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OUR BODIES, THEIR PROFESSION. GENDER IN THE MEDICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *This paper aims at the issue of interpersonal interactions in health care settings. The focus is on the communicative implications of the most prevalent gender patterns between doctors and patients at the doctor's surgery online and offline. The linking of the female role to the patient is highlighted together with the professional expectations from doctors within the framework of social and cultural values.*

Key words*: speaking man-womanly, gender inequality, politeness, high-power discourse, Pygmalion effect.*

Introduction

Interpersonal interactions in health care settings are critical events and delicate matters. Somewhere amidst the difficult and complicated process of accurately conveying information, interpreting meanings, and creating understanding between doctors, patients, and nurses lies the crucial concern for a patient's well-being and possibly even his or her life. The available research concerning all forms of communication in health care settings is enormous and unwieldy (more can be read about it in Anne S. Gabbard-Alley's article 'A Review and Critique' in *Health Communication and Gender*) examining topics from drug advertisement messages to the rhetoric of medical art-work from various perspectives. Overall, communication practices in the medical context emphasize one issue: participation in the discourse.

Patients are criticized for not participating in decisions concerning their health and doctors are criticized for not allowing patients to participate in these decisions. Unlike in any other setting, the medical context is one where an individual's health depends directly on the communicative interactions that occur.

As stated earlier, introducing gender in medical interactions is far from being a theoretical issue with little practical benefit. According to the 2007 statistics on the health of the Hungarian population, more female patients visit doctors every year, making three visits to doctors for every two visits men make (HCSO 2008). This is not an especially Hungarian phenomenon, there are also more female than male patient visits in most EU countries, according to the pocket book issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (2008:41). Although the reasons and symptoms behind this issue are more than just related to illness, and a complete analysis is beyond the scope of this study, a communicative, gender-related approach can highlight some of the anomalies of the medical subculture (LAM 2008:336-7).

The purpose of this paper is twofold: 1. to argue that doctor-patient interaction is a discourse of power; 2. to investigate that gender differences influence medical interactions, that is, the languages used by male and female doctors, are, in fact, different.

How the Patient's Gender Affects Communication: Powerless or Simply Feminine?

Two explanations emerge from the fact that more women visit doctors more frequently than men. The first is associated with gender roles, that is,

the female role in society has similar characteristics to the patient's or "sick role" in our culture, and women are expected to play these roles.

A girl from childhood on is encouraged to admit her pain, to freely ask for help and to expect and accept weakness in herself. Patients are expected to be obedient and to cooperate with doctors. Overall, it is more appropriate for women to express suffering and accept assistance than it is for men (Nathanson 1977:68-99). However, by expressing pain and asking for help, women leave themselves open to "learned helplessness," which is the repeated inability to exert influence over one's own situation (Malterud 1987). Learned helplessness leads to a condition where one chooses to play the role of the incapable and allows the stronger partner – in this case, the doctor – to take control of the situation. The focus on the patient role mirroring the female role in society is prevalent is literature (Borges 1986; Bernstein and Kane 2001; Gray 1998; Hausfeld 1976; Malterud 1987; Nathanson 1977). The stereotypical position is magnified when the patient is an older female who is more than willing to list her complaints to the doctor (Roos 2007:345).

This emphasis on the female being willing, and in fact encouraged by society, to speak of her symptoms indicates that it is considered appropriate for females of all ages to seek help for illness and to passively accept the doctor's assistance. This linking of the female role to the patient role emphasizes, by conspicuous omission, that the patient role is not a role expected from men. Thus, it is less appropriate for males to complain of symptoms and receive professional help than it is for females.

While this may allow males to escape the condition of learned helplessness, it may push males into the potentially dangerous position of not asking for help when it is needed.

Illness or Disease?

The second possible explanation for more numerous female medical visits could be that more females are ill more often than males. On the surface it seems to be logical, together with the well-documented fact that females are diagnosed with psychosomatic illnesses more often than males (in 2007 97,293 females and 48,736 males received psychiatric treatment according to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office). However, from a socio-communicative approach the explanation goes well beyond the ratio and statistics. Repeatedly, studies have shown that women are prescribed more tranquilizers than men because females are more often identified as having illnesses that begin in their minds, not in their bodies**.**

There is simply no language for "ill-defined" conditions in the medical context. Disease is the term often used to describe physical abnormalities while "illness" is used to refer to the patient's feelings of unease and the effects of these feelings.

As Malterud (1987:206) points out, "Illness that does not result from disease is not as respectable in our society as illness that does". Thus, if there is no clear name of a disease available for an illness, the patient is often diagnosed as suffering from either a psychosomatic disease or from a non-disease. Patients are clearly being told that their illnesses are in their heads or that illnesses do not really exist at all.

Interaction with the Doctor

In communication course-books for medical students it is emphasized that a patient-doctor visit in a wider sense is very similar to society-health care interaction, since it resembles the individual vs. power impingement. It

has been found by researchers that females often receive explanation from doctors that are less technical than the questions asked. It sounds as if they underestimated the level of the patients' cognitive skills by coming up with a limited vocabulary embedded in paternalistic style. Interestingly, the web pages of online doctors (cyberdoc.com; americasdoctor.com;flora.org/ askdoctor.com; Netdoctor.co.uk; britmed.com; medicdirect.co.uk; informed.hu) follow the same routine.

In forums like "Problem pages" or the "Debate sections" gynaecologists try to comfort stressed out women by saying: "you need to slow down and learn to relax" which definitely will put their mind at rest. Doctors try to "undershoot" the level of technicality to match the level of the patient (irrespective of gender).

The Question of Power

To support the position that linguistic differences linked to gender reflect power differences, the differences in verbal behaviour revealed by research should cohere with some explicit conception of high- and low-power language. Lakoff's much quoted argument (1973, 1975), which was not driven by data, links particular forms or categories of language to the pivotal concepts "tentativeness" and "uncertainty".

Women invoking "women's language" use hedges, tag questions, and markers of politeness in order to soften claims or directives, rendering these speech acts less assertive, and less direct. The use of such linguistic forms may lead to judgments of low power, low competence, and so on, for example, the use of hesitations and hedges ("sort of" or "kind of") (Hosman 2006:35). There is a good deal of research indicating that an impression of authoritativeness or, more generally, "high power" can be created through

the use of particular forms of language, e.g. rapid rate of speech, overuse of polite forms, or intensifiers (Brown 1980; Bradley 2002; Putnam 2002). If men display greater power linguistically, they would use less hedging or intensification, decrease tag questions, and use less polite forms.

It should be pointed out that online medical conversations do not give evidence that there is significant difference in use of intensifiers or hedgers used by male and female clients, although in both cases it certainly carries the sign of uncertainty, and indicates powerlessness. Conversation analysts would argue that the connection between, for example, hedging and tentativeness is usually assumed rather than demonstrated empirically. It is also stipulated that any linguistic form can indicate tentativeness, or, contrary, assertiveness depending on the situational context. Politeness, for example, tends to be linked to deference, tentativeness, and so on, but this linkage can also be perceived as sarcasm.

Gender (In)equality in the Medical Profession

Although there are today more female than male doctors in Hungary, the medical profession still bears the symptoms of gender inequality. Women in the medical profession have had difficulties being accepted in the surgical fields dominated by men for centuries, while men, who have been occupying the territory of former midwives become reputable obstetricians. The profession is clearly gendered: 84% of dermatologists are women, and there are more female dentists (58%) psychiatrists (68%), eye-specialists (77%), chest specialists (70%) and paediatricians (76%) than male.

The number of female gynaecologists is surprisingly low compared to the US where women specialized in obstetrics and gynaecology outnumber men (data collected from www. medicinenet.com). The special fields

favoured by women together with the sphere of research, testing, and public health (where women work in huge numbers) have lower mean incomes than surgery where women are "under-represented".

