnesses Carrie’s death in a very intimate way: “Sue tried to pull away, to disengage her mind, to allow Carrie at least the privacy of her dying, and was unable to. She felt that she was dying herself and did not want to see this preview of her own eventual end.” (King, 1993:211) The dénouement of the novel is quite dark: it seems there is no Heaven, no light, no redemption for Carrie. “For a moment Sue felt as if she were watching a candle flame disappear down a long, black tunnel at a tremendous speed. [...] And then the light was gone ...”(King, 1993:211).

There is another fairy tale which could be related to King’s novel: that of the ugly duckling. There is a description in the beginning of the novel which likens Carrie to a

“frog among swans” (King, 1993:10), and this might be a direct allusion to this other tale. At the Prom we witness Carrie’s transformation from ugly duckling to a beautiful swan. Her beauty shines forth from inside, the accessories (new dress, make-up) have only a secondary importance. But for all her beauty, she is not given a chance to start a new life: her nemesis, Chris, pushes her back again into the role of the sufferer of practical jokes. When the blood drenches her, the students also sigh with relief: all is well with the world, this is still the same good old Carrie, with whom everything ends in a disaster. Her rebellion against the powerful mother figure is futile, too: it is not the first step on the road to a new life, to independence, autonomy. Instead of that, they end up murdering each other, as if this was the only way to end such an intolerable situation.

Leslie Fiedler, in his *Love and Death in the American Novel* claims that American male writers have a tendency to create female characters who are either fragile victims or bitches and there is nothing between these two extremes (1982:314). King consciously tried to remedy this situation but all he achieved was to create a heroine who progresses from one extreme to another.

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**THE MANIPULATION OF IMAGES OF FEMININITY  
BY THE MEDIA**

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In the contemporary context of postmodern society gender and gender roles have acquired new dimensions, breaking the rules and definitions that have governed them for millennia. One century alone, namely the twentieth, has been the witness of innumerable

changes that seemed unthinkable before. New trends and social movements have emerged and changed the world and society's mentality forever.

Feminism, in spite of all the dissensions regarding the term, has had a substantial contribution to the changing of the situation of women and gender relations. The third wave of feminism, a stage that is important for the current endeavor, began at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The old concepts of equality and binary oppositions which had previously supported the movement became unsatisfactory in the new postmodern context. The focus was no longer on the domination of the masculine paradigm but on questions of the plurality of experiences women have, and the difference, not between men and women but between women from different social and political contexts (Dragomir and Miroiu, 2002:142). Feminism is at this stage if its development directed at the plurality of feminine expression in different cultures and takes into account such factors as race, class, social status and sexual orientation. The focus is on empowerment not on the old victimization theories.

The new direction of the feminist movement is influenced by the general changes of perception brought about by postmodernism and its new approaches to culture and life. Postmodernism is a term that encompasses all the elements of the world in which we are living. The term has caused controversies and a clear definition is very hard to construct. However, theorists such as Ihab Hassan, Linda Hutcheon, Frederic Jameson, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jurgen Habermas and Jean Baudrillard have analyzed the concept and tried to define it, to create a poetics, to find characteristic features and explain it.

An important theory of the postmodern world comes to add evidence in the issue of gender roles and gender relations at the beginning of the third millennium. It concerns the contemporary consumerist society and its new values created by the media. These are discussed by Jean Baudrillard in his famous theories about simulations, hyper-reality and the role of the media in postmodern society. What Baudrillard is trying to prove is that this world we are living in is nothing but one huge simulacrum that rules our lives. In his book *Understanding Media Cultures*, Nick Stevenson entitles one chapter *Baudrillard's Blizzards* and devotes it to the theorist's views related to media and its effect on people in the postmodern context. He summarizes the main points of interest in Baudrillard's theories:

Jean Baudrillard has provided the most sophisticated postmodern critique of mass

communication currently available. He has addressed the ways in which the experience of the late twentieth century has been radically altered by the growth of communications technologies, transitory fashions, theme parks, graffiti, and post-industrial lifestyle. For Baudrillard, the arrival of consumer cultures radically questions the distinctions usually drawn between high and low art, the profound and the superficial, culture and commodity, the signifier and the signified and the idea of human needs and the current offerings of late capitalism (Stevenson, 1995:144).

An important issue in Baudrillard's theory that is related to this study is the importance of the medium over that of the message. Our world is flooded by information and the mass media have reached a very high and fast level of development, and they have invaded our lives. So much information, so many messages bully us every day that we have become immune. We have given up involvement and participation and have become simple disinterested and indifferent viewers. This indifference is the result of the elimination of the subject by the rush of information, Baudrillard pessimistically concludes (Stevenson, 1995:145). This is a harmful consequence of the exacerbated popularity of the mass media and it translates into the disappearance of critical reflection. The subject has become passive and rejects participation.

Another of Baudrillard's theories has to do with advertising. His analysis leads to the conclusion that the relations of production and consumption have been replaced by a sign system and so, "before goods (objects) can be consumed they must become signs" (Stevenson, 1995:149). Signs are organized into codes that help human beings come to realize their needs. People, therefore, consume according to the needs that are created by these codes present in advertising. This idea resembles very much the theory promoted by Nachbar and Lause in their study on popular culture where they argue that popular culture both provides for our needs and creates new needs (Nachbar and Lause, 1992:6).

The best and most popular means of creating expectancy regarding the signs and codes that objects are endowed with is advertising – one of the most manipulative instruments of the mass media. Stevenson remarks: "The object is not consumed by a subject whose needs are fixed by a universal human nature or biology. [...] Social goods are consumed not to satisfy pre-existing needs but to gratify social distinctions" (Stevenson, 1995:149-150). The rhythm of economic development has led to an avalanche of products that has slowly taught people to consume much more resources than they would normally need, leading thus to a consumerist society.

Advertising creates a new language and, as a consequence, new subject positions. Through its invasive force television and the other mass media turn into people's only system of reference. The cult of the image as a sign of the real is paramount. The media use their manipulative power and create images promoting them as real, thus contributing to the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes and false beliefs with harmful consequences.

This is how contemporary society shapes itself, or rather is shaped by the media at the turn of the century and the media declare that feminism is an obsolete movement because women are no longer interested in it. Mihaela Miroiu comments in *Lexicon feminist*:

The end of feminism is an idea created by the mass-media, which claims that feminism time is over and that this "trend" is obsolete. The message is not that the gender equity requirements have been resolved but that women no longer care for them. It is a permanent pseudo-intellectual critique and a continuous irony to feminism. (Dragomir and Miroiu, 2002:145). [my translation]

Other theorists such as Germaine Greer, quoted by *Lexicon feminist*, propose that postfeminism is a creation of multinational corporations that need women as consumers for their products and also need a liberation of the media from the constraints of the rigid feminist agendas (Dragomir and Miroiu, 2002:145). The mass media are the most important means of promoting these ideas and they are doing it successfully.

A parenthesis should be made here to discuss an issue that is relevant for the point of the paper, namely stereotypes. The world is far too complicated for the human mind to grasp and accept it at once in all its complexity. For the immediate purpose practicality is needed and the answer to that is the stereotype, which, according to Nachbar and Lause "is such a natural human function and is so common that it occasionally functions in a useful way" (Nachbar and Lause, 1992:238). The conclusion that could be drawn from this simple sentence is that stereotypes are perceived as negative.

In theorizing stereotypes Nachbar and Lause analyze them in order to extract pertinent definitions and explain their uses and characteristics. Medhurst describes how stereotypes are created but Nachbar and Lause offer a definition that sounds like this: "A stereotype is a standardized conception or image of a specific group of people or objects",



which is “held in common by the members of a group” and which is a “direct expression of beliefs and values” (Nachbar and Lause, 1992:236-237). Popular stereotypes are shared by people belonging to a common cultural mindset and express the opposition “we/them” and, in the case of a negative stereotype, it protects “us” from the unknown, from “otherness”, as Medhurst remarks quoting Richard Dyer: “stereotypes exists in order to ‘make’ visible the invisible, so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares” (Medhurst 1998:285).

The important element that is relevant for our immediate purposes is the fact that the typical location of stereotypes is acknowledged to be the media. Advertising images are present everywhere suffocating the environment. There are billboards on the streets, on buildings, on TV, in magazines and newspapers, symbolic images that flood that cityscape. Two Dutch theorists, Liesbet van Zoonen and Irene Costera Meijer, in their essay on gender representation observe that the proportion of women compared to that of men present in advertising images is much higher and their paper tries to find an answer to this issue. How are women represented, what is the message of these representations? How are men represented (when present), how are masculine images perceived and what are the differences between the two types of representation?

The infamous and unfashionable patriarchy with its power strategies seems to be the answer to the first question, why women are present in advertising images more than men, as the two authors conclude: “The display of women for the pleasure of men has been a long-standing tradition in western patriarchal culture. [...] To be looked at, to be made into a ‘thing’ for the gaze – to be objectified so to speak – obviously seems the fate of women in western culture, whereas the act of looking and the voyeuristic pleasure produced by it is reserved for men” (van Zoonen and Meijer, 1998:298-299). In this respect the authors bring as evidence a famous and true quotation from the work of J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, in which he notes:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight (van Zoonen and Meijer, 1998:298).

This is an explanation of the double imaginary women experience and men generally do not. A woman perceives herself as being looked at and so she acts in consequence. This fact is rooted in centuries of objectification of women by a patriarchal culture which apparently is still very much alive.

Since women are aware of being looked at they concern themselves with their physical appearance which is dictated from outside. Rules imposed from outside have prescribed for centuries standards of femininity and the myth of beauty. Femininity, like gender, are cultural constructs and not natural born qualities. Theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva have similar opinions. Simone de Beauvoir distinguishes between presence and absence (dictated by the dominant power) in history as main elements in the construction of the two types of femininity, the traditional and non-traditional femininity:

“Traditional” femininity is built around the pole of submission, passivity, sexual receptivity in the case of young women, and protective attitude in the case of mature women. In turn, non-traditional femininity is built as autonomy and resistance to the dominant culture, resistance that has been marginalized by the invisibility of women in history, politics, and the mass-media. (Dragomir and Miroiu, 202:148). [my translation]

The same attributes of passivity and submissiveness are still present and promoted visually by the representations of women in media. Women are still objectified through their massive presence in images everywhere as sex-symbols or just as mere decoration on ads, magazine covers or any other medium.

The myth of beauty is standardizing, it imposes certain rules on the female body and in the end its results are quite damaging both physically and mentally. The myth of beauty goes back to ancient times as it has been a major preoccupation in ancient Greece and it is exemplified by Greek art and its obsession with perfect symmetry and also by the famous philosophical discussions of Plato about his ideal of beauty. The ancient Greeks even had a deity, Aphrodite, whose main attribute was beauty.

Representations of Aphrodite in painting are standing proof of how standards of beauty have changed through time and how the myth has been shaped according to the aesthetic criteria of each age. Thus, Botticelli’s *Venus*, as seen in *Venus and Mars*, represents the fifteenth century and its ideal of Renaissance beauty. She is fully dressed, her body is thin and delicate, her skin is white. This image of Venus is not reminiscent of

the ancient Greek legends where Aphrodite was playful, devious, shrewd and proud. Botticelli's Venus looks passive, silent, submissive as she embodies the ideal of beauty in a Renaissance woman, or rather what a man wanted from a woman when he was looking for a wife.

Reubens's Venus, a painter known for the generous forms of the women in his paintings, would make contemporary women shudder at the sight of his overweight (by today's standards) symbol of beauty. Painted in the seventeenth century, it appears to say that beauty in Reubens's time resided in generous forms which were a sign of strength, health and fertility. The nineteenth century Venus is painted by Alexandre Cabanel and she is white as milk while her curves are no longer as generous as those of Reubens's Venus. Her body is more reminiscent of the ancient Greek statues representing women or goddesses. Just like her predecessors this Venus has long beautiful hair, a feminine attribute of sexuality and sensuality. Cabanel's Venus is presented in a passive position, lying on the waves, exposed to the voyeuristic gaze in all her splendour.

The twentieth century Venus by the artist Richard R. Miller looks more politically correct. Her traits make her look very much like the famous movie star Halle Berry. She is neither white nor absolutely black. Her hair is black and very short not fitting thus the classical standard of beauty but a postmodern one in which the politically correct mélange of traits mix two races into one symbol of beauty. Her body is fit and slim.

A very recent image of Venus dates from the very first year of the twenty-first century and the beginning of the third millennium. This Venus, designed by the American artist Chris A. Tsuda looks very much like a Barbie doll in which the sexual attributes flaunted today in every image that represents a woman, the bust and the bottom, are prominent. Her hair is long and blonde, just like the typical Barbie. Similar standards of perfection are promoted today in every commercial image, on billboards, on TV and in magazines.