These difficulties are compounded by the assumption that females are socialized to be "caring, soft, gentle, emotional, involved and nurturing." While these qualities may seem ideal for a doctor, it has been noted that medical schools take an approach that is analytical and rational, focusing on curing, not caring. The assumption here is that the doctor's role is a male role, and therefore, male doctors do not experience the same role conflict when becoming physicians that their female colleagues do. However, doctors of both genders have other forms of tension to balance. For example, doctors are expected to always be precisely correct in their diagnostic and treatment decisions while, also, accurately judging how individual patients would like to be communicated with during medical appointments.

Thus, doctors encounter conflicting requirements: they are expected to show power coming from the "deity" of the medical profession while being "naturally" human in a doctor-patient interaction. These contradictory requirements – which may affect male and female doctors differently– are handled differently in the communicative issues when dealing with patients (in scenarios of medical communication).

If females are socialized differently in comparison with males and if the profession is somewhat "tailored" to gender stereotypes, it might be assumed that female doctors treat their patients in a different manner, in a more caring way, than male doctors. It has been argued repeatedly that, in general, females and males display differences in the use of verbal and nonverbal communication. It would follow that the same difference will be

found between male and female doctors. According to the hypothesis if the doctor is female, then she will communicate in a more nurturing, relational, powerless, "female" way. However, a few researchers state there are some differences (Heins et al. 1979; Langwell 1982) but others have found no differences in the communicative behaviour of male and female doctors (Murphy-Cullen and Larsen 1984; Weisman and Teitelbaum 1985). Moreover, others searched for differences in patients' expectations of male and female doctors instead of doctor's communicative choices (Weisman and Teitelbaum 1985).

In the linguistic representation of power doctors' choice of communicative style displays tokens of the "Pygmalion effect" (Rosenthal 1992:86). Thus, a person using "high power" style may give the impression of having been in a/the power position – that he "knows" better/the best – and this may impel others to behave deferentially. This, in turn, may trigger the person to become, in fact, more authoritative.

The findings of online research analysis of gynaecologists' interactions on medical websites show that female doctors give long, detailed, and reassuring answers to female patients' queries, suggesting both competence and compassion while male doctors' advice is likely to be educational, prompt, unambiguous, wrapped in an extremely polite, paternalizing style. However, the results do not loudly proclaim female doctors to be more caring, or even very different, their communication style conceals a different level of power.

According to offline observations and recordings female doctors ask more questions designed to elicit the patient's feelings and make more frequent attempts to restate the patient's worries in a non-judgmental manner. Their expertise is underpinned by concrete data, facts, and medical

terms: a professional speaking "wo/manly". A (male) doctor's credibility undoubtedly comes from the "possessed" knowledge of high power, which used to be accessible for men – this credit used to have been a male privilege for centuries which he is now willing to share with the ignorant. He can even make comments or give counselling on his own preference. It is of little surprise, then, that, for the dilettanti, doctors' professional accomplishment is judged upon their conversational style. The assumption here is that the profession is genuinely male, and he has to act accordingly.

Conclusion

The health care setting mirrors society in a way that those holding the power are usually male physicians while those with less access to it are predominantly female. The medical context reflects the recent changes in society as individuals have begun to cross the thresholds of traditional gender-roles in their career choices. Preliminary findings seem to indicate that females take on the attitude of those in power when entering the traditionally male realm of the medical profession, while males carry their power with them into the mainly female practice of nursing.

Much more live research needs to be done to promote hospital ward observations where female doctors in their interactions with patients speak from a male position with their acquired power-speech, like a professional, while male doctors speaking the language of authority take on the heritage of the past "professionally".

The issue of gendered communication in medical settings stirs up a lot of queries but answers only a few. There is only one definite point to consider: we are all mortal and we are all going to die one day. Before that everybody is entitled to get fair treatment irrespective of the patient's or the

doctor's sex, gender or power. To achieve the ideal, democratic, open discourse the whole society – including the NHS – has a long way to go.

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GENDERED POLITICAL DISCOURSE – HOW WOMEN FIND THEIR WAY IN THE PENALTY AREA OF THE POLITICAL BATTLEFIELD

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Abstract*: The article is set within the frameworks of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis and deals with the gendering of political discourse in Serbia manifested through the pervasiveness of* SPORT *and* WAR *metaphors in today's political language as used by politicians themselves as well as by newspaper reporters as the main mediators between the political parties and voters, in a way that supports hegemonic masculinity and discourages women from participating in political life.*

Key words*: political discourse,* SPORT *metaphors,* WAR *metaphors, masculinity, gender bias.*

1. Introduction

By political discourse in this paper we mean not only *internal* political communication, referring to "all forms of discourse that concern first of all the functioning of politics within political institutions, i.e. governmental bodies, parties or other organisations" (Schäffner 1996:202), but also *external* political communication, aimed at the general public, as well as the language used by reporters and political commentators as the main mediators between the political parties and voters. Such a broad approach to political discourse enables us, within the framework of Critical Discourse

Analysis (Fairclough 1989; Van Dijk 1993; Wodak 2006; Fairclough/Wodak 1997) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff/Johnson 1980), to see language as a "social practice", where the context of language use is of the greatest importance (Fairclough/Wodak 1997). Critical Discourse Analysis understands discourse as being "socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people" (Fairclough/Wodak 1997:258). In this sense, discourse may both help sustain and reproduce the social *status quo* and contribute to transforming it. "Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between [...] social classes, *women and men* [our italics] and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people" (Fairclough/Wodak 1997:258). The main principle of Critical Discourse Analysis is the identification and analysis of linguistic manipulations. In other words, "CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)" (Wodak 2006: 4).

Therefore, political discourse in this article is treated as an expression of more or less hidden relations of power and the fight for power and control. The main advantage of such a cognitivistic as well as a critical approach to the analysis of political discourse stems from the fact that metaphors may reveal much more than speakers actually say, so that hidden aspects of political power relations may be deconstructed and critically revealed more easily.

The main aim of this article is to illustrate SPORT and WAR metaphors used in Serbian political discourse, and to classify them into several

submetaphors, as well as to point out the fact that contemporary political discourse in Serbia is highly gendered as complex political issues are metaphorically presented in terms of two source domains that most women are not familiar with or engaged in – SPORT and WAR. We also deal with the reasons and the underlying motives for such a pervasive use of SPORT and WAR metaphors in Serbian political discourse. However, the most important aim of the article is to develop the idea that, due to the conceptualisation of political activities as SPORT and WAR, the participation of the female part of the electorate in Serbian political life is discouraged and demotivated.

The data collection used for this research consists of 250 examples of WAR metaphors as well as of 350 examples of SPORT metaphors excerpted from the print and electronic editions of the leading Serbian political dailies and weeklies (*Blic*, *Politika*, *Večernje novosti*, *Press*, *Kurir*, *Vreme*, *NIN*) in the period between 2002 and 2008, during which Serbia had three presidential and three parliamentary elections, in which over 20 political parties and more than 10 presidential candidates participated.

Due to their ability to allow us to understand one abstract entity in terms of another, more concrete entity, metaphors are one of the most pervasive instruments of persuasion and propaganda in the language of political rhetoric. In the next two sections our focus will be on the use of SPORT and WAR metaphors in contemporary Serbian political discourse.

2. SPORT Metaphors in Political Discourse

In addition to playing an ornamental role in Serbian political discourse, which until the introduction of a multiparty system in 1990 tended to be rather mystified and obscure, SPORT metaphors are much more important if understood as a means of hiding certain aspects of political

reality. An inseparable connection between sport and politics has long been observed in literature, while SPORT metaphors are pervasive in political discourse in many countries (see, e.g. Orwell 1968; Lipsky 1979; Howe 1988; Semino/Masci 1996; Thompson 1996; Herbeck 2000; Russo 2001, etc.). There are several reasons for the use of SPORT metaphors in political discourse. A political discourse based on SPORT metaphors requires minimum processing effort by the message receivers (Orwell 1946) and facilitates its comprehension. As claimed by Lipsky (1979:36), the "athleticization" of politics is essentially a conservative method which prevents an adequate conceptualisation of new policies and new directions in politics. The use of sports for the description of political activities serves an important purpose of camouflaging the complexity of social and political developments, thereby preserving the *status quo* in the conceptualisation of political life. Conscious, deliberate and manipulative simplifications of political processes aim, in turn, at relativising the significance of political developments and provide political parties with room in which they are able, undisturbed by anyone, to fight for power, without [needing] a wider control of the electorate. Further, ambiguity characterising the metaphorical way of expressing, as well as different interpretations individuals attribute to certain metaphors, allow political parties a wider coverage of the electorate. As Semino and Masci say (1996:244): "the implications of structuring of one domain in terms of another can influence the way in which large numbers of people conceive of sensitive and controversial aspects of the reality they live in" and can "impose the speaker's vision of politics onto the electorate" (Howe 1988:103). SPORT metaphors conceptualise politics as a competition between the opponents taking place according to predecided rules. According to several authors (e.g. Howe

1988:89-90), SPORT metaphors are common and understandable in a two-party election system, where "one side seeks to defeat the other but cannot eradicate it", while in countries in which "the number of parties far exceeds the number of contestants in sporting events" (Howe 1988:90), they do not play a major role in political discourse (*cf*. Semino/Masci 1996). This claim is refuted by the political situation in Serbia during the last decade. Namely, despite an extremely large number of registered political parties, SPORT metaphors are ubiquitous in Serbian contemporary political discourse.

SPORT metaphors often serve as a cognitive shortcut to understanding complex political phenomena. In this process of metaphorisation, *football*, being the most popular sport in Serbia, is the most frequent source domain. The choice of FOOTBALL as a source domain is not random for several reasons. Certain metaphors function better in some societies than in others, not because of personal preferences or particular situations in which they are used, but because they are preferred by the society in general, thus confirming the claim about the cultural conditionality of metaphors (see e.g. Kövecses 2005). Therefore, each society uses those metaphors whose source domain is based on its most popular sport, with which a majority of the electorate is familiar, thus making possible instant recognition of the rules and behaviour on the sports field, as well as spontaneous identification of the political with the sports field.

As "the metaphors favoured by many politicians combine a very simple explanation with strong emotional effects" (Ungerer/Schmid 2006: 150), it should not come as a surprise that football is a very frequent source of metaphorical expressions used in Serbian politics. As claimed by Meân (2001:790), "football is [...] a male sex-typed sport with very strong links to masculinity and male identity". Being "the most important unimportant

” and the national sport in Serbia, football is inseparately intertwined with the notion of a typical Serbian male. Football enables men to manifest their hegemonic masculinity through “physical strength, aggressiveness, violence, hardness, emotional stoicism, and competitive zeal” (Jansen/Sabo 1994:8) in the same way in which politics enables them to exert power and fulfil the urge for possessing power. It is a team sport organised in national/regional leagues, which presents an appropriate conceptual framework for the metaphorisation of political discourse, having in mind a large number of political parties active in Serbian political scene. By oversimplification of complex ideological and ethical issues, politics is seen as “a relatively simple domain with clear participants (the party ‘teams’), unproblematic goals (winning), and unambiguous outcomes (victory or defeat)” (Semino/Masci 1996: 246).

“Woman. Sport. These two words rest curiously next to each other like unrelated, detached strangers” (Boutilier/San Giovanni 1983:93). Since football is practically an entirely masculine activity, it comes as no surprise that football metaphors are so ubiquitous in politics, which is, at least in Serbia, also perceived as a predominantly masculine activity. In our corpus of examples we have categorised the conceptually superior POLITICS IS FOOTBALL metaphor into three submetaphors (POLITICAL PARTIES ARE FOOTBALL TEAMS, ELECTIONS ARE A FOOTBALL MATCH, AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTION RULES ARE FOOTBALL RULES). Among various metaphorical expressions used to linguistically realise these submetaphors, due to space constraints, we will use only a few to illustrate the above conceptual mappings. Thus, *key political players* (‘ključni politički igrači’) take up the most important positions in a *political team* (‘politički tim’). *Midfield players* (‘vezni igrači’) are those political parties who, thanks to their

enormous coalition capacity, enable the formation of the government. *Penalty area* (‘šesnaesterac’) is a metaphorical expression by means of which the political scene of Serbia is conceptualised. In the *election match* (‘izborna utakmica’) there are *favourites* (‘favoriti’) and *outsiders* (‘autsajderi’), who are (un)likely to *win/lose* in the elections. The first and the second rounds of the presidential elections are conceptualised as *the first and second halves of a football match* (‘prvo i drugo poluvreme fudbalske utakmice’), whereas the second round of these same elections is frequently understood in terms of *extra time* (‘produžeci’). *Dribbling* (‘driblanje’) or *scoring a goal* (‘dati gol’) is a useful statement/move of a politician/political party, whereas a *counterattack* (‘kontranapad’) is the way a challenge from a political rival is dealt with. Since the rules of elections are conceptualized as the rules of football so that the electorate has the impression of fair play in politics, the corpus exhibits many examples of such metaphoric expressions. Politicians get a *yellow card* (‘žuti karton’) or a *red card* (‘crveni karton’) as a caution by the electorate for inappropriate behaviour, a political mistake or a bad political move. If a politician makes a rash decision, a wrong move or a damaging statement which backfires, he/she is said to have *scored an own goal* (‘autogol’), whereas an *offside* (‘ofsajd’), an illegal position in the game of football, is an attitude or a decision of a politician that puts the government and people in a difficult situation and should somehow be punished.

If women are not ardent football fans, it is quite difficult to guess how they would be able to understand the majority of the mentioned expressions, let alone contextualize them in the field of politics and understand their extended meanings. The terminology mystification has a twofold mechanism: on the one hand, the majority of women are automatically

repelled by the lack of knowledge and experience in football and choose not to delve into the subject at all thus abstaining from the political process completely, whereas on the other, the minority who make the effort face the fact that they are vaguely acquainted with the matter and that their understanding and participation cannot go beyond a very superficial one. In the next section we will deal with WAR metaphors in Serbian political discourse in order to further exemplify and confirm the gendered nature of political discourse in Serbia.

3. WAR Metaphors in Political Discourse

Participants in the primary political discourse in Serbia (politicians) and, consequently, participants in the secondary discourse (newspaper reporters as the main mediators between politicians and voters) also conceptualise political developments in Serbian political scene as a WAR, which is waged not by means of weapons, but primarily by means of words and political decisions. If, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim, ARGUMENT IS WAR and WORDS ARE WEAPONS, then politics, as a target domain in the process of metaphorisation, makes a very suitable basis onto which various aspects of war are mapped – essentially, a political process is an argument among several political parties around a number of different topics important to the society as a whole, in which words serve as a means of conveying ideas and attitudes to the electorate, which, in turn, makes a decision about the winner in this argument by voting in the elections.

Based on the corpus, we have classified the conceptually superior metaphor POLITICS IS WAR into six submetaphors, which will be illustrated by various metaphorical expressions, language used to express metaphorical concepts via words. These submetaphors are the following: (1) THE

POLITICAL SCENE IS A BATTLEFIELD; (2) POLITICAL PARTIES ARE WAR ENEMIES; (3) THE ELECTION IS A BATTLE; (4) POLITICAL STATEMENTS/MOVES ARE WEAPONS; (5) COOPERATION BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES IS A TRUCE; and (6) VOTERS ARE WAR VICTIMS/CASUALTIES.