These standards are created by images manipulated through the mass-media. And since the media are the location of stereotypes it would be fair to talk about another characteristic of stereotypes which is directly related to the manipulative role of the media. Nachbar and Lause point to a danger that stereotypes represent:

Essentially, this second danger results from the fact that stereotypes are not merely *descriptions* of the way a culture views a specific group of people, but are also often prescriptions as well [...]. In other words stereotypes encourage people to internalize a

cultural image, as their goal – a task which may be convenient for the culture (and especially for the power structure status quo) but this proves to be both impossible and damaging to the individuals being asked to mold themselves in such a narrow manner (Nachbar and Lause, 1992:241-242).

And so, women try to live up to these social stereotypes. Mădălina Nicolaescu in *Lexicon feminist* distinguishes between indiscriminate acceptance of external impositions, free will and the advantages of conforming to the rules as far as the construction of the perfect body is concerned: “Women assume it [the normative construction of the body] to the extent that they believe shaping their body according to this standard ensures them a symbolical capital and facilitates their success, both socially and personally.” (Dragomir and Miroiu, 2002:63) [my translation]. However, since success is something most people want, many women try to live up to the stereotypes in order to get the job they want (it is not only jobs like model or actress that are met with such prejudices regarding physical appearance but also any profession that involves human contact such as secretary, receptionist, waitress, flight attendant, even manager) or keep the relationship in which they are involved as most women live with the constant fear of being left for younger and more beautiful women.

The beauty standard of our age is skinny unnourished bodies with firm muscles and, if possible, with strongly accentuated sexual attributes. And so cosmetic industry thrives. Diets, lotions, creams, massages or more drastic interventions on the body such as plastic surgery, liposuction, implants where needed (lips, breasts, buttocks), aerobics, hairstyling, clothes and many other are the things a woman needs today in order to be successful. This is the fashionable woman of today. Jane Caputi and Susan Nance in their essay *One Size Does Not Fit All: Being Beautiful, Thin and Female in America* make an interesting remark regarding this expression and the difference between sexes that is implied by it:

Indubitably, women are the fashionable sex. Yet, although easily overlooked, the word *fashion* is not only or even primarily a noun or adjective. It is also a verb and it is the verb form that reveals its character. As a verb, *fashion* means “to make; shape; form; mold; contrive.” Hence, the fashionable woman is literally the one who can be bent, stretched, shrunk or even beaten into the requirements of the prevailing mode. Fashion often seems freely chosen, but oppression can be made to look consensual, torture pleasurable (Caputi

and Nance, 1992:300).

So, the contemporary fashion exercises a very strong pressure on women to come as close as possible to the standard that floods our retinas every day. The consequences as far as the physical part is concerned are translated in a permanent shaping of the body, which is continually subjected to different chemicals that more often than not have negative side-effects and, eventually, those with more sensitive physiologies react with allergies or other serious diseases or with psychosomatic disorders such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa.

Otilia Dragomir in *Lexicon feminist* concludes that “restricțiile pe care femeile și le impun în dorințele, poftele și alimentația lor sunt de fapt încercări de adaptare la un sistem social patriarhal” (Dragomir and Miroiu, 2002:32). So, it appears that patriarchy has not vanished but that the new capitalism and mass culture that we are experiencing is just a form of subversive patriarchy. This obsessive fashioning of the female body into extreme thinness could be used to confirm the stereotype of women as the “weaker sex” and dieting continues this tradition. As girls perceive themselves as fat they choose dieting as their favourite method to lose weight. Boys, on the other hand, not only tend to diet less frequently but also express the desire to gain weight and become larger. So, the symbolic message of the thinness stereotype is that in our culture “men are encouraged to gain or win and women are encouraged to lose, men to increase and women to reduce” (Caputi and Nance, 1992:304).

Advertising has a very simple role. The method used to perform this role, however, is more complex. Advertising must promote and sell products to as large an area of consumers as possible. It is limited in space (billboards, pictures in magazines and newspapers) and time (TV) therefore it has to make the best of the conditions given and transmit a very powerful but simple message that ensures a large-scale understanding. In this regard advertising usually functions with symbols and stereotypes and it is therefore very conservative. The space and time limitations pressure the advertisement to call upon the familiar in order to send the message as there is no time for detailed explanation.

Advertising generally keeps aloof from revolutionary ideologies or, quite characteristically, aloof from any kind of ideology and it is apolitical. Advertisers want to create a familiar and untroubled world in which buying should be everyone’s main concern as a way to happiness. The new changes in society, emancipation movements and

destruction of prejudices are introduced only when their settlement is absolutely clear and approved by the majority of the population or when it obviously reaches the target consumer of the specific product. Thus, advertising is, as T. H. Qualter remarks in his essay *The Social Role of Advertising*, a very conservative but powerful social force that helps in defining and preserving the status quo through the perpetuation of traditional stereotypes of class, race and sex (Qualter, 1997:155).

As an introduction to the issue of gender representation in advertising Qualter discusses the problem of race representation and how the emancipation movements have changed that image. The black population of the United States and the United Kingdom has been treated as an inferior minority. Nowadays, as racial prejudice is considered inexcusable, black people, though they appear in advertisements less frequently than white people, have a variety of roles that were strictly reserved for the white population such as doctors, police, or shoppers.

The way women are represented in advertising constitutes a different situation. Though up to a point their case was similar to that of the racial minority, the differences are significant. The emancipation movement of the black population has had a more homogenizing effect. Whether they are poor or middle-class, black people certainly do not wish to return to the age of cruel discriminations when they had very few rights that were usually overlooked. The situation is different with women because, as Qualter remarks, their emancipation movement was not symmetrical and there were many who opposed the radicals and wished to preserve the traditional role of wife and mother keeping the household for the husband (Qualter, 1997:157). So, the attitudes were split. One group wanted independence, the other group wanted tradition and this put the advertising industry in difficulty as it had to reconcile two contradictory versions of woman's role in the world.

Qualter presents the study of Rosemary Scott that organized advertisements into two main categories. The first major theme in her study is that women are naturally housewives and mothers and this topic encompasses a few sub-headings: "(a) Women do not work outside the home. (b) When women work outside the home, they are not successful; they do not do 'male' jobs. (c) Women are happy doing housework: it is satisfying. (d) Men and Women have strictly delineated sex roles and household duties. (e) Little girls grow up to be housewives, wives and mothers" (Qualter, 1997:158). The second theme expresses the exact opposite of the first. It states that a woman's goal in life

is to attract and keep a man. The characteristics of this category are as follows: “(a) Women are always attractive; they are sexual objects. (b) Women operate alone; they do not relate with other women, only to men. (c) Men are intelligent, women are not. Men do not like intelligent women (who are ‘unfeminine’). Women have inferior ability” (Qualter, 1997:158).

However, the most persistent representation of woman in advertising is in relation to the household. The most obvious examples are the advertisements for cleaning products such as detergents for laundry or dishes, whitening products, laundry conditioners, products used to clean bathrooms and toilets etc. Most of these products are promoted using the familiar environment of the home where women use them in order to make the house look spotless. The implicit message is that the woman, although many times shown alone, does not actually live alone. She has a family, so she is a wife and a mother. Her role is to unite the family by conciliating disruptive moments such as the staining of the tablecloth with wine or the soiling of clothes with chocolate or dirt. So, women are crucial, in their little restricted space of decision-making.

Qualter remarks that although changes are apparent only few of them are fundamental. When advertising shows the liberated women, this concept is actually opposed to that prescribed by the emancipation movements (Qualter, 1997 159:160). So the stereotypes are preserved in order to maintain a safe market as women are the ones who deal on a daily basis with those products and so they are supposed to know how to handle them. Qualter comments here on that crucial characteristic of advertising to preserve the status quo in order to ensure a secure market: “There is an enormous economic benefit in persuading women to accept the status of an unpaid semi-servant class (Qualter, 1997:162).

Qualter also remarks that the advertising industry today ignores the economic reality which forces women to work outside the home and also continue their traditional role at the same time: “there is little room in the safe, comfortable, middle-class world of the commercials for working-class women or single parents. The contribution of women to the labour force is barely acknowledged, while the women who populate the beer, soft drink, and sports car advertisements are all young, carefree hedonists who never, apparently, need to work for their living” (Qualter, 1997:158). So, it is self-implied that these women have other financial resources since they don’t have to work and these resources are usually held by men who support women and their fantasies.

Disregarding women's actual professions and true roles in society, advertising regards them only as consumers. To this end stereotypes are used with both their roles, to describe and mostly to prescribe which is very useful for the cosmetic industry. Cosmetic products for men are present in a very low percentage compared to those for women, as appearance is a feminine preoccupation. Men's importance and respectability are not given by looks (which is actually regarded as an effeminate activity related to homosexuality) but by their job and financial resources.

In spite of progress, politically correct policies and many attempts to overcome such overt images promoting women as sexual objects or trapped in the home environment, the conservative force of advertising is much stronger. This industry continues to regard women either as consumers or as objects. Qualter remarks that advertising is being overtaken by reality because, as adverts show women in the same stock positions, in reality the domains in which women function are much more diverse and in order to avoid losing their audience and consumers advertising promoters should relinquish the old stereotypes of idealized consumers and focus more on the real women of today and their preoccupations (Qualter, 1997:160-161).

However, changes exist. What is evident in the world today is that more and more elements that enter the masculine world from the feminine world and vice-versa. There is more emphasis on looks and external aspect in men. There is also emphasis on style in the fashion for men that is more and more influenced by feminine fashion just as feminine fashion had been influenced by the masculine one before. Men are becoming familiar faces in commercial images though context and symbolism still dictate gender separation and discrimination.

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**SOAPS FOR EVERYBODY! THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE  
NARRATIVE OF SOAP OPERAS**

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Soap operas are an immensely popular cultural format, attracting more than two million viewers each day in Hungary alone, the majority of these being female (<http://www.mediainfo.hu>). While the soap opera audience contains men as well as women, the genre “soap opera” carries heavily feminine connotations in contemporary culture, as it has been marketed and addressed to women since its radio-broadcast origins in the first part of the twentieth century. The soap opera continued the tradition of women’s domestic fiction of the nineteenth century, which had also been maintained in the magazine stories of the 1920s and 1930s. It also drew upon the conventions of the “woman’s film” of the 1930s. Once it had moved to the medium of TV, the primary target audience for soap operas - women working in the home - was intended to integrate the viewing of soaps into their daily routines. Soap operas, according to Ann Gray, form an important part of female viewers’ everyday lives, and give focus to a female culture which they share (1987:48). Such an approach either narrows its reference by specifying the kinds of women it describes (in terms of class, race, sexual orientation, nationality, age, etc.) or runs the risk of invoking a universalized “woman” whose affiliation with the codes of femininity is assumed as a norm. Watching soaps is as much a proof of femininity, as soap opera aversion is a sign of a Nobel prize candidate. The real issue is not the individual or gendered difference in tastes, but rather the structural and ideological features that explain the soap’s unbroken popularity.

Although the consumer value of soap operas is high they can boast of little appreciation in academic circles. The scholars’ reluctance to engage with soap operas arises from the marginal status of the genre itself. If we now have “gendered genres” in television studies, soaps are considered be the most feminine of them all: Tania Modleski cites statistics showing that 90 percent of soap viewers in the early 1980s were women, and she and other feminist theorists have shown how the multiple climaxes, slow-paced, weak action, the lack of closure, the constantly shifting points of view, the priority of dialogues over action, and the depictions of female power so common in daytime soaps mark them as a specifically feminine alternative to masculine narrative traditions.

Moreover, soap opera texts continue to perpetuate such myths of the dominant culture as the primacy of the heterosexual marriage, the irrevocability of blood-ties between mothers and children, and the priority of white upper middle class citizens’ concerns over those of other ethnic and social groups. *Dallas*, the program that sparked the primetime soap boom of the 1980s in the US, not only borrowed the serial from daytime

soaps, but also the structuring device of the extended family (the Ewings), complete with patriarch, matriarch, good son, bad son and in-laws - all of whom lived in the same Texas-sized house. The kinship and romance plots that could be generated around these family members were believed to be the basis for attracting female viewers, while Ewing Oil's boardroom intrigues would draw adult males, accustomed to "masculine" genres (western, crime, and legal dramas).