The WAR metaphor clearly and unambiguously shows that Serbian political scene is conceptualised as a *battlefield* ('ratno poprište') in which deeply *entrenched* ('ušančene') political parties *fight* ('bore se') for votes. Political parties wage *cold war* ('hladni rat'), *guerilla war* ('gerilski rat') or *trench war* ('rovovski rat') against one another, in which they make political *manouevres* ('manevri'), advised by their election *headquarters* ('štabovi'). Political parties in a political *battle* ('bitka') are political *enemies* ('neprijatelji'), which, pursuing their vested interests, *ally* ('postaju saveznici') to come to power with their *allies* ('saveznici'). Members of political parties, party *infantry* ('pešadija'), as well as high party officials, party *generals* ('generali'), are governed by a *soldier discipline* ('vojnička disciplina'). Party officials sometimes organise a silent *coup* ('puč') in which they are *coup leaders* ('vođe puča'). Political enemies participate in an *election battle* ('izborna bitka'), supported by their respective headquarters, which shape an *election strategy* ('izborna strategija') and *tactics* ('taktika') to achieve an election *victory* ('pobeda') or *defeat* ('poraz'). If in the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor words are conceptualised as WEAPONS, then political parties in Serbia have the whole *arsenal* ('arsenal oružja') at their disposal. Political *enemies* ('neprijatelji') frequently come *under cross-fire* ('pod unakrsnom vatrom') or *barrage fire* ('pod baražnom vatrom') of their opponents, throw *poison arrows/spears* ('otrovne strele/koplja') at one another, *shoot from all weapons* ('pucaju iz svih oružja'), which is usually preceded by flamboyant *saber rattling*

(‘zveckanje oružjem’). Temporary cooperation between parties, usually motivated by their vested interests, is conceptualised as *truce* (‘primirje’) or *ceasefire* (‘prekid vatre’). They *enter into pacts* (‘sklapaju paktove’), *bury the hatchet* (‘zakopavaju ratne sekire’) and sign *non-aggression* policy *agreements* (‘sporazume o nenapadanju’). Finally, voters are conceptualised as *victims of political wars* (‘žrtve političkih ratova’), *casualties of political battles* (‘žrtve političkih sukoba’), or as *collateral damage of party fights* (‘kolateralna šteta partijskih obračuna’).

As Lakoff and Johnson say, “no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis” (1980:19). This experience, however, is not only “physical”, but “cultural through and through”, meaning that “we experience our ‘world’ in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself” (Lakoff/Johnson 1980:57), cultural basis being by no means less important than the physical one. Serbs lived under war conditions, with certain breaks, for over 15 years. As the introduction of the multiparty political system in Serbia coincided with the outbreak of the first of these wars (the one in Bosnia), we argue that the use of WAR metaphors in political discourse nowadays is the consequence of the immediate physical setting to which Serbs were exposed in that period. The physical setting, in effect, created the cognitive framework for viewing politics in terms of war. However, we also argue that WAR metaphors in political discourse in Serbia are deeply embedded in Serbian historical and cultural background, and that, being “culturally prominent [are] reinforced in everyday conversation” (Ritchie 2003:131), which only adds to their prominence both in the minds of Serbian people and in their language.

War is a "quintessentially masculine activity" (Jansen/Sabo 1994: 9), where "male hegemony is bolstered by the association of men with power and violence in a situation that not only excludes women but also frequently [...] politically marginalizes them" (Jansen/Sabo 1994:9). It is obvious, therefore, that politics is understood in terms of "experience shared far more commonly [...] by men than by women" (Howe 1988:100), this experience being not personal, but the one "absorbed by most males during their upbringing" (Howe 1988:100). Men play soldier games as boys, and in some less lucky countries such as Serbia, wage real wars, not only reading about them or watching them in cinemas.

4. The Name of the Game: War

Sport itself is frequently conceptualised as war and the sports field is conceived of as a battlefield (the SPORT IS WAR metaphor). It is this intertextuality of SPORT and WAR metaphors in politics (or, "the conflation of the languages of real violence and ritualized violence" [Jansen/Sabo 1994:7]) that makes political discourse one of the most prominent examples of "androcentric forms of discourse" (Jansen/Sabo 1994:7). Such a conflation of SPORT and WAR metaphors, as used in political discourse, involves "a marked gender bias" (Semino 2008:99), since sports as well as wars tend be characterised by men, as players, spectators, fans, soldiers, leaders, etc. Such a pervasive use of these metaphors in political discourse fosters the maintenance of male dominance in political life, discourages the participation of women in the political process and stresses physical strength, aggression, confrontation, as well as competitive, violent and pugnacious aspects of political activities.

Football is traditionally a male domain in the cultural pattern of Serbia and, admittedly there are women's football clubs organised in leagues, where women actively participate in competition, it may be said that the participation of women in football – be it as players or spectators/supporters, is negligible. In the light of the fact that women account for 52 per cent of the total population in Serbia, and that they make up 53 per cent of the electorate, whereas their participation in institutional political life is disproportionately small, we maintain that the gendered/masculinised political discourse in Serbia, manifested through the frequent use of SPORT and WAR metaphors, is one of the reasons for voting abstinence among the female part of the electorate.

We also believe that most women voters do not understand SPORT metaphors in political discourse. Although metaphors are a rhetorical device which is supposed to facilitate and simplify the act of message comprehension, we maintain that most women need to put significant processing effort in order to understand the true nature of SPORT (FOOTBALL) and WAR metaphors, often without positive results. As already stated, no metaphor can be comprehended independently of its experiential basis (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). If we apply this claim to the way women understand SPORT and WAR metaphors in politics, we may be justified to assume the following: if metaphors are a mechanism by which we are supposed to understand one abstract entity in terms of another, concrete entity, deeply embedded in our experiential basis, and if, on the other hand, sport/football, as well as war, are not part of women's entire corpus of experience, then SPORT and WAR metaphors, as used in political discourse, are an obstacle to the women's understanding of political reality rather than a means which helps them comprehend the political developments. This, in

return, potentially excludes them from political participation, both passive (via voting) and active (via membership in political parties and holding political positions). Essentially, "the often erroneous perception that politics must, by its nature, take the form of a contest" (Howe 1988:100) clashes with the female cognitive framework which is not saturated with the concepts of sport and, consequently, war. This results in the incongruence of the political rhetoric and women's experience, reflected in the already mentioned tendency to abstain in the election process on the part of women.

5. Conclusion

Metaphors have a persuasive power since they shape the way we think, by highlighting only certain aspects of our experience, while simultaneously hiding other aspects of it. Our research indicates that SPORT and WAR metaphors in Serbian political discourse often function as a kind of "public *double speak*" (Hardway 1976:79), which is consciously and deliberately used to manipulate the electorate. We believe that the process of metaphorisation serves a purpose of intentionally hiding many aspects of political reality, trivialising the importance of decisions vital to the society as a whole, fostering competitive values and behaviour in the society, diminishing the citizens' ability to control political parties and reveal their true interests, while at the same time discouraging women's participation in political life. George Orwell said that "if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (Orwell 1949). Lakoff and Johnson, on the other hand, said that "metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities" and that they "can be self-fulfilling prophecies" (1980:156). Therefore, it is extremely important for women to become aware of the enormous rhetorical power of language, in order to be able to reveal those

aspects of reality in the discourse of political elite which deliberately remain hidden behind the veil of metaphoricity. Without a careful awareness of the metaphors that structure the way we perceive reality, women are less likely even to think of politics in terms of a non-competitive and non-aggressive activity, fitting nicely into the cult of manhood. It is of the utmost importance to introduce new alternative metaphors in Serbian political life, which will reveal some other aspects of politics remaining hidden behind the metaphorical expressions deriving from sport and war.