Feminist recuperations of soap opera have most recently relied upon explications of how viewers use such texts for feminist ends: to satisfy unconscious drives towards female power, to serve as the focus for communities of friends whose conversations about the plots can be critical or carnivalesque, and hence subversive of the plots' apparent ideologies. "Feminine emotional experience" does not emanate from the female body or even from any given woman's psychology. It is a process structured by culturally produced and received intensities. For some viewers, the intensity of emotions are a form of background noise in a life otherwise detached from the concerns of the soap opera plot; for others - particularly those who are moved enough by the storyline to want to write about it on-line - the intensities are more present, more vividly part of daily consciousness. To watch every day is to be carried along on that wave of intensities, to experience the build-ups, the crises, and the undertows of response as one of the structuring principles of daily life. To watch every day - to have your emotional life structured, however subtly, by that wave pattern—is to be continually re-gendered, whether you are male or female, whether you experience the feelings as "genuine emotions" or "intensities," whether you view this process as part of the oppression of women or as an opportunity for celebrating white, middle class, feminine experience. In focusing on gender rather than sex in my analysis of soap opera viewing, I mean specifically to include those men who are as dedicated to watching soaps as their female counterparts, and who are, in that sense, full participants in this aspect of feminine culture.

Although soap opera texts are relatively open to different interpretations, they do require certain types of knowledge to draw on in order to make sense of the program. These include familiarity with the genre, with the history of the specific soap opera, and with the wider cultural competence of marriage, family and personal life (Dyer, 1987:14). This is a kind of competence that does not depend on gender.

The analysis of the narrative structure of soap operas reveals that they amalgamate elements of genres which traditionally attract male or female audiences. *Dallas*, a

production of the CBS network, the main topics of which are sex, intrigue, money and power, was broadcast around the world from 1978 to 1991 in 5,034 episodes over 14 seasons. The popular long-running American primetime TV soap is just about emotions. And as everything in Texas is always said to be so much larger, bigger, and huger than life so is Texas emotion. The narrative is defined by just such an emotional wave pattern that gives rise to the story and satisfies the rhythm of both melodrama and whodunit. Before I analyzed and sketched the dominant emotions being represented in individual episodes over five weeks (of Season 1), it had been my impression that particular episodes tend to be unified around the representation of certain sets of emotions: there are anxious scenes, angry scenes, jealous scenes, desperate scenes, etc. My analysis of all the scenes in those episodes indicates that this is generally true, that each episode is dominated by characters populating various subplots, expressing a particular subset of all the emotions available to soap opera diegeses. A typical example of that is the ‘anxious’ scene where Cliff Barnes (who is a constant loser) is discussing the latest news about his rival, JR, with his mother and where nine different emotions (nine different subplots) back up the leading emotion, his embitterment.

Liz: Clifford? What’s the matter? →*concern*

Clifford: Nothing.

L: You must’ve read that story about JR and Sue Ellen’s divorce at least three times as you sit there. →*curiosity*

C: I always enjoy if there is something bad with JR. →*gloat, vengeance*

L: It’s more than that, isn’t it? →*secrecy*

C: Why should it be?

L: The penalty case that you had with JR over John Ross.

C: Where did you hear about that?

L: I wasn’t in Mars, I was in Huston. That made the papers there, too.

C: Yeh, there was something to that. She used me to get back to JR. And I *fell in love* with her. And I think she fell in love with me. →*revenge, hope, embitterment*

L: What happened?

C: What always happens. JR’s crew and his power have put us up. →*anger*

L: What do you say now that she’s free?

C: I don’t know. I haven’t thought about it. Maybe when she’s settled I’ll give her a call.

One difference is there: JR can’t touch me. Because I’ve got the power. →*revenge, hope*

(Season 8, Episode 46)

The five episodes are similarly dominated by the expression of *angst*, in the forms of worry, concern, tension, dread, suspense, depression, and unsatisfied sexual desire, except for the last episode that functions as the crisis point in a particular storyline, where the dominant emotions are revenge, terror, and erotic gratification. The emotional wave pattern cuts across the familiar six-day pattern of a “mini-climax” each week, and a smaller “cliffhanger” every other week, in that it seems to function within a cycle of 23 to 29 episodes. (The first season was a pilot year with only five episodes). After two weeks of tension/worry/suspense/anxiety, one or more of the subplots will culminate in a crisis day of rage/terror/eros. Even the most intense of crisis days will be broken up by some brief scenes from other subplots reflecting happiness, warmth, or affection, scenes which are also always present during the days that build up to and recover from the crisis. This wave pattern contributes to the rhythm of suspense in the serial form, and results from the form’s radical resistance to closure: no subplot is ever really resolved, as the undertow of emotional repercussion after the crisis keeps the pattern of affect constantly moving. In this important respect, soap opera is unique among melodramatic forms.

Daniel Gerould, summarizing the Russian Formalists’ model of melodramatic structures, states that melodramas typically “move in tiers.” As Gerould puts it: “What is characteristic for melodramatic composition is not a straight rise to the culminating point and then a lowering of tension until the conclusion, but rather a movement in tiers by which each new phase of the plot with its new “obstacles” and “no resolution” gives rise to new degrees of dramatic intensity. The “movement in tiers” resembles the wave pattern, in that there is never a single climax to a plot, as each new complication builds more “dramatic intensity.” But whereas the stage melodrama or its novelistic counterparts will eventually reach “the final moments of the denouement”, the soap opera text never does. The intensity continues unabated, each season finishes with a highly dramatic cliffhanger, where one or several characters’ lives are left in the balance, for over 365 episodes throughout 14 years and more, (with the last episodes Conundrum 1 and 2) as the spectator’s “heightened dramatic perception” is never fully dissipated.

Another structural feature of soap operas comes into play here. Soap operas have no ultimate narrative closure, thus preventing viewers from forming long-term expectations for plots. While there are a number of ongoing subplots, conflicts are never

totally resolved, given the ongoing nature of the program in which audiences can tune in at any time and understand the story. Soap operas have, according to John Fiske, an “infinitely extended middle,” in that they never end, and can never be resolved completely (180). There is always the threat of change in the future. Events cannot be read in relation to a complete story, because soap operas do not end neatly. This makes soap operas unpredictable in the long run. One can, for example, anticipate that two characters may in the near future get together because of the daily development of their relationship, but one cannot foresee that they will still be together in ten years time.

Rather than concentrating on long-term goals and events, the soap opera narrative focuses on the reactions and emotions of characters as they live through constant change, disruption and temporary resolutions to plots that will eventually change and continue to develop in unexpected ways. In soap operas, life goes on after the happy ending. Because of this particular narrative feature, the soap opera text as a whole can be characterized as being “open,” as opposed to “closed,” texts which have specific, predetermined paths and ways of reading and interpreting (Fiske, 1987:180). A widely distributed single program, such as *Dallas*, with ‘non-controversial content’ may not be an agent of homogenization after all, for to reach its multitude of diverse audiences it must be an “open” text that allows for a great deal of cultural diversity in its readings, and thus provides considerable semiotic space for the receiving cultures or subcultures to negotiate their meanings, rather than the ones preferred by the broadcasters.

The narrative structure of soap operas gives some insight into how viewers can become involved in the program. Narrative structure and flow have often been regarded as chronological movements of actions in a text, but there is another axis of movement and action that is particularly relevant to soap operas. This axis is an associative one which moves the viewer through the network of characters, rather than forward in the sequence of actions in the plot of the program. Soap operas are complex, with large casts of characters and intricate, labyrinthine plot lines which develop slowly over long periods of time, sometimes measured in years. This type of structure helps make sense of these complexities by focusing on character and history instead of action.

Drawing on structural linguistics in its analysis of language and narrative, it is useful when looking at soap opera narrative structure to distinguish between the syntagmatic axis of structure, which is sequential, and the paradigmatic axis, which is associative (Allen, 1985:69). The syntagmatic axis in soap operas can be seen as the

temporal sequence of events, the story lines and plot outlines. The paradigmatic axis, on which I will concentrate, operates in a different manner, and is in fact one of the most significant features in soap operas (70-72). This axis of structure focuses the viewer's attention not on the sequence of events, but on the reverberations of the event through the character network of the show. It is the discussion and interpretation of an action by various characters that amplifies its significance to all of their lives, and to future plot developments of these characters. I use Allen's terminological distinction between the "naive" viewer, who tunes into a soap episode for the first time, and the "experienced" viewer, who knows the backstory. As Allen explains, the naive viewer can only read syntagmatically, from event to event, whereas the experienced viewer performs a paradigmatic reading, recognizing the pattern among events that unfold over the long term. The experienced viewer attains a level of literacy in soap-opera convention that makes it possible to interpret the broad strokes of an episode of a soap he or she has never seen before; approaching one of his or her "own" soaps, the experienced viewer has the competency needed to fill in the gaps that necessarily occur in the daily diegeses (85).

Viewers themselves enter vicariously into the fictional soap opera community. There are many long-term viewers, some of whom have been watching soap operas for as long as 35 years. Soap operas are organized around the calendrical cycle of the "real" world in which viewers live, i.e. Christmas on soap operas occurs at Christmas our time. The lives of characters thus run parallel to the lives of viewers in time. Thus, it is time, and not plot, which comes to dominate the narrative process (Geraghty, 1991:11-12). Thus feminist critics have shown how the conventions of daytime soap operas, their reference to 'here and now', their concern with relationships and reactions and the real-seemingness of the characters enable them to interact fruitfully and creatively with women's gossip.

Dramatic events are built around talk: arguments, lies, shouting matches, accusations, false promises, and gossip, the most complex structural component of soap opera texts. Feminists like Mary Ellen Brown and Linda Barwick have begun to re-evaluate gossip as part of women's culture and to argue that it can be both creative and resistive to patriarchy. The fact that men consistently denigrate it is at least a symptom that they recognize as a cultural form that is outside their control. Bakhtin suggests that in an essentially literate society oral culture is necessarily oppositional, for it bears the traces of the political position of its subordinate subcultures. But it does more than this, it is one of

the prime media through which these subordinated groups have resisted incorporation and have maintained their social differences (Diaz-Diocaretz, 1989:121-39).

The notion of gossip, normally carrying with it a negative connotation, can be usefully applied to soap operas on various levels. First, the specific narrative structures of soap operas allow for a concentration on character gossip that brings a paradigmatic depth and richness of time to soap opera viewing. Second, gossip between viewers allows for further delving into the histories of characters as well as providing a means for viewers to test out attitudes about social norms and values that are difficult to discuss in “real” life situations. This second level of gossip takes it outside the text into the lives of viewers, where it has an even larger significance. Gossip has important social functions amongst members of a group, however loosely associated those members may be. According to Gluckman, we all gossip, and “[...] every single day, and for a large part of each day, most of us are engaged in gossiping. I imagine that if we were to keep a record of how we use our waking-time, gossiping would come only after ‘work’- for some of us - in the score” (Gluckman, 1963:307). The complexity of the narrative of soap operas generates gossip between viewers as they fill each other in on what has happened on the program and make predictions for possible resolutions of story lines. Soap operas are about domestic and personal problems: marriages, divorces, births, deaths, and all the problems involved in marital and family relationships. They provide a basis for family and neighborhood gossip. Through soap operas, viewers see other families on television to which to compare their own (Geraghty, 1991:33). The meanings that are generated on soap operas are not confined to the viewing context, but carry through to everyday activities. They provide a framework for talk for family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, even strangers (Morley and Silverstone, 1990:46-48). Soap operas extend their popularity even further than discussions between individual viewers. The concerns of soap operas can be perceived to be split between the public and the personal, with the private, personal sphere taking precedence. This recognizes and values the emotional work women are supposed to do in the domestic sphere (Geraghty, 1991:43). The personal relationships on soap operas provide the dramatic moments. These moments provide areas that viewers react to and discuss as a way of testing out attitudes which could not have been so conveniently discussed had they occurred in “real” life. What is important to note here is that not all viewers are in agreement as to how soap operas should be interpreted. There is a good deal of negotiation going on when viewers discuss and disagree over these points (123). Soap operas, in this



indirect way, provide material for discussions about social conventions and values. Finally, the wider popularity of soap operas extends discussions beyond television and into the categories through which people live by means of the dialogue they stimulate in the media. In these ways, we see that the “idle talk” generated by soap operas has a greater impact on our lives than previously envisaged.

In her book *Overhearing Film Dialogue*, Sarah Kozloff reminds us that women’s film, driven by emotional confession and talk, evokes the paradox of melodrama. Building upon the earlier work of Peter Brooks and Tania Modleski, Kozloff finds in the dialogue of women’s films an enduring enigma. While film melodramas are verbally over-explicit, they nonetheless “hinge around the not said, the words that cannot be spoken” (2000:242). Like stage melodrama in earlier centuries, the woman’s film relies upon the “melodramatic gesture” and scenarios of “tears and fainting” (240). On the one hand, melodrama unleashes “the desire to express all” and to “utter the unspeakable”; on the other, it dramatizes “the repression of speech” and its consequence in hysterical signs (Kozloff, 2000:244). The 1950s confessional quiz program exposes exactly this “pressure between speech and silence” (247). Women are encouraged, indeed required, to tell their personal stories, yet their narratives are continually interrupted and reworked so as to accentuate the hysterical gesture and woman-as-spectacle.

A third level of gossip about soap operas is generated by the popular press. Magazines such as *Soap Opera Digest* and *Soap Opera Weekly* provide additional information and commentary about the programs. These can be a useful and enjoyable guide for fan, as can soap opera community websites with their forums, chat rooms and news blogs. They discuss aspects of production and behind-the-sets politics. They have features on prominent relationships, interview actors, and keep track of what is happening with characters and actors. This provides background details for viewers to savor and enhances the pleasures of watching, helping to broaden paradigmatic complexity. Viewers can exchange ideas about hit episodes, stars’ private lives, exclusive interviews with the show’s characters, fashion, etc., while discussing their own experiences and finding new friends. Viewers can create their own story, and predict that something drastic will happen to a certain character after reading in a magazine or hearing through the grapevine that a certain actor is quitting a role.

Some soap opera events reverberate even further. When *Dallas*’s J.R. Ewing was shot, it made the evening news worldwide. As Stuart Hall says, “At a certain point, the

program attained a type of popularity that was not a popularity in terms of figures and ratings. The viewers' involvements became something different. You couldn't help talking about the popularity of Dallas, because people were starting to refer to categories taken from the serial in interpreting their own experience" (quoted in Riegel, 1996:201). Soap opera characters and events have become cultural phenomena. Their enormous popularity has engaged the public in discussions of domestic and emotional issues which are normally deemed to be private (Geraghty, 1991:5). They have insinuated themselves into the categories through which people experience their everyday lives and conversations.

Women's soap opera viewing has long been thought of by feminists and nonfeminists as an unproductive waste of time. Critics now commonly read soap opera as a feminist form. They point to its open-ended narrative, the shared experience of its female and male fans, the domestic space at the core of soap opera, and the medium's attention to women's experiences. Some critics go even further, arguing that women's "indulgence" in these programs is actually liberating. In overcoming the social opposition to the stigma attached to the feminine content and style, and engaging in soap opera viewing, women celebrate their femininity, particularly their gendered identification with romance, relationality, intuitiveness, talkativeness, and other aspects of emotionality. Over the last decade, most of the scholarship on the gendered nature of soap opera has repeatedly pointed out that daytime melodramas form an integral part of popular culture and should be seen as sites from which men and women understand the social concerns that dominate everyday life. What we can all learn from the texts of soap operas is how they reiterate patriarchal practices; the textual sites of pleasure and resistance they offer women viewers; and the ways in which they oppose and yield to the dominant practices of the male-owned television industry. And this is too significant to be ignored.

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## **GENDERING THE INTERNET**

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This paper examines the question of whether we can create a “gender free” environment on the Internet, one that is beleaguered by the old stereotypes, controversies and pigeonholes that seem to be inescapable in day to day life. The straightforward answer to this question is “no”. We will be analyzing the reasons in support of this answer in what follows.

At first glance, the Internet is the ideal place for the re/de/construction of identity. Indeed, it has been hailed by the most optimistic of its advocates as the realm of all possibilities and liberties, an impersonal space empowering through the anonymity inhering in its construction, as the embodiment of postmodernism where the self is fragmented, plural and fluid. Researchers, such as Turkle claim that the virtual space “strips away differences” (Herring and Martinson, 2004:424) in the absence of the body and subsequently its culture and ideology of inequality.

However, anonymity remains a strong feature on the Internet in terms of its importance as a public arena. Lately, a substantial body of research and recent developments on the web are starting to reconsider the Internet as an increasingly personal space. Forums, chatrooms, communities, blogs, the Messenger, even the apparently commonplace email represent the democratic voice of the alienated, of those minorities (cultural, social, political, sexual, religious or racial) whose voices might otherwise never find an escape hatch into the public domain (boyd, 2005:2). At first glance, nobody would be so mistaken as to point out that these manifestations of the Internet belong solidly to the public space with users and participants still remaining anonymous, or having the possibility of hiding their real life selves. Nevertheless, joining such groups means funneling out of the big, nameless masses and acquiring an identity, whatever that may be. What is sure is that the Internet is no longer regarded as just a source of information. The newest generation of Internet sites and communities like Wikipedia, Youtube, Flickr, MySpace, to name only a few examples of Web 2.0, pride themselves on the fact that it is their users who create cyberspace. In order to do that, to generate the Internet, a user account is prerequisite, just like in the case of the now indispensable email. In doing this, gender is a value that you have to fill in and very few sites offer options that are not male and female.

Therefore, just as in offline contexts, gender is a basic marker of identity which goes on to prove that “male or female is usually the first category people sort self and other into” (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004:514). As danah boyd states, even when faced with a

plethora of liberties we still tend to organize ourselves according to old tenets: “by presenting sex as the relevant marker, the implicit message is that sex is the most or the only significant characteristic” (boyd, 2001:8).

However, what makes the Internet singular is the possibility of juggling multiple identities simultaneously, and, in the absence of the body, multiple genders. This brings us to one of the most discussed facets of the Internet: deception. Both extolled and criticized, the opportunity of being whoever and whatever you want fostered by a bodiless cyberspace can entice many a user to experiment with roles, patterns of behaviour, reactions always enjoying the option of turning everything off, choosing another activity or creating another identity, or just returning to their real lives. This feature has been extolled because, according to researchers, the virtual worlds are equalizing. Since the body remains offline, people can hide certain aspects of their identity, such as race or gender that might otherwise cause discrimination (Turkle quoted in Kennedy, 2006:893). At the same time, criticisms derive from the fact that, empowering as it may be, anonymity can actively encourage dishonesty (boyd, 2001:9), and virtual crime.

The online gender deception that is relevant for this paper, nonetheless, is best illustrated by a multi-user game popular in the 1990, the Turing Game, now closed according to its official website <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/elc/turing/>. A MUD (Multi-user Dungeon/Domain or Dimension) where people could assume different identities and join in different games, it was designed by Joshua Berman and Amy Bruckman for the Georgia Institute of Technology as a social experiment to see if men and women behaved differently online and if people could guess who was a woman and who was a man on the Internet. The environment is based on “female games” and “male games” where users of both sexes are encouraged to participate and attempt to convince a panel of judges that they are men in “male games” and women in “female games”.

The creators of the game borrowed the name from that of Alan Turing, a brilliant British mathematician. In his paper *Can Machines Think?* Turing devised the test that carries his name to prove if a machine is capable of thought, by pitting two interlocutors, a man and a computer, against each other. If a judge could not tell the difference between the man’s and the computer’s replies, then it could be considered that it had passed the test ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turing\\_test](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turing_test)).

What is interesting to notice in the gender game, besides the telling fact that the machine, the alien, the other, is replaced by a woman, is also the revelation that, albeit

there is no corporality, no flesh to the identities of the users in the game, researchers have found that it is the text, the language that takes the place of the body in virtual space (Herring and Martinson, 2004; boyd, 2001; Nyobe, 2004; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, Zoonen, 2002; Kennedy, 2006; Gersch, 1998, Mullany, 2004).

The issue of gender and language has been extensively discussed. When applied to interaction on the Internet, research on the Turing game has shown that the language used by participants most often than not betrays their real-life gender. In an environment where gender-deception is encouraged, the users evidently did not remain oblivious to this aspect. As a corollary, most of them resort to stereotypical cues in order to get high scores from the judges and, thus, win the game.

Moreover, the questions themselves were gender biased in order to elicit masculine answers in male games and feminine answers in female games (Herring and Martinson, 2004:436). For example, in a male game, judges would ask stereotyped questions such as “Your girlfriend wants to borrow your car for a ‘night out’ with the girls. What do you tell her?” In female games the questions could be slanted towards “What annoys you most about men?”, “Describe the outfit you wore on Monday.” (Nyobe, 2004:70)

Another telling aspect is the fact that the judges’ identification of real-life women or men is quite low, which gives credit to the claim that there is a significant discrepancy between stereotypical language and real life gender.

At the same time equally important is the fact that one of the players’ main concerns is to be good subjects and “not to transgress the norms of the heterosexual matrix – they are anxious that they are interpreted as homosexuals” (Nyobe, 2004:73). To make matters even more convoluted and actually show how slippery gender language can be, analyses of different games (Nyobe, 2004:78) has evinced that the more stereotypical the answers from the players, the more suspicious the judges become, especially in female games. On the other hand, however, answering truthfully to one’s gender does not ensure high scores either.

This brings us to an important discussion in this paper, namely that of gender as performance. From the players’ reaction at being acknowledged as their gender or not, the data garnered by Lotte Nyobe in her analysis of a 1999 game include reactions such as “But I wasn’t lying. I was being me. You said I was not a man”, “I never seem to convince people I’m really a man”, “geez, guess I’m not a very good man”, “not to be antagonistic or anything, but is it because I’m a lesbian and act like one?”, “I’m a woman and

everything I said is true. I'm devastated," "I'm genuinely hurt! I'm 100 per cent woman!" (Nyobe, 2004:72). These reactions show how important it is for the players to perform their gender correctly and be recognized as man or woman. Interestingly enough, as Nyobe also points out, losing in transgender games does not generate such strong emotions, the players are actually relieved not to have come across as the other. However, winning transgender games causes gamers to have reactions tantamount to losing a male/female game where they perform their own gender.

Therefore we can safely say that people bring social and gender constraints from their offline worlds into their online communities. Whether they experiment with gender online or not, they rely heavily on known gender stereotypes to ascertain the gender of their interlocutors as an important factor in online communication. As one participant in the Turing Game says "gender is mostly about stereotypical things" (Herring and Martinson, 2004:428) and as it turns out so is the game.

At the same time, just like in real life, gender becomes something that one does rather than something that one is (Herring and Martinson, 2004:426). Just like in their offline lives, interlocutors in online communities act out cultural beliefs on how men and women should behave. In *Unpacking the Gender System. A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations*, the authors, Cecilia L. Ridgeway and Shelley J. Correll, claim that these patterns of behaviour will unavoidably manifest themselves in social relational contexts.

"Since social relational contexts include any context in which individuals define themselves in relation to others to comprehend the situation and act, everyday interaction, be it in person, on paper, or through the Internet, is a major source of social relational contexts" (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004:511). Moreover, as the same researchers duly observe that "contexts in which individuals act alone are also social relational if the individuals feel their behaviour or its consequences will be socially evaluated. In such situations, individuals still must implicitly define themselves in relation to those others to anticipate and manage the situation." (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004:512)

This could help explain the findings of another research on the use of the Internet by ethnic minority women in the UK, conducted in the late 1990s. Part of Project Her@, the idea behind the research was to instruct disadvantaged women and teach them how to use the computer so they could enrol in computer mediated distance learning. In return, the women agreed to be interviewed, keep diaries and create a homepage. It is these

homepages that interest us: the participants in the project showed no intention of hiding behind the freedom of online anonymity, or construct another identity for that matter. These women displayed both their gender and their ethnicity as a central part of their cyberspace identity construction, through language, pictures, colours. (Kennedy, 2006:868)

The reasons behind this unequivocal display was of course communication, as homepages are a presentation of self on the Internet, drawing in visitors, contacts who might join friends' lists and thus create dynamic networks. As mentioned above, in the case of the Turing Game, deception is always possible, however, a fake identity is difficult to keep up consistently. Nyobe mentions the case of a male player who pretended to be a woman and built quite a strong network of female friends around his identity. When he eventually revealed he was a man, it sparked outrage among the women who had trusted him and had confided in him things they probably would not have had they known his true identity. (Nyobe, 2004:69)

In *Beyond Anonymity, or Future Directions for Internet Identity Research*, based on anterior research, Helen Kennedy points out that “social users of CMC (*computer mediated communication [my addition]*) create online selves consistent with their offline identities”. (Kennedy, 2006:864) This is corroborated even further by danah boyd who refers to “people-like-me” (boyd, 2005:2) in order to point out that users in online networks adhere to people who share our gender/ideas/interests, from the most mundane such as gardening to the queerest and most disturbing. Examples from the Turing Game only reinforced the same dichotomies, nevertheless what the Internet has to offer to its users is the possibility of performing gender as multiplicity and there is also the question of what type of users is interested in experimenting with their identities and dealing with the consequences. But this remains to be analyzed in future paper.