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ADVERTISEMENTS IN PUBLIC TOILETS:

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PROMOTIONAL DISCOURSE ABOUT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN TORONTO AND NOVI SAD

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***Abstract**: The research focuses on reproductive health in advertisement discourse and its assumed ideological narratives about female genitalia and sexuality, which work beneath the seemingly gender-neutral surface forms. The paper bases its conclusions on the comparative analysis of toilet advertisements at food courts in a university campus in Toronto, Canada, and cafes frequented by youth in Novi Sad, Serbia. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data is informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).*

***Keywords**: advertisements, critical discourse analysis, reproductive health, reproductive gender roles.*

Our research focuses on discursive practices and linguistic features of advertising material about reproductive health (RH) displayed in public toilets in food courts at a university campus in Toronto, Canada and in youth-frequented cafes and bars in Novi Sad, Serbia. In order to record, document and analyze a portion of public discourse about RH in both countries, we focused on advertisements which promote products designed for protection and enhancement of RH. In our selection, collection and qualitative and quantitative analysis of the research data we concentrated on distribution, placement and understanding of the genre of toilet advertisement in its spatial, discursive and cultural context. We identified,

documented and interpreted patterns of distribution of advertising material with respect to gender division. Our qualitative analysis of the collected data scrutinizes linguistic and discursive features of the promotional discourse about RH using the methodology and theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The theoretical framework of CDA enables us to contextualize the identified sets of linguistic choices in the genre of toilet advertisements with connection to social practices and cultural assumptions about gender roles. Finally, special attention is paid to indexing and explanation of differences, if any, between the discursive features of the advertisements in these two different socio-cultural and economic contexts.

Canada is a developed industrial country with established structures of free market economy on the one hand, and with a weakening dedication to socially responsible management of public goods and state resources on the other. Canada has basic state funded health care coverage for most medical interventions pertaining to reproductive health with a tendency towards reduction in financial support due to the global economic crisis. Canada is listed, usually right after Nordic countries, as one of the countries with the greatest achievements in creation, implementation and constant improvement of policies and social practices which affirm gender equality and the rights of minority groups. Basic sexual education is accessible to high and elementary school students.

Serbia is a post-socialist society characterized by a late transition into liberal capitalism. Although 21st century Serbian society is in the midst of processes of democratization, pacification and modernization on the surface, patriarchal gender arrangements still dominate in many spheres of public and private life. Nationalist political structures coupled with the evident strengthening of religious consciousness induce a backlash against many

initiatives for improvement of the position of minority groups, including women. In Serbia, there is no governmentally supported and instituted education about reproductive and sexual health. Youth acquires information about reproductive and sexual health from peers, from a small number of NGOs which have limited resources and scope to inform and educate youth, or from magazines, TV commercials and other media. The magazines mostly offer advice on seduction strategies, not emphasizing strongly enough the need for responsible sexual behaviour and avoidance of negative outcomes (STIs/HIV or unintended pregnancy).

In the comparative analysis of toilet advertisements in food courts located on a university campus in Toronto and youth frequented bars in Novi Sad, we examined whether the advertisements follow a gender-symmetric or -asymmetric perspective in promoting products manufactured for protection and improvement of RH. We expected to find a symmetric view on gender roles in the corpus from Toronto, because of the assumption that the free market economic model and high degree of development of civil society with notable achievements in gender equality in Canada would be a social and cultural environment "conducive to promoting optimal sexual health" (Canadian Guidelines 2008:14). More specifically, we expected a shift away from an androcentric script about woman's body and stereotypical gender roles in protection and enhancement of RH. We presumed that the prominence of pronatalist and patriarchal arguments about reproductive roles of women and men in Serbian public sphere combined with lack of governmentally supported and instituted sexual education programs in schools would be the decisive factors for presence of gender-role stereotyping in advertisements about RH in the corpus from Novi Sad.

Employing the analytical tools of CDA, this research has attempted to determine to what extent the advertiser's linguistic choices, or the surface grammatical forms and rhetorical figures combined with visual images assemble a message about equal share of responsibilities pertaining to safer sexual practices and attainment and maintenance of optimal RH. A specific hypothesis for the comparative qualitative analysis is that the longer and more stable tradition of advertising in free market economic system in Canada would influence the use of elaborate marketing and advertising tactics, such as branding, personalization of reader, elaborate rhetorical devices, or the creation of an imagined community (Fairclough 2000; Kress and Hodge 1979; Davidson 1992; Leiss et al 1986; Talbot 1995). In our qualitative analysis of the linguistic features of the texts from the Serbian corpus, we expected no or minimal presence of advertising strategies prominent in late capitalism because we captured the practice of advertising in public toilets in Serbia at its earliest developmental stage.

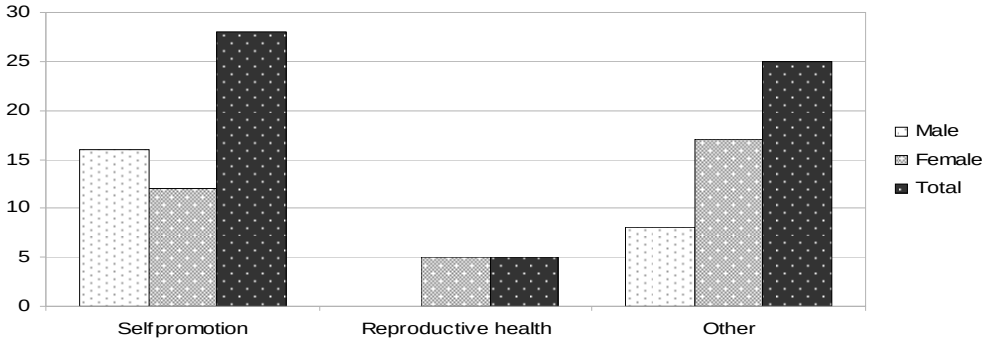
For the Toronto corpus, we gathered advertisement material in both men's and women's washrooms in food courts at the university over a period of 3 months (January-April 2006). We selected and scanned seven pairs of the most frequented public toilets in food courts on campus in order to maintain equal presentation of both genders and to identify and scrutinize the pattern of distribution of advertisements in university lavatories in Toronto. For our corpus from Novi Sad, we collected and documented advertisement material displayed in men's and women's toilets in most popular youth frequented cafes and bars, mainly in downtown Novi Sad, over a period of three months (January-March 2009).

The university campus in Novi Sad does not have food courts, nor does it have advertisements or any other commercial messages displayed in

university buildings. Through the careful selection of places where the advertisements are placed, we attempted to maintain generational similarity of intended recipients of advertisements in both cities and major social and cultural characteristics of advertisers' assumed target group: young people 17-26, students with an active social life and, presumably, an active sexual life. Our targeted group from Novi Sad, however, might include young people who do not necessarily study at the university. While in Canada there is a long and stable practice of renting designated areas in toilets in public spaces such as bars, shopping malls, restaurants and universities as advertisement spaces, in Serbia it is a fairly recent phenomenon which started in 2003-4.

We selected public toilets because they are simultaneously public and private spaces as defining this space as either commonly shared or private depends solely on its state of occupancy. We analyzed this particular genre of promotional discourse in public toilets accessible to and used by mainly youth because the advertiser has much larger manoeuvring space and freedom to deliver messages about reproductive issues to its intended recipient. The copywriter's message is spatially coded as more intimate and therefore not likely to be scrutinized in a public discussion. Secondly, public toilets are spaces in which its user is stripped of most social and cultural constraints and attends to one of the basic human biological functions. Urinary and digestive functions as well as exposure of genital organs are culturally coded as private/intimate. The recipient of an advertisement displayed in a toilet is susceptible, and in a way psychologically prepared by the spatial and functional context to read a message about RH. The decisive factor in selecting public toilets at either the university or bars in our gender-sensitive analysis is that public toilets are strictly gender-segregated

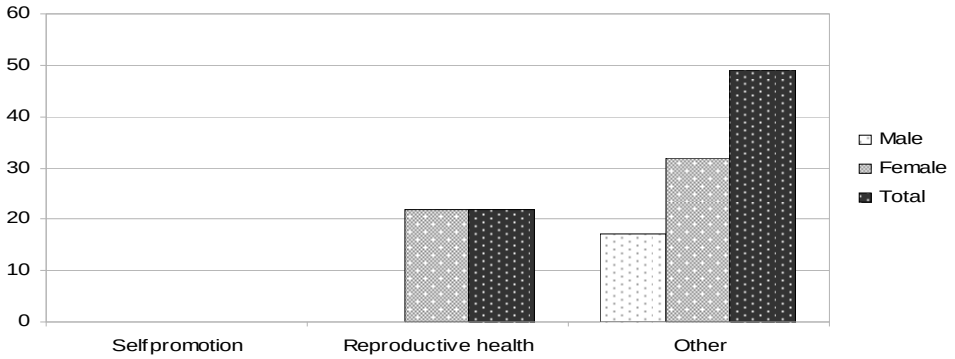
spaces. Their architectural conception, design and construction are based on the biological and anatomical division of human sexes into males and females. This prominent feature of public toilets enables us to clearly identify the recipients of an advertisement and compare thematic and discursive differences, if any, of the displayed advertising material with respect to gender. However, as spatial gender segregation of public toilets is based on a heteronormative view of gender in terms of structural binaries (female/male), we assume that the anticipated recipients of advertisements related to reproductive health are heterosexual women and men. Introducing queering elements would additionally complicate our analysis, and we believe that advertisers, following the patriarchal script, rarely include homosexual, transgendered, or two-spirited people because having the clear-cut system of binaries is easier to predict and address.



Graph 1. Gender and thematic structure of the advertisements in public toilets in youth frequented cafes and bars in Novi Sad, Serbia.

In Serbia, with the introduction of free market economy, producers of goods and marketing agencies have begun exploiting vast areas of previously advertisement-free space, including public toilets. This explains the smaller number of advertisements and the fact that many cafes have only

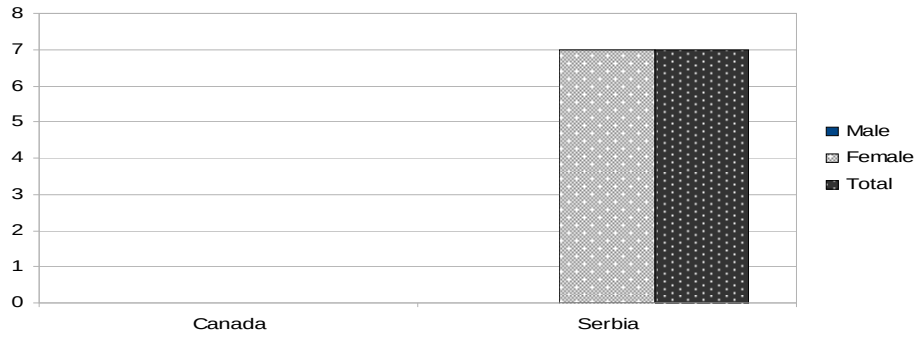
self-promotional material in their toilets (Graph 1). With the further development of free market economy we predict that the designated areas presently utilized for self-promotion will be rented out and replaced with marketing messages about products or business of others.



Graph 2. Gender and thematic structure of the advertisements in public toilets in food courts on a university campus in Toronto Canada.

In the analysis of the advertisements displayed in such strictly gender-segregated spaces, it is essential to be reminded of the fact that the particular advertisement is carefully placed in a toilet targeting a person of particular gender. As can be seen from the data presented in Graphs 1 and 2, women's toilets have by far greater number of advertisements in both corpuses. Furthermore, men's do not feature a single advertisement related to reproductive, sexual and genital health which are prominent in women's toilets. Instead, the advertisements in men's toilets feature suggestions about travel, bowling alleys, or food. If we assume, following defenders of advertising, that advertisements are a medium for dissemination of useful information, one might understand that men do not necessarily need to be the targeted audience of advertisements for menstrual pads. Yet, it appears

beyond comprehension why men should be exempted from viewing information about STIs/HIV, genital bacterial imbalance, yeast infection, birth control, and most puzzlingly, condoms. The rational information model of advertising is of no use for understanding gender asymmetry in this instance. Instead, we argue that the advertisers create and distribute promotional material in the toilets simultaneously exploiting and recycling the following stereotypical assumptions about women's behaviour: i) women are more disciplined and loyal and easily predictable consumers; ii) women are caring and nurturing gender, while men are not, so advertising products related to genital health or birth control to men would be futile; iii) women's genitals and body are impure and require additional work to be purified and beautified.



Graph 3. Comparison of patterns of distribution of condom dispensing machines in Toronto, Canada and Novi Sad, Serbia.

Advertisements about condoms are placed only in women's toilets in both instances. A university in Toronto, like the one in Novi Sad, does not feature condom dispensers. In the youth cafes and clubs in Novi Sad, condom dispensers are placed in women's toilets, while the matching men's toilets do not feature them. The condoms are offered at an affordable price

because it is crucial to supply youth with affordable condoms in order to minimize the risks of spread of STI/HIV and prevent unintended pregnancies. However, unequal exposure of women and men to information about safer sex and means of protection of RH is part of the patriarchal narrative about reproductive responsibilities. Such a pattern of distribution of condom dispensers suggests that women should not rely solely on them as their primary method of birth control, if it is other than condom because condoms are the most efficient means for protection from STI/HIV. On the other hand, lack of condom dispensers in men's toilets suggests that either men carry condoms with them, or that their partner will supply them with condoms.

Both placement of condom dispensers and marketing strategy of advertising condoms and contraceptive devices in women's toilets only amplify the truism that birth control and prevention of STIs are and should remain solely a woman's responsibility. In our view, only equal exposure of both women and men to accessible and affordable condoms can reduce both transmission of STIs and prevent unintended pregnancy. The sole focus on educating women about responsible sexual behaviour and need to remind their male partners about practicing safer sex recycles millennia-old patriarchal assumptions that RH is solely a woman's responsibility. Researchers who analyze issues related to sexual reproductive health from a gender perspective also recognize this problem. Druta and Kalajdzieski (2007: 16) claim: "[m]ixed messages about gender, roles and identities, from media, families and peers, make it difficult for young people to make or access informed choices/information about their SRH. […] While in the past, both gender and SRH has been associated primarily with women and women's issues, men are now recognized as being equally important."

The genre of washroom advertisements is part of a larger promotional media discourse. The set of linguistic choices in the genre of toilet advertisements does not create a text which appears in some sort of vacuum without any connection to social practices, but is contextualized with connections outwards to a wider cultural and socioeconomic field. We intentionally analyzed patterns of distribution of advertisements in gender segregated spaces in order to trace and document a part of socio-cultural views on share of responsibilities with respect to RH. As public toilets are defined as commonly shared and simultaneously secluded intimate spaces, the advertiser has an opportunity to more openly state certain truisms about sexuality, genitals and reproduction, which otherwise remain latent in public discourse as the topic itself is culturally coded as taboo. As the primary concern of this research is discourse about RH in toilet advertisements, the qualitative analysis of the advertising material identifies assumed ideological narratives about RH, female genitalia and sexuality which work beneath the seemingly gender-neutral surface forms. We argue that to a certain extent every advertisement we analyze features selective, but covert application of an androcentric perspective on RH and sexuality.