For the moment, even though by transplanting gender cues online, we unavoidably reproduce what is an institutionalized system of social practices based on hierarchy and inequality (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004:522), the Internet itself cannot be rendered hierarchically; it does not respect a traditional pattern around a central axis, a unified point of origin and a given direction of development (Stephen and Pullen, 2006:1290). Because it may not seem controllable in the near future, as well as its features of heterogeneity, rupture, isolation simultaneous with instant connection, may help account for the empowerment felt by its users.



What is unmistakable, though, is that by way of forums, homepages, blogs, MUDs and other networks, users gender the Internet. In the words of some of the researchers, we *reincorporate* experiences of ourselves and others into virtual space, we recreate familiar contexts and circumstances, thus, humanizing, personalizing the impersonal web. Yet, by doing that we bring familiar baggage to a new frontier, in short we are still bounded by the same inequities we are trying to combat offline.

In conclusion, communication on the Internet is not free of the flotsam and jetsam of gender. Bodiless communication is not characterized by a genderless exchange but by an exaggeration of cultural conceptions about gender (Mullany, 2004:303). The more impersonal the environment is, the stronger the need to populate it with elements that make us feel at ease with the murky depths below our fingertips. In other words, we recreate the world in our image.

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## **IS THERE A BRIDGE BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE?**

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In this paper I shall describe the two spheres that are present in anyone's life: public and private. At the semantic level they are antonyms. Nevertheless, it seems interesting to follow the development of these words diachronically, to pursue the evolution of their usage. The concept of "private life", in its contemporary meaning, appeared only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The concept is understood to cover the area of the intimate where one can live without the interference of others; it is the ideal topos in which everybody feels protected from society's "eyes". In the private area someone harbours what is extremely precious for her/him, what belongs only to them, what is of no interest to others. According to Phillipe Aries, this private life is separated from what happens outside its boundaries. It is "walled in". Still, on either part of the "wall", whose integrity was severely defended, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, struggles go on.

Public life, by contrast, means any kind of activity that is not encompassed within the confines of the household. This understanding of the two concepts belongs to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I mention this because, if we look back on early times, e.g. the Roman Empire, we would be surprised to see how these concepts overlap. Phillipe Aries and George Duby in their *History of Private Life*, point out the fact that the Romans found it difficult to make the distinction between public duties and individual honour, between public finances and individual property. In Rome, as in other cities, power belonged to the rich who were singled out by means of their wealth. The Senate decided who was apt to be enrolled in it, the criterion being the social status of the candidate.

Public function was seen as an honour bestowed upon the individual. This virtue meant nothing but an ideal glory. This can be achieved, proliferated or lost. Public honour thus, resides in property; the holder of public function was proud of it and defended it as a king his crown (the use of the personal pronoun is to be noted –masculine gender - which clearly indicates that men were the ones presiding over the public sphere. The collocation women-public was not even heard of in those times. Leading a public life, exerting public functions was not perceived as a single specialised activity, it simply meant the completion of a man worthy of this name. An ordinary person who had no access to a public function, to political life, was considered to be unworthy (Aries and Duby, 1993:101-119). Roman society appears to be, according to the account presented so far, one that did not take into consideration the existence of either women or people who could hardly make both ends meet.

We have seen so far that during the Roman Empire no distinction was made between the two spheres; this holds some sense, nevertheless, only in the case of men. If we were to analyse women's existence, we would find them as "ladies", as Phillippe Aries calls them, taking care of the household. She is not the one doing the domestic chores, she is the governess, so to say, keeping an eye on the slaves' work (it is at a time when the presence of slaves is taken for granted). The life of a "mater familias" is a comfortable imprisonment (Aries and Duby, 1993:80-85).

Women did not do any kind of activity outside their houses. For them the concept of public life did not exist. As a "bridge" towards it, we might consider the school. This was an acknowledged institution. The religious calendar decided the time for holidays. Schools were mixed, boys and girls, up to the age of 12. Afterwards their paths parted. Only boys were supposed to continue studying, provided that they belonged to a rich family. They studied classical authors, mythology. Rich families would hire a tutor for their children. Only very rarely did a girl benefit from this, as a result of her father's decision for her to continue studying. What they mainly studied was classical literature. It is essential to mention that when girls were twelve, they were considered to be nubile. That is why many of them stopped learning at this age. A fourteen-year-old girl was considered mature. The husband was to take care of her education from then on. He would round off the process of learning.

But the boys went on studying in schools not because they wanted to be good citizens, to become specialised, but to get richer, spiritually speaking, to improve their minds by means of literature. They also learned rhetoric (Aries and Duby, 1993:28-32)

In the Roman Empire we are entitled to claim the existence of the two lives: one inside the house, the other, totally distinct, outside of it. Going on, following the chronological thread of the two concepts under discussion, we come to the Middle Ages where, to our astonishment, everything is private. State and society are won over private life. According to Michel Rouché, the individual makes everything private. The king is the most powerful in the state, which becomes itself private. The Roman Empire glorified the state, stressed the idea of a peaceful existence opposing war. During the early Middle Ages fierce civil wars were waged in order to turn the state into private property. While the Empire made a distinction between state and the private goods, private and royal goods, in the Middle Ages such distinctions become blurred. As George Duby (1994:27-35) asserts, feudal society breaks down authority into many autonomous cells. For each of them there

is a master holding a private title, the power to command and punish. He exploits this power and the share of his patrimony in a hereditary fashion. Within each “cell” there lived families - the man doing the physical work and the woman taking care of the household.

As I have already mentioned, the concept of “private life” appeared only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Up to this moment, if we look into the history of this concept we can only get a shady perception of what it means. We are never shown the clear boundaries between the public and the private in the Roman imperial period, the Middle Ages or even the Renaissance.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century however, the separation of the two spheres becomes apparent. The public becomes exclusively “the work of the state” (Perrot quoted in Aries and Duby, 1997:12). The private, until then considered insignificant, and “negative” becomes revalued, becoming synonymous with happiness. For the Evangelical Movement man was in charge of public life; the woman was the centre of her house and family. They truly believed that man and woman were created to belong to different spheres. This was according to them the law of nature. Everyone had talents and any attempt to get out of the ascribed sphere meant disaster. Hannah More (quoted in Aries and Duby, 1997:50) detested Mary Wollstonecraft not only for seeing in her the radicalism of the year 1790, but because she was convinced that the equality Mary Wollstonecraft praised so much was immoral and against nature. She believed that men and women had to have a different status in society which was determined by their biological differences. Hannah More also believed that if a woman looked for success in the public sphere as men did, this would lead to the denial and dereliction of the duties God had ascribed to them.

We should not ignore the fact that the Bible presents women as being quite influential in the public area. They had the power to influence their husbands in taking decisions and the latter took into account their advice appreciating women’s reading of reality. The apostle Paul mentions women being obedient to their husbands, but does not prescribe their absence from public life. One of the main problems that occurs when talking about women’s obedience is that we tend to perceive this as a way of annihilating our personality, our nature and even our way of thinking and action.

Still, we find nowhere in the New Testament women being reduced to the status of non persons. Obedience does not mean being subjected and suppressed. It is clear enough that a woman like Priscilla worked together with her husband and supported him in every possible way. She was undoubtedly a great personality and she was often referred to first

followed by her husband, “Priscilla and Aquila”; she could understand Christian truth, she would help in providing places of refuge and she seems to have been an outstanding figure within the Church.

In the Old Testament we have some examples of great women. Deborah, Lapidots’s wife, makes her husband aware of the duties that God had called him to and warns him when he is wrong, making him understand that his honour is in jeopardy (Judges, 4:4-5). Moses and Rahab’s mothers acted with wisdom and authority (Exodus:2; Joshua:2). Ruth, by means of her unflinching loyalty for God’s people, was beside her husband the forerunner of David’s reign. God’s women have their own opinions, protest together with their husbands, give advice, think swiftly, act energetically with determination and have qualities so much admired by feminists (Lees, 2004:33-35).

Bringing our discussion back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we find Mary Wollstonecraft who was very eager to help women change their perspectives on life; to look beyond the “wall” of their houses. She does this by encouraging them to study. Although her contribution was significant, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century women’s and men’s status was still very different. The two spheres were separated, but the duties were clearly ascribed to the wife and husband (the woman belonging to the private, the man to the public, sphere).

Following on the stream of history we see that in 1840 the private sphere was still considered a state of enslavement for married women. At this time in America the woman loses her liberty for good, once she crossed the “threshold” of marriage. Still, there is one little light at the end of the tunnel. Starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women’s voices began to be heard outside their houses. Articles written by them started to be published. They would meet over a cup of tea discussing issues that interest them directly. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century women wrote ample works inspired from social realities and especially their own experiences (Nelson quoted in Bauer, 2001:38-40).

Feminine literature was still outside the academic area. Starting from the year 1800, American literature came to be studied in colleges. This was exclusively written by male authors. This happened because women were not given enough credit at that particular time. Only in 1840 were women writers considered to really contribute to the cultural canon. According to Herbert Ross Brown this kind of literature is irrelevant, as it does not do anything beyond simply relating ordinary and trite circumstances that exist in any family. This type of literature is different from the “true and serious” kind, and by this, Brown understood literature that presented the historical and social events of the time.

Feminine literature, be it studied as a branch of American literature or read in small literary clubs, was considered to be created for a particular segment of the society – women. The criticism, according to Dana D. Nelson, considered the persons that “consumed” such literary works as being confined, feeling at ease in the domestic area.

Taking into consideration the two spheres, American literary critics start a serious debate on women’s culture. D. Nelson says that the most important historical referent for her was Nathaniel Hawthorne and his comments on women’s literary productions. The latter considered that these had only made an attempt in their work of writing. Their works were too simple and transparent to be analysed. Nevertheless, these features made them successful, as the reading did not require other knowledge in the field. Feminine literary works are not only reconsidered but they are also made available by means of publication. This literature is even studied as a subject in the great literature of the time. In this way it finds its place in history (Bauer, 2001:47-51).

It stands out as reality that the novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by their themes, refer especially to women. But it is also true that these had a great contribution to the change of women’s perspectives by letting them know about the possibility of crossing beyond the threshold of the private sphere and so, gaining confidence in themselves. Most of the time this literature hinged on the authors’ private experience. D. Nelson says that there are women writers focusing on promoting women’s education, others develop the psychological way of perceiving social realities. Such novels help women become aware of their own value, their gaining self-esteem in a world in which, as N. Baym said, there is no affection, power of understanding and mutual acceptance. N. Baym said that the family background, against which the plot unfolds, is not a form of idealism, but a means to reveal social relationships, that are generally located within the household. She also points out that this style is “pure and simply real”; these novels shed light on ethical aspects of family life. These writings show clearly that the woman governs the private sphere. Her influence extends more and more getting into the public one by means of publications. To N. Baym a distinction between the two spheres is not even desirable, taking into account the concept of equality according to which women and men should get involved in both spheres.

In my paper I have tried to draw a picture of what public and private means and how these concepts are perceived through history. The answer to the question that I posed in the very title of the paper depends on the historical period we refer to. What is essential,

I think, to understand, is that they both belong to everyone's existence, they cannot be approached separately.

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## REBELLIOUS WOMEN FIGURES IN EDWARD BOND'S THEATRE, CHALLENGING PATRIARCHY



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“I have represented history as a woman with a sword under her skirt”.

Edward Bond, draft for *Socialist Challenge*, August 1978 (Hay and

Roberts, 1980:239)

When Bond was conceiving the idea of writing a play about Ancient Greece, he decided to break the tradition of male heroes that inhabit his first ten plays. In *The Woman* (1978) the author, for the first time, bestows the leading role to a woman, Hecuba, the Trojan Queen, and the secondary role to another important female character, Ismene, the Greek commander's wife, notably called Heros. Both women, though initially political enemies, unite to fight the irrational politics and the tyrannical government of the Greeks.

Interestingly, Bond starts drawing special attention to the female voice at the end of the seventies, when the feminist movement had vindicated female emancipation. The author himself stated the reasons for this change as gender and sexual politics concerns in an interview with Hay and Roberts:

I've tried in this play [*The Woman*] 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 characters of women (*Observer*, 6 August 1978).