Advertisements are not mere reflections of reality, but specific discourses or structures of signs which carry a number of latent messages designed to achieve one objective: promotion of goods and increase in sales of the advertised product (Fairclough 2000). Nevertheless, as advertisements are part of public and media discourse, the presentation of reality in them is structured as neutral and objective, as if no mediation is involved (Herman, Chomsky 1988; Leman 1980). Dyer (1982) and Fairclough (1989) contend that advertisers employ language, images, values and ideas from culture and assemble a message that is fed back into the

culture. According to Fairclough (2000) and Dyer (1982) advertisings copywriters employ and simultaneously recycle linguistic and cultural categories and features from society. We stress that the advertiser utilizes those categories and features selectively to stimulate a desirable type of behaviour (consumerism) and promote a particular set of values (woman's beauty, purity, sex appeal) even when it comes to advertising pharmaceutical products related to protection and enhancement of RH or contraceptive devices. The definition of advertisements which we will be following in our paper is that advertisements are deliberate and consciously articulated messages whose main communicative function is promotion of goods (Fairclough 1993; Dyer 1982; Herman, Chomsky 1988).

Transition from industrial to consumer culture in the last quarter of the 20th century, according Leiss et al (1986), induced modifications in advertising methods. Strategies for marketing a product in late capitalism, thus, differing from advertising in the industrial era. Due to constraints of space, we shall deal only with certain aspects of discursive practice in advertising in late capitalism: branding and personalization of the reader. Davidson (1992) claims that the postmodern advertisement industry fully developed once it started implementing branding in marketing campaigns. According to him, the job of an advertising agency is to transform a product into a brand. A product is "something that is made, in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer" (Davidson 1992: 25). In other words, consumers buy brands - products with surplus value. Through branding it is possible to achieve cumulative effect of advertising campaigns.

Beautification of female genitals is an example of branding. Understanding and advertising health issues in terms of (lack/presence) of

beauty is highly problematic as it, on the one hand, trivializes health problems, and, on the other, applies culturally constructed and prescribed standards of beauty to what should be a far more serious issue—health. In the instance of advertisements which endorse feminine hygiene products, the ideal of beauty poses as the surplus value by the successful formula of branding: once the notion of beauty is added to a health issue, a medical/pharmaceutical product transforms into a beautification brand and is advertised as a vast number of cosmetic gadgets. Several advertisements from the Toronto corpus featured a beautification of health issues branding strategy. Next to the image of a girl - germs attacking her face and stormy cloud above her head - apparently "ugly-fied" by the vaginal yeast infection with a green nose, the copywriter adds this text: "[h]aving a yeast infection doesn't make you *a freak of nature*. It doesn't make you *ugly*. […] Monistat gives you six individually wrapped COOLWIPES with aloe and vitamin E so you can feel clean and soothed. What could be more *beautiful*?"

None of the collected advertising texts about RH in our sample from Serbia employs branding strategy. Unlike in Canada, advertisers did not advertise a health related issue through the lens of beauty. They merely presented a medical issue and offered a medical/pharmaceutical solution for it. The advertising texts gathered in Novi Sad are mainly product-centred third person narratives which state medical problem, explain its cause, and offer the solution—the advertised product. They are aimed at providing information succinctly or in point form: *X femina emulsion for everyday intimate use: intended for everyday use; use it instead of soap; contains milk acid, pH 5,2; maintains natural pH of intimate body parts*. Sometimes they are structured in the question/answer format featuring an omniscient author as a problem-solving narrator *Q. How does a woman feel that the*

vaginal flora is disturbed? A. There are many symptoms: irritation, itching, burning sensation; unpleasant smell[…]. Although the advertisements from the Novi Sad corpus do not feature branding of medical issues by applying beauty-criterion, they display a patriarchal view on female genitals that they are impure and unclean even when healthy.

According to Fairclough (2000) and Kress and Hodge (1979) the main feature of promotional discursive practice in late capitalism is personalization of the reader/recipient by utilizing either direct address to a recipient (you) or inclusive pronoun (we). The main purpose of this discursive strategy is to simulate a conversational, friendly and equal relationship between the corporate producer or advertiser and the recipient or potential consumer. The simulated egalitarianism, symptomatic of promotional discourse, serves to conceal the authoritative position of a promoter (copywriter, advertiser, or manufacturer) and to present him/her as a synthetic friendly persona (Talbot 1995). In the corpus from Toronto every advertisement related to genital health features personalization of the reader. Direct address to the personalized reader is used as an "attention-grabbing" device in the opening line: *now that your pants are down, let's talk; just in case you didn't bring any reading material*; *Irritation. Itching. Sores. Is your body trying to tell you something?*; *You itch. You burn. You discharge. Yet the most uncomfortable part of your yeast infection is how you feel about yourself.* Some feature a quick self-test, directly engaging a reader through a yes/no question form: *Do you suffer from a skin rash, itching or sores on genital area or buttocks?* The advertised product is textually introduced with imperative, the verb form which also personalizes the reader: *don't panic (there is a proven cure); take control*; *take plan B*; *take care.* In the corpus from Novi Sad this discursive feature is not used

with regularity. Direct address (you) is used only in one instance, in an advertisement for condoms: *in the moments when you don't think with your head*. Inclusive pronoun (we) is used slightly more often. Notable shifts between the third person narratives with medical terminology and portions of texts with inclusive pronouns are present in this corpus: *intimate body parts of a woman's body require special care. Our body has developed many […]*.

The advertisements displayed in Toronto discursively personalize the anticipated reader, while in our corpus of data gathered in Novi Sad we found evidence of a shift from depersonalized advertising strategy towards personalization. In Canada, advertisement agencies exploit temporary intimate seclusion of public toilets for endorsement of products for improvement of genital health far more aggressively and invasively through much bigger number of advertisements and through branding and personalization of the intended recipient. This probably mirrors the stability of social and economic system in Canada and restructuring and transition into liberal capitalism in Serbia. Although there are discursive differences and variation in marketing tactics both corpuses endorse consumer femininity by applying patriarchal views on female genitals which supposedly need to be purified and additionally beautified in service of achievement of the ideal feminine appearance.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the gathered data we can conclude that development of civil society and democratic institutions are not sufficient in achievement of equal gender responsibility in reproductive aspects of human lives. We expected gender-symmetric share of responsibilities in the corpus from Toronto, but the analyzed advertising material provides evidence that in both cultural contexts, amount

of responsibility about reproductive health is distributed unevenly. These findings expose rootedness of patriarchal assumptions about share of responsibilities in protection, maintenance and enhancement of RH. Such assumptions are difficult to alter because issues related to sexuality and RH are culturally coded as taboos and rarely surface in the public discourse. They are rarely openly discussed in public life, especially in Serbia. Biological and anatomical reproductive difference between the sexes, however, should not be an excuse for exempting men from being exposed to the information about safer sex and responsible sexual behaviour. STIs, unplanned pregnancy, genital disorders and illnesses can equally affect lives of young women and men.

It is not our intention to minimize the role of institutionalized sexual education programs. Instead, we stress the need for research and deconstruction of pervasive and omnipresent media and advertising messages about RH. Advertisements do not merely reflect reality, they contribute to shaping it. Their patterns of distribution and discursive features should be transformed as to contribute to equal share of responsibility in reproductive aspects of young people's lives.

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Women Writers Subvert the Canon

RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RACE AND AGENCY IN JAMAICA KINCAID 'S *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MY MOTHER*

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Abstract*: Jamaica Kincaid, arguably the most popular Caribbean woman writer living in the USA, has produced many of her bestsellers by dissecting her personal and familial history. Yet in spite of her inclination to anchor the life of her creative inventions in her personal and intimate experience, Kincaid, known for her radicalism and militancy, can be a fiercely political writer. The aim of this essay is to explore how Kincaid handles the trope of race in her novel The Autobiography of My Mother, how she uses racial imagery to unearth the covert mechanisms that account for the intricacies of identity formation and how she dismantles ideological foundations that paved the way for racial exploitation. I will in particular focus on how Kincaid challenges, undermines and recasts the (post)colonial concept of race by showing that racial identity is a shifting category conceived through interaction with other categories of identification such as class and gender.*

Key words*: relational identity, race, gender, class, sexuality.*

Perhaps due to her international status, Kincaid has managed to escape the identitarian categories through which postcolonial, African American and feminist studies have framed their discussions of agency. But even though she eschews the politics of feminism and race, Kincaid is incessantly preoccupied with the issue of power, which she links with the concept of race. For her race no longer boils down to somatic differences: "My husband is white, my children are half white," says Kincaid about her marriage to Allen Shawn (the couple are now divorced), "I can really no longer speak of race because I no longer understand what it means. I can speak with more clarity about power." (Jones 1990:75) For Kincaid race is not an essence in itself but a shorthand for something broader, an imbalance

of power (Mantle 1997). Kincaid claims that "[she] can't imagine that she would invent an identity based on the color of [her] skin" because for her "[there] are so many things that make up identity and one of them is not identity" (Cryer 1996). Kincaid argues against treating "race" as a separate category of analysis just as she refuses to recognize her sex as a major coordinate in the process of her identity formation. In her interview with Selwyn Cudjoe she recapitulates: "It's just too slight to cling to your skin color or your sex, when you think of the great awe that you exist at all" (Cudjoe 1989:401). Kincaid asserts that "one's identity should proceed from an internal structure, from one's internal truth" (Hayden 1997) and that truth cannot be reduced to racial categories that are ultimately only relations of power. (Mantle 1997)

Kincaid's views tap into the recent debates about racial politics, racial discourse and agency triggered by contemporary critics who write under the aegis of various schools of literary practice such as Postcolonialism, Afro-American criticism, and the Black Atlantic model. The project to revise and rewrite the racial discourse has brought together different black thinkers such as Edouard Glissant, Henry Louis Gates and Paul Gilroy, who even though they do not share one agenda, theorize about race and power in a similar fashion and expose conventional cultural constructions through which racial otherness is represented. In this way those theoreticians have outlined a new analytical territory that transcends the critical boundaries with which postcolonial, Afro American and transatlantic studies have been traditionally separated.

I want to offer a model of reading Kincaid's novel which takes its clue from theoretical interpellations of these post-essentialist critics – Glissant, Gilroy and Gates – and which, in the words of Gates (1986:6), aims at

"deconstruct[ing] the ideas of difference inscribed in the trope of race [and] explicat[ing] the discourse itself in order to reveal the hidden relations of power." Therefore I will begin with an overview of their discourses on race to provide grounding for my examination of racial, sexual and class configurations in Kincaid's fiction.

Edouard Glissant, one of the first Caribbean critics to take issue with the phenomena of globalization and hybridity, can be credited with creating the model of relational identity – an identity that comes into being as a result of the continuous process of racial, cultural, religious and linguistic mixing – called Creolisation. Creolisation leads to endless proliferation of identities which do not fall into preconceived and fixed categories that classify groups of people into predictable and rigid categories. Glissant and some other Caribbean thinkers (Brathwaite, for example) incited the turn of the century polemics on multiculturalism and cultural syncretism that marked out a new field of analysis of the nature of cultural identity that at our present historical juncture seems to be unstable, mutable and never completely finished. His writings helped to bring to the fore the themes of nationality, migrancy, and cultural affiliation that have done a lot to discredit West Indian cultural nationalism that proposed to understand race, ethnicity and nationhood as invariable and hermetic categories.

Glissant was also one of the first critics who warned the black writing elites against falling into the pitfalls of anti-colonial nationalism which used the concept of identity, grounded in roots, folklore and racial authenticity as the major weapon against imperialism. Black essentialism was conceived as a unifying discourse whose primary function was to resist colonialism and defy and reverse racist stereotypes and hierarchies. And although as Glissant is quick to point out, it did a lot to "revalorize" denigrated

indigenous cultures, still he condemns race-based politics as counter-productive. Glissant proposes to replace Négritude's model of racial identity with his model of rhizome identity, which he defined as "multiple spreading of filaments of simultaneous being" (James 1999:112) and which, in his opinion, better accounts for the cultural and geopolitical intricacies of the Caribbean region.

Gilroy, who created an emergent school of cultural criticism which he called the Black Atlantic, goes one step further to evolve the concept of the fluidity of identities. Gilroy offers a powerful redress to the claims of nationalism by challenging black nationalist thinkers to investigate how they frame their own discussions about race and culture and how their thinking is configured by their imbeddedness in the Enlightenment philosophy and Romantic ideas about what constitutes "race," "nation" and "people." According to Gilroy despite their ostentatious attempts at disaffiliation, those thinkers theorize about race and agency with concepts and terms borrowed from the Euro-American age of revolutions and Romantic nationalism. These critics often emphasize ancestry and roots as the foundation of identity, rather than think of it as an ongoing quest: "modern black political discourse has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than seeing identity as a process of movement that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes" (Gilroy 1993:19). Gilroy associates black intellectuals' desire for "acquisition of roots" with the post-emancipation period when rootedness began to be seen as a prerequisite of national identity and with the post-independence period when postcolonial peoples were engaged in the project of building nation-sates. In general, looking for roots – for stable and presumably authentic forms of subjectivity and identification – and for

normative configurations of racial/national difference was what motivated the vast majority of black intellectuals in the 20th century.

Gilroy repeatedly stresses the futility of the pursuit of black essentialism and sensitizes blacks to the significance of plurality that exists underneath African unity. Black particularity, in Gilroy's opinion is complex and internally divided, not only by class and gender but also by age and relocation. In his 1993 study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Gilroy focuses chiefly on relocation, on the "restless recombinant qualities of the Black Atlantic affirmative cultures" (1993:31). In his later book *Against Race* Gilroy offers another profound corrective revision of the black discourse on race and launches one more attack against "the lazy essentialism that modern sages inform us we cannot escape" (2000:53). Again he rebuts the idea that blackness in a monolithic and unitary construct, and he refuses to recognize it as a common cultural condition based on shared interests and political solidarity of the whole race. He reminds his readers that race is an illusive category of identity whose origins can be traced back to the scientific racism of the previous centuries (eugenics, craniometry and phrenology) and whose major objective was to prove the inferiority of the black man and provide a rationale for his further exploitation. Whereas the 20th century science abolished the claims of biological determinism, race as a social construct continues to exert influence on political culture and bears upon the dynamics of identity formation with the effect that raced-based politics of identity is "pious ritual in which we always agree that 'race' is invented but are required to defer to its embeddedness in the world and to accept that the demand for justice requires us nevertheless to enter political arenas it helps to mark out" (2000: 52)

H. L. Gates, whom Gilroy calls a "cultural interventionist," was one of the first African American theoreticians who grappled with the issues of globalism and cultural hybridity and in consequence gave black criticism a new dynamic direction. For Gates race is "a dangerous trope" (1986:5). In a vein similar to Gilroy, Gates argues that race is a metaphor: "[r]ace as a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences has long been recognized to be a fiction. When we speak of the 'white race' or 'the black race' 'the Jewish race' or 'the Aryan race,' we speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, metaphors" (1986:4). Race is a social construct and, though it has been freed from the constraints of biological determinism, it is still enmeshed in the false assumptions of social determinism which continues to define our "color-coded" civilization, to use Gilroy's phrase (1993:125). The inscription of the racially bound identity is automatic because race is seen as a pre-existing, fixed and finite category. Bodies equipped with racial markers are still perceived as loci of alterity. They are a repository of pre-established norms of behavior, psychological traits and moral attributes typical of a given race. According to Gates "the term 'race' has both described and inscribed differences in language, belief system, artistic tradition, and gene pool, as well as all sorts of supposedly natural attributes such as rhythm, athletic ability, cerebration, usury, fidelity and so forth" (1986:5).

Racially