In fact, from *The Woman* onwards, women bear more and more “the moral responsibility” for a change in the politics presided over by an irrational patriarchy, thus becoming envoys of Bond's rational philosophy. Years after his before-mentioned statement, the author stressed that his decision to give women the main role in a sequence of his plays was a deliberate choice to show the weight of feminist analysis:

I found that in order to deal with the broadest political problems of our time [...] it was necessary to write female characters. These characters' problems and attitudes made clear the total problems of society and the total problems of our future (Stuart, 1995:69).

Bond, humanist and socialist, becomes a supporter of the feminist cause by endowing women with the capacity to analyse the urgent problems in our society. In this way, as revolutionary exponents, they are empowered to intervene in political affairs to bring about social change. In this paper I am going to analyse female characters such as Hecuba and Ismene in *The Woman* (1978), Rose in *Restoration* (1981), Marthe in *Summer* (1982) and Agustina in *Human Cannon* (1986).

Bond started to write a series of major plays in 1962 which he denominated “problem plays”, where he experiments with different theatrical forms and genres to forward his dramatic message. The author not only examines our contemporary political and social problems but also our cultural history and rewrites classical plays to demythologise the past. In *The Woman* (1978), the last of the second series of “problem plays”, Bond looks at Greek myth to reshape Greek tragedy for our time. The first half of the play deals with the destructive politics of the Greeks, their siege and final destruction of Troy. In Bond’s play, however, the Trojan War is not fought over beautiful Helen, but a plain, grey stone statue, the *Goddess of Good Fortune*. It belonged to the Greeks, but was then captured by the Trojans. This religious icon of male fetishism is said to bring prosperity and youth to the male leaders, which, ironically, has not proved true (cf. Klein, 2003:20-21, 23).

In this play, Bond presents the familiar binary opposition between an irrational and a rational world in terms of gender inflection, that is, he confronts masculine arrogance and bellicosity with feminine selflessness and pacifism. Astutely, the Greeks send a woman, Hero’s wife Ismene - though not considered on equal terms with men - to convince another woman, the Trojan Queen Hecuba, to hand over the statue to the Greeks. However, Hecuba makes Ismene face the truth. The Greeks would seize the statue and still attack Troy. Progressively during their conversation, Ismene’s initial self-delusion gives way to acknowledging her husband’s treachery. Consequently, she offers herself as a hostage to the Trojans to avert the impending tragedy. Thus, from being an immature and docile wife, she becomes an autonomous and responsible being. She makes a decision to take action, while fully aware of the high price she will have to pay in losing her husband, social status and motherland. From the Trojan walls, she naïvely appeals to the non-existent humanity of the Greeks in her powerful harangue for peace (Klein, 2003:25). Nevertheless, her plea fails as neither the Greeks nor the Trojans trust one another. Ismene’s enterprise brings about her own tragedy. She is sentenced by Heros and a mock jury to be walled up alive as

punishment for her treason. Hecuba's power, on the other hand, is usurped by her Son, nameless as a sign of his lack of valour. He is finally lynched by the demoralized, famished and enraged Trojan Crowd, who frantically hand over the statue to the Greeks, hoping to bring about the end of the war. The latter, nevertheless, take the statue, sack the city and kill most of its inhabitants, primarily children.

Faced with the massacre, Hecuba pleads to Heros to spare her grandson Astyanax, the last child left in Troy. Her plea is echoed by a voice from within the wall, which powerfully evokes the voice of the Earth itself (Bond, 1978,I,xiv:59). It is Ismene's voice who, immured, desperately appeals to Hero's compassion: "Take the child! Make him our son!" (59). Their entreaty is enforced by the cries of the Trojan women who join in common cause against Greek irrationality. Heros, inhuman and irrational, pays no heed to these desperate appeals, hurling the child from the city walls. Hecuba, in a nihilistic outburst of despair, blinds herself to avoid witnessing any further act of human destructiveness, while Ismene vows to give testimony of the Trojan War from inside the wall, so that the truth will be recorded on earth (I,xiii:55).

In the second half of the play Bond sets the action on an idyllic Aegean island in the aftermath of the Trojan War, where Hecuba and Ismene were stranded after a shipwreck. Ismene used her feminine charms to escape from her tomb and, unrecognised, was shipped to Athens together with Hecuba among other women prisoners - and the statue of the Goddess. The two women enjoy a peaceful existence in mutual dependence among a fishing community. However, the distress has caused Ismene to suffer from amnesia, reducing her to a helpless child, while blind Hecuba mothers her. Ismene, in turn, has become "Hecuba's eyes" and her reporter of the outer world. Bond needed a second part to transform women paralysed by bereavement into figures of energy and moral consciousness, refusing to use Hecuba as a symbol of sorrow as represented in Euripides' play. Thus, Hecuba gradually realises the folly of her withdrawal from Heros's dehumanised world. With his arrival on the island, still in search of the *Goddess of Good Fortune*, Hecuba is forced from her pastoral, idyllic world back to the cruel, inhuman world she had intended to leave behind. She understands that if humanity is to survive, Heros must die. Hecuba, the "woman with a sword under her skirt" convinces a crippled miner, Dark Man, who escaped from the hell of Heros's silver mines, to kill him with her sword. The symbolic alliance between a member of the proletariat and an enlightened woman is the joined force to build a new world with a just and equitable society. Hecuba's

transition from blindness to insight, from victim to heroine, is at the same time accompanied by a growth in class consciousness. Ismene's loving union with the Dark Man and gradual mental recovery symbolizes, on the other hand, the hope for a better future. Bond's play has thus moved from a mythical world to a historical world, looking at the plight of Hecuba and Ismene in the context of contemporary politics to reflect on the disenfranchised politicians in power.

In his "answer play" *Restoration* (1981), subtitled *A Pastoral*, Bond dramatizes a more recent historical period - *England, eighteenth century – or another place at another time* – as he states himself in his stage directions. Here, he exploits some of the dramatic conventions and stock characters of Restoration comedy, that is, the opposition between country and town, masters and servants. By blurring both the essentials of the historical period and the genre, the author examines critically the artistic and historical period of the Restoration. However, the world of the play seems to be embedded in the seventeenth century and the Industrial Revolution with its repercussions on the present age (Mangan, 1998:57). As the story develops, it turns out not to be a comedy, but rather a tragedy, moving from burlesque to a nineteenth century melodrama. Thus, the play *Restoration* is made extremely effective by the variety of different theatrical styles and the juxtaposition of historical periods.

The play focuses on diverse social groups that are interrelated throughout the story: an eccentric and bankrupt aristocracy, a mercantile enriched bourgeoisie and the poor servant class. The plot consists of two strands: the upper-class story of the insolvent Lord Are, who marries Ann, the daughter of the affluent industrialist, Hardache, for her money. The second strand concerns Lord Are's servants: country-bred Bob, the clichéd faithful, "good" servant, and town-bred Frank, the rebellious, "bad" servant. The latter steals some silver from his Master, and Bob and his mother hasten to lock him up to denounce him. Ann's *black* maid Rose, recently married to Bob, turns against their betrayal and helps Frank to escape, though he is recaptured and sentenced to hang. The comedy climaxes with the death of Ann, now Lady Are, who is accidentally killed by her husband. Bob is persuaded by Lord Are to take the blame for the murder, which he does, naïvely believing that his Master will secure him a pardon. Rose tries in vain to save Bob, the "booby", and he is hanged together with Frank.

In *Restoration* Bond makes use of songs in a Brechtian-like style sung by the servants to establish a dialectic with the spoken dialogue. Subjugated both by their social

position and by their inarticulacy, the songs endow the menials with a certain protagonism by occupying centre stage where they step outside the action and outside the historical period. Consequently, the songs enable them to express a different perspective on their social position, in marked contrast with their shocking subjugation and inarticulacy throughout the play. By presenting the songs in pop music, the action obtains epic dimensions by being transposed from the Restoration period to our time. Rose “is the key link between these songs and the action of the play” (Hirst, 1985:78) because, in contrast with the servant class, she is capable of learning and she articulates her social criticism both through her actions and the songs. Rose acquired the sagacity to survive in adverse conditions from her mother, a slave from the Indies, as well as the courage to fight and to act. Consequently, Bob’s passive acceptance of his fate causes Rose’s bewilderment and contempt.

The second part of the play is set around Peterborough prison, London, and Rose’s battle to arouse Bob’s will to fight for his freedom. The image of Bob in shackles portrays graphically his mental slavery; his pathetic submission to Lord Are - “Ont hang. His lordship stand by me” (Bond, 1981,II,vi:54) - is juxtaposed with Frank’s frenzied attacks on Bob’s foolishness. A kind of morality-play conflict is unleashed between Rose, the Good Angel, and Are, the Devil, who continually frustrates her attempts to rescue the innocent Bob. Bond provides a full social perspective by making Rose appeal to three social strata to find allies for her husband’s sake. She starts her pilgrimage at the lowest social level, Bob’s family, being confronted with their spiritual degradation that makes them accept their son’s fate with total submission. Rose then astutely approaches Ann’s father, the ironmaster Hardache, yet she miscalculates the depth of his greed. He is more interested in money than seeking justice for his daughter’s death. Using Rose’s information about the true murder of Ann, he blackmails Lord Are into signing a document that entitles him to exploit his land “underneath”, knowing the existence of an important coal field on the lordship’s land. Thus, the “two bosses” reach agreement based on authority and power, which entails the sacrifice of Bob. Finally, Rose approaches Lord Are’s mother in the hope of getting some benefit from her hatred towards her degenerate son. Lady Are indeed promises to seek Bob’s pardon, not out of compassion, but only to contradict her son. Unfortunately, she is outwitted in the end by her son’s sagacity. He bribes the messenger and makes Bob’s illiterate mother kindle the fire with the Pardon. In the end, it is power and wealth symbolized by Are and Hardache that win the battle.

Nevertheless, Rose still tries to save Bob by freeing him from his shackles and escaping with him to Liberia. When she realises that his shackles are unfastened and the window unbolted, she understands that Bob is beyond salvation because he has always accepted the mental shackles imposed by the brutal and corrupt system. In response to the irony involved in Bob's proclamation to be "a freeborn Englishman" (II,viii:78), Rose proclaims the bitter truth about all slaves in the world:

You're a slave but don't know it. My mother *saw* her chains, she's had marks on her wrists all her life. There are no signs on *you* till you're dead. How can yer fight for freedom when yer think you've got it? (78)

Before going to the gallows, having waited until the last moment for the Pardon to arrive, Bob gains some sympathy and strength when he declares his passionate love for Rose: "Yoo ont ashamed of me. How I doo love thee! Ont miss the world: miss thee" (II,xi:95). In Bond's inversion of Restoration Comedy and his depiction of a crude reality, a happy ending is impossible. No Pardon will arrive at the last moment as in Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* or Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*.

The play ends with a kind of epilogue where Rose - *a black female revolutionary* - strives to liberate her social class from ignorance, to lead them towards freedom, by singing from top of London Bridge "Man Is What He Knows" (II,xii:100). Thus, through Rose's struggle the servants are *restored* from their discriminatory condition and are given a proper place in society.

Bond's answer play *Summer* (1982), subtitled *A European Play*, is set in the present and located on an island in Eastern Europe, supposedly near Dubrovnik in the former Yugoslavia. Unlike previous plays with a bigger cast, there are only five characters which gives *Summer* the air of a chamber piece (Mangan, 1998:59). Critics have referred to the influence of Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov, among them Spencer (1992:205), who compares Bond's portraiture with "the class-inflected characters of Chekhov's own plays". *Summer* relates the past impact on the present by unfolding the story of three middle-aged survivors of wartime atrocities on that island – Marthe, Xenia and German. Furthermore, we witness the relationship between different social classes – the upper-class Xenia and her family servant, Marthe. Xenia's house and the half of her family owned island was expropriated by the Socialist republic. The house belongs now partly to her previous

servant, who acts as caretaker and rents rooms to holiday-makers. After the War Xenia moved to England from where she and her daughter Ann made many summer visits to the house as tourists. Xenia's presence on the island revives her former relationship as mistress with her servant. The tension is produced by Marthe's partially joining in and partially rejecting this past connection between them, finally leading to an open confrontation. In this way Bond, through the narration of ordinary daily lives, establishes a historical analysis.

The author shows the impact of past events on the present by relating an important incident that seriously thwarts Xenia's and Marthe's relationship. During the War Xenia had interceded to save her servant's life, due to be shot by the Nazis in revenge for partisan activity. Xenia still expects Marthe to be grateful for the courageous action that saved her life. In turn she accuses Marthe of ingratitude and betrayal when she gave evidence against Xenia's father to the new Communist regime. Xenia's action is put into another perspective by an elderly German tourist who had belonged to the occupying forces. Not recognizing her, he tells her the story of how "a girl in white" (Bond, 1982,iv:35) had requested the officer to spare her servant's life. Xenia is stunned when she learns that her supposed "heroism" was not an act of courage, but rather a gesture of collaboration, because, as the soldier tells her: "She came from the same class as our officers [...] She needn't have asked, she could have given an order!" (36). Nevertheless, Xenia is not prepared to be taught to change her attitude, which is symbolically indicated by her turning away from German.

However, Xenia is uneasy because of her situation in the war, and she wants Marthe to exonerate her and her family. But she refuses to condemn her past, still believing that they cleared themselves by their acts of charity. Through Bond's voice Marthe explains that the good they did was meaningless, because rather than free them, it turned their class into beggars (v:42-3). Their confrontation reaches a climax when Marthe recalls the words of an old woman who was not saved by Xenia's family, and exclaimed before being killed: "If I could live to spit in her (Xenia's) face" (45). The woman's frustrated wish is granted by Marthe's gesture, herself now a sick old woman, when she *heaves herself out of her chair and spits in Xenia's face* (45). This reminds her of the fate of all the women imprisoned and killed by the Nazis with the tacit agreement of Xenia's class. Mangan (1998:60) has rightly pointed out that through this gesture Marthe "forces together the past and the present". The gesture is revolting but truthful at the same time, because it

symbolically rejects the charity received by Xenia and her family and it finally frees Marthe from her state as servant and hostage of the upper class. Xenia, nevertheless, is incapable of changing her mistaken attitude and falsehood, not willing to learn the lesson, first taught through the encounter with the German ex-soldier, and now through Marthe's plea for understanding.

Xenia will not return to the island, and it will also be Marthe's last summer, because she is dying of cancer. The future is represented by the loving union of Xenia's daughter Ann and Marthe's doctor son David. While they were making love on the island, German was talking about the atrocities of war with Xenia. Thus the play ends on a hopeful note. The message is expressed in Marthe's soliloquy in Ann's presence, where she says that: "If we didn't die we'd live like the dead. Without death there's no life" (vi:49). This statement connects with Bond's binary oppositions such as love/hatred, destruction/edification, irrationality/rationality.

*Human Cannon* (1985) is set again in our contemporary period, the 1930s, and depicts the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. The play is divided into two parts and twelve short, often contrasting scenes that give evidence of the struggle against the Fascists of Franco's army, exemplified mainly by the village community of Estarobon and especially by the peasant woman Agustina and her family. The figure of Agustina is loosely based on the historical character Agustina de Aragón who fired a cannon in the Spanish War of Independence against Napoleon's invaders and who was immortalized in one of Goya's etchings, in his *Disasters of War* (Letter to the author, 1987). Bond's heroine learns how to fire a cannon and becomes, because of her courage and iron will, the most effective and fearful weapon in the resistance and revolution: a human cannon.

The play shows the gradual growth of awareness of a common force in the struggle for dignity, justice and liberty. According to Bond's open statements in his "answer plays" such as *The Bundle* (1978), *The Worlds* (1980) and *Human Cannon*, political violence or revolution might be unavoidable to create a just and rational society, if this is impossible through pacific means. The play should thus not be viewed as a story of the heroine Agustina, but how working-class people create their humanity by daily experience of resistance or impulse for change, how they act driven by the forces of history rather than by personal motives. The analysis of the events in *Human Cannon* is accomplished by means of public soliloquies and choruses, which interrupt the story, and function as informed personal comments on the action. This new theatre technique introduced by Bond



accentuates the epic character of his theatre. The author conceives the characters as drawn from history or spokespeople of its forces, so that the play embodies history itself (Klein, 1989:82). For Bond, the dramatic development in epic theatre comes from the individual who struggles to make society more human.

In *Human Cannon* – as in his afore-mentioned plays - Bond presents again the antagonism of different social classes: on the one hand the landowners and the clergy; on the other, the farm labourers of Estarobon. The play opens with the poverty and oppression of the villagers. In their anger against suppression, they have set up a kind of Revolutionary Court to judge the priest who does not prevent exploitation of the villagers by the landowners. If the priest in his role of the accused acts as the supporter of the establishment, the labourer Ignacio comes forward as the uncompromising defender of the poor and prosecutor of the wealthy. He incites the villagers to struggle in order to become human by changing society, while Agustina accuses them of their lack of solidarity and involvement.

Scene One of *Human Cannon* is set in the late twenties and entitled “The Nameless Child”. It introduces the heroine of the play, Agustina, her husband Nando and their young daughter Tina. The title of the scene refers to Agustina’s baby that has just died as a consequence of their poverty. Though suffering, the author shows Agustina’s rational attitude when confronted with the death of her baby. She does not succumb to sentimentality but faces reality and centres on her family’s need. While Nando makes a wooden box to bury the child in common ground, he tells Tina how a stone became the first weapon. This Brechtian-like parable establishes the Marxist theory of ownership and exploitation.

Scene Three is set in a factory compound, where working-class people earn their living by making ammunition for Franco’s army. Nando tries to convince the workmen that by making the shells they are like slaves who have always made their own chains. Agustina strikes the first blow for her oppressed class in a poignant and comic way. She uses her feminine cunning, pretending to be a conventional ignorant woman with a mop and a bucket, to inveigle a young soldier into teaching her how to fire his cannon. She exploits her daughter Tina’s sexuality to lure the soldier from his place of duty, so that she can fire the gun at the dedication ceremony, which is a striking satire on the governing forces. In a very powerful gesture that exemplifies Agustina’s determination, she thrusts her right fist forward with the thumb raised as she aims the gun at the General, the Bishop

and his Chaplain, the Factory Manager and his Assistant, who have assembled to incite the workers to double production. While she fires the gun, Agustina delivers a powerful analysis of her action, justifying this “blameworthy” act in order to avoid greater evil. She rejects the mythologizing of her action by stressing that she did an ordinary thing: “The gun was there. My enemies walked in front of it. I fired.” (Bond, 1996:99) The scene ends with the soldier hurrying on with his trousers down; he is a pathetic figure that will be shot for abandoning his post. This classic gender stereotype of traditional farce is an effective strategy to highlight the gravity of Agustina’s political action. The firing of the cannon becomes the culmination of the first part, yet it is at the end of the second part that Agustina herself becomes a cannon.

The second part is a narration of Nando and his comrades’ guerrilla fighting against the brutal methods of the Fascist regime. He is finally shot in a sadistic way by an inexperienced soldier. Nando dies for an ideal, to create a just and rational society, appearing as a martyr, as Bond states in his stage directions (Klein, 1989:90). Nando’s cruel death is followed by the description of a mass killing (Scene Seven “The Vendors”), where fascist leaders shoot the enemies as a kind of spectacle for the English, who have arrived to invest in Spain. Agustina, in the meantime, has joined the guerrilla fighting but is finally arrested because of the explosion of a bomb in the village church. The Investigator tries to extort a confession from her by taking ten other women hostages from the village. He threatens to execute them unless Agustina makes a public confession. Asked by the Investigator “Who put the bomb in the church?” the women hostages answer one by one: “Estarobon” (114). This scene shows Bond’s commitment to the drama of the classics, that is, Lope de Vega’s *Fuenteovejuna* (1612-14) (*The Sheep’s Well*), where a town rebels against the tyrant and murders him. Even under torture, no one will name an individual offender, claiming that it was Fuenteovejuna that committed the murder. In *Human Cannon*, though one of the women hostages betrays Agustina under duress, Agustina’s enemies know that she is too strong to be conquered. Before her execution, her confrontation with the Investigator is transformed into an extraordinarily powerful theatrical metaphor. She starts to denounce the Fascists, while the women, in a final act of solidarity, lift her above her enemies’ heads and aim her, in a horizontal position, at the Investigator. Converted into a “human cannon”, Agustina *spits out verbal fire* at him and his fascist regime, which is dramatically and skilfully achieved by Bond’s rhythmic language:

Destroy them! Their world! Cruel! Pull it down! Lift me higher! His head! Point me at his head! Head! Head! Head! [...] Our world! Our hands! Our feet! The day! Up! Up! Doors open! Hear streets! Our world! Aim me! Head! Target! Higher! Now! Gun speaks! The bomb – who put – the church? It speaks! Not Estarobon! Fool! It was Spain! Spain! (115)

Bond does not end the play with that powerful scene. In a kind of epilogue he shows that Agustina's struggle and human sacrifice will help to bring about a change towards a more just society, though the Investigator affirms sarcastically that "fascism is normality protected from change" (115). Before her death, Agustina encounters her grandchild and tells Tina to lift it higher, smiling at the child. Symbolizing the future generation, there is the hope that they can live in a human, rational world, brought about by Agustina's, her husband's and her supporters' heroic resistance towards a totalitarian system. Agustina's struggle can be compared to the one led by other women activists against the Fascists, such as Dolores Ibárruri, La Pasionaria, and many others (cf. Klein, 1999).

Bond's epic, rational theatre has a pragmatic intention, inviting the audience to follow the example provided by a series of revolutionary heroines, such as Hecuba, Ismene, Rose, Marthe and Agustina. Through them the audience may analyse the dehumanising structures of a patriarchal, oppressive society, and be encouraged to create a new consciousness through a rational understanding of the past. Bond presents women thus as "appropriate figures through which the urgency, goals and methods of social change might be best represented" (Stuart, 1992:221).

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## **Women in a Changing World**

**“FEMALE GOVERNMENT” IN SERBIA – ONE EXAMPLE OF  
LOBBYING FOR MORE WOMEN IN POLITICS**

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## **Introduction**

The women's movement in Serbia during the 1990s had the objective to "create and articulate the energy of resistance", the resistance of women to the totalitarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic and the wars between countries which were formerly part of Yugoslavia. Marina Blagojević, a sociologist who studied the women's movement in this period from different perspectives, has pointed out that "it [the resistance movement] could have happened in some other way as well. But it did not. It happened actually through a feminist movement; feminism also represented a common denominator in the resistance to the 'patriarchal madness' of the war. The simplicity of this formula was efficient." (1998:11). Viewed as a whole, feminist and pacifist movements were most often inseparable. These arguments lead us to conclude that female activism in Serbia at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century developed within the frame of political activism.

After the establishment of a democratic regime in the year 2000, not all expectations of women regarding their broader inclusion in organs of the government were fulfilled. That is why the political engagement of women continued, but it has had a tendency to slow down. It was evident that women, who make up half the voting population in Serbia were becoming passive. A new, simple formula was needed which would once again bring into focus the problem of the underrepresentation of women in politics and their weak influence on the government. That is why the idea of "female government" was formulated and realized.

The event that this paper deals with is this new organization of the Female Government, which was founded in Serbia in the middle of 2007. The objective of the Female Government was to promote women leaders in a Serbian society in which the participation of women in political institutions (such as parliament) had fallen drastically during the period of transition, whereas in the public life it had increased significantly (women entrepreneurs, managers, etc). Our objective is to describe and analyse the organization of the Female Government: from initiative for the organization of the Female Government, through the process of elections, constituting, organization, promotion, and finally to its registration as a nongovernmental organization (from August 2006 to May 2007).

It is possible to explain the issues of formation and development of women's movement with different theoretical approaches. We decided to use an interdisciplinary approach in this paper which is often used in discourse analysis according to which we can examine the same event from different points of view and get perspectives which together provide new data about the event. Such a theoretical approach enriches the methodological practice in research about various women issues because it proves that there is something to be gained in the combination of two views – from within and without – in research. The view from within is represented by professor Svenka Savic who is a member of the Female Government and the view from without by professor Slobodanka Markov, sociologist.

### **The initiative for its constitution**

In the summer of 2006 the NGO European movement in Serbia initiated the formation of the “Female Government” through the project “Vote for Female Government.” The initiative for this form of gathering of women into an organization did not come from already existing women's movements in Serbia. It was not grounded beforehand in any particular theoretical or methodological principle in terms of belonging to some ideology. It rather had a practical aim in focus.

### **What were the reasons for starting such an initiative?**

*View from without:* Formation of a female elite and ensuring that it has greater presence in public life. Formation of the Female government can be seen as the creation of a potential element in the professional political elite in Serbia. The impression was that the leading party in the democratic block (Democratic Party) has already started the process of education of its male and female members as leading experts in public life. Since the active members of the Female Government are either members of the Democratic Party or of the democratic block in Serbia, it can be said that it is a part of this process.

Since the idea for the formation of the Female Government appeared in July of 2006, several months before parliamentary elections, it can be assumed that one of the ideas was application of the concept of female leaders in the process of the encouragement of women to vote, identify with and accept political opinions of female leaders in the Female Government. In that sense, it was a form of role play.

*View from within:* Female Government represented a new way for women to be present in public life. The Process of the formation of the Female Government was

designed as an inherent part of media presence – the Female Government from the very beginning existed virtually in the daily newspaper *Blic* (circulation 300,000) and the process of elections was carried through SMS messages. This is an example how a concrete women's NGO rose from a virtual domain, an event which was not part of the existing tradition of women's organizations in Serbia, which is the reason why we decided to write this paper about it.

The daily newspaper *Blic* promoted the idea about the Female Government, formulated the procedure on the basis of which the Female Government would be elected which included invitation of citizens from all strata of society to vote for candidates – something which was in itself unique for Serbia.

Usually, the process is the reverse of this: a minimum of ten citizens have to get together to found an NGO which has some previously agreed upon objectives, and only after registration and organization of some significant activities, is affirmation through the media sought. In this instance, media were an inherent part of the organization of the Female Government because communication with the citizens was initiated on a symbolic and virtual level. The idea was to show that there are a lot of women who could participate in the government. But since it was a virtual event, awareness that women could assume the roles and rule the state in reality was not part of the process. The event was rather perceived by those who voted as a game, but also, we believe, by those who designed it from the beginning. An imaginary game is less burdened by rivalry and hatred toward other candidates, and it focuses more on the pleasure of playing it.

*View from without:* This event mobilized broad activities of women (and men). Some women not only voted but also invited other women to vote using their mobile phones and even suggested to them which candidate to vote for or for which department in the government. In that way, women started to identify with and to support the nominated women. It was a message to Serbia that there are highly competent women who take part in the work of political bodies, public offices, companies and organizations. Suddenly the sheer number of women who were nominated gave strength to voters in reality and made them believe that it is possible for the virtual government to become real.

Under the title “Let's elect the Female Government” in *Blic*, for each place in the government (president, vice president and 19 ministers), eight candidates were nominated. It was not clear to the public how the list of 161 potential candidates was formed. Also,



during the campaign, citizens suggested to the editorial board of *Blic* that they should allow them to nominate ministers themselves and thus broaden the campaign.

*View from within:* Svenka Savić as a member of the government is in a position to know that the consultative list was made within the NGO European movement in Serbia after which nominated candidates were asked to give permission for their nomination, to provide a CV and a photograph but without being given clear instructions what all that was for. CVs arrived at the editorial board of *Blic* where a man in charge summarized the data (five sentences maximum for each candidate) which were published together with the photographs of candidates. Comparison of the texts of the CVs which the candidates sent to the board with those which were published shows that the person who prepared the texts was not using a feminist approach. The editorial board veered towards sensationalism (for example in connection with Svenka Savić nominated to be Minister for religion it was mentioned that she had written a book about swear words; in connection to Marina Blagojević, sociologist, nominated for vice president the focus was put on her feminist orientation and activities and not on her extensive research). On the more positive note, some candidates sent explanations to various email addresses clarifying why they wanted to become part of the Female Government, what their capabilities were, describing their previous records in professional and public arena, and everything else that recommended them for the high places for which they were nominated. These were women already experienced in lobbying. Thus a broader circle of women from women's NGOs, political parties and networks of friends lobbied for candidates.

### **Election procedure**

There were some novelties in the way elections for the Female Government were organized – voting was carried out through SMS messages (a modern way of symbolic communication with the citizens). Each candidate had her identification number which the readers of *Blic* keyed into their message and sent to a certain phone number according to previously established rules published in *Blic*. Time was also limited; messages had to be sent by 5 p.m. on a given day. The response of the public was great – 23 000 people voted. This was profitable for mobile phone operators who earned a lot of money during the campaign which explains why they took part in the campaign. Moreover, the barometer of public opinion shows that circulation of *Blic* rose. That also explains why the media supported the campaign – they earned money as well.

### **Constitution of the government**

After the finish of voting and elections, the president of the OSCE for Serbia (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) which financed the campaign, promoted the Female Government in front of the representatives of media in the offices of OSCE in Serbia in Belgrade. That was the first venture of the Female Government into the real political space.

*View from within:* Already in this first appearance it was clear that the Female Government had to be located in the existing patriarchal framework: the candidates receiving bouquets which resembled bridal bouquets, brand name leather handbags, and one of the journalists wrote in the text after the promotion that all candidates wore discreet makeup, smelled nice and had disarming smiles.

### **Motivation of some women for engagement in the Female Government**

*View from within:* Already at the very beginning of public engagement of the Female Government it was clear that not all elected women were eager to engage themselves, including the president. There were various reasons for this: some were preoccupied with other activities, some women found it interesting only to participate in the game while it lasted but did not want to do so when it turned into reality because there was no clear concept what would happen to the government after the elections (what would be its profile and activities). At such a moment several women gave up participation because they did not want to “waste time” until some concrete steps were taken.

### **Regrouping and definition of the role of the Female Government**

In the light of the situation, several enthusiastic women within the Female Government decided to issue a call for cooperation to those women who took second place in the election and to offer them the opportunity to be equal members of the government. The idea was to strengthen the government. Out of 35 women, 15 decided to take active part in the activities of the Female Government.

The initial question after its constitution was what the role of the real Female Government would be (1) in relation to the government of Serbia and (2) in relation to its own vision of growth.

What were the issues?

1. Should the Female Government constantly play the role of a shadow cabinet to the real government in Serbia?

2. Is the Female Government going to provide corrections for some activities of the legitimate government?

3. Does the Female Government have its own specific vision in Serbia outside the activities of the government?

*The view from within:* At the meeting with the new members of the Female Government it was concluded that they did not want to play the role of the shadow cabinet and that lobbying should be the primary method of their work. However, there was a problem to the Female Government to arrive at the concept of its work and the reason was that during the first several months of its existence, the Female Government acted in reality, but it did not have its real form – it was not registered as an organization. This is the most likely explanation of the decision of the members to register the Female Government as an NGO. After registration, the Female Government gained a semblance of structure (it had the Statute, president, vice presidents, and assembly) but in reality it does not have these organs. It only has the president who presides over the organization for a month. From a democratic and feminist point of view, this is a good idea, but it is not realistic in the present situation in Serbia since the organization is thus prevented from achieving continuity in the process of governing.

*View from without:* In the process of constituting the Female Government, the procedure for the foundation of an NGO was respected: the statute which develops the initial idea about female experts and leaders and gives additional explanation of the objectives of the Female Government. The registration of the Female Government as an NGO was completed in March 2007.

### **Comparison of data in the statute of the Female Government**

Although the members at the beginning of their work defined the mission of the Female Government as the promotion of the expert potential of the women in Serbia (published in *Blic* in August 2006), in the Statute of the Female Government the objectives are more broadly defined:

“The Female Government is the association of citizens founded as a non-party, non-governmental and non-profit organization whose objective is the creation of an equal society, an improvement in the position of women by ensuring their equal participation in

the organs of government, in accordance with modern principles and practices, the promotion of the expert potential of women, the encouragement of a critical approach to social phenomena, constructive communication and respect for human rights through influence on public policy.”

According to the objectives, the field of activity of the Female Government is relatively broadly defined without there being clearly specified differences between this and other NGOs.

### **Activities of the Female Government as a nongovernmental organization:**

*View from within:* (1) One of the first activities was a campaign before the parliamentary elections for a broader participation of women and their equal representation in the Parliament of Serbia, as well as a campaign for the empowerment of women to participate in parliamentary elections. This was nothing unique since other women’s NGOs did the same as did women’s caucuses in some political parties, trade unions etc. Also the Female Government made a general plan for the campaign “Let women decide“. The Female Government and The European Movement in Serbia decided to invite women to go to the polls at parliamentary elections held on January 21, 2007. Through the campaign women candidates on the election lists were also supported. The campaign demanded a bigger number of women in the organs of government. During the campaign, members of the Female Government visited many towns in Serbia and the final Convention was held in Belgrade on January 13, 2007.

The Female Government concluded that the campaign was successful and presented the results at the news conference after the parliamentary elections. The Female Government also used the conference to issue a demand to the future Parliament to pass as soon as possible the law on gender equality which was in the parliamentary process. Thus, it was a form of pressure on the existing government in Serbia with which the Female Government showed that it has an ambition to criticize the government from the point of view of the citizens.

*View from without:*

(1) The result of this and of the campaigns of other women’s NGOs and groups was the election of 51 women to the Parliament of Serbia on January 21, 2007 which constitutes 20.4% of the total number of the members of parliament. The law on elections stipulates that 30% of women candidates have to be on election lists at parliamentary

elections. The Female Government and European movement in Serbia issued a very strong statement criticizing the government for not fulfilling the promises given before the elections that there would be 30% of women in the Parliament, for not respecting European standards and the basic message was that the government did not respect the Constitution which guarantees equality to women and obliges the state to give equal opportunities to all its citizens.

(2) The Female Government continued cooperation with the newspaper *Blic* in the form of a weekly column “From the point of view of the Female Government” about the relevant issues (for example the celebration of March 8, elections, the marking of certain religious holidays – for example Christmas).

(3) Preparation of a monograph about eminent women in Serbian history. The purpose of this monograph is to present to the readers the lives and work of women who have left a mark on Serbian history, to serve as a reminder, but also provide role models for future generations.

(4) Establishment of the annual award of the Female Government to the woman of the year. The award was established with the aim to reward women for their accomplishments in areas in which they are engaged and for their contribution to the development of democratic society.

Apart from the above mentioned activities, the Female Government strives to promote itself through projects. In that way it provides funds for its work since finances represent a limiting factor in the organization of its activities. The project of the development of the database with information about 1,500 expert women was launched. The purpose of this project is to present to the public a large number of women who are experts in various fields and point to possibilities for higher participation of women in political, economic and social life in Serbia. This data base can inform potential investors about women with high professional qualities, who can become leaders and instigate reforms in the country as well as occupy in larger numbers leading positions in the state and in society.

*View from within:* Application for some research projects influenced some members of the Female Government to make teams and thus get to know each other better through work which would in turn create a greater cohesive force within the whole organization. Thus a real Female Government can be formed as one of the more atypical NGOs in Serbia. It developed as a virtual NGO through concrete activities in reality and

became a model for how women of different political and professional organizations can work together if they share the same vision. The Female Government also does not have any rules which would exclude any of the elected women (e.g. not coming to the meetings) but always offers to its members the possibility of taking an active part in the organization if they want to. In this way, it fulfils one of the first objectives of the organization – to promote a new culture of communication and solidarity among women.

### **Conclusion**

*View of both authors:* We described an example of advocacy and organization of one women's NGO in Serbia which was formed in virtual reality in present day Serbia and which gained renown and prestige. It is expected to become one of the significant institutions with expert and leadership potential of women who are its members at the time when Serbia is busily getting ready to enter EU and when this potential undoubtedly can play an important role in a faster recuperation of the country and creation of a socially responsible state.

*View from without:* The politics in Serbia is still in the masculine space and because of that the project of the "Female Government" can be understood as an attempt to rectify the position of women in the sphere of politics (in the government more specifically). On the basis of the objectives formulated by its members, it is evident that they have ambitions to occupy high political positions. Maybe more hypothetically, we can say that they would like to become a new elite in Serbia, or a contra-elite in the beginning.

Also with the emergence of the "Female Government" in the public sphere, citizens, primarily men, would become accustomed to the idea that women can also be in the government and could occupy the positions of prime minister or vice prime minister. When we take into consideration the fact that the "Female Government" consists of experts and that its work has the support of high ranks of political circles in Serbia, as well as international organizations, it is clear that it is already an elitist NGO so it will be interesting to monitor its further activities, and more specifically, which interests, feminist, but also broader, will be in the focus of its attention. Up till now, the members of this government have, either collectively or individually, publicly expressed their opinions about governmental policy in fields connected to women, but also all citizens (poverty of women, preventive health care of women, the chances of women to become successful entrepreneurs, undeveloped mechanisms of citizens' influence on the government,

nontransparent financial reports of state bodies, the price of election campaigns and elections, lobbying for state ownership of electrical companies, and so forth).

Also, when it comes to lobbying for the interests of women, we must have in mind that women are a significantly internally socially differentiated (structured) group. Therefore, it would be of special interest to analyse whether the “Female Government” would strive to become representative of all categories of women or whether it would focus just on the interests of some groups.

When everything has been taken into account, there are still many obstacles facing the “Female Government” as well as unavoidable financial, organizational and other issues that it needs to deal with if it wants to gain the status of being an influential counterweight to the government’s policy in a way which occupies the position of a representative of interests of women in Serbia.

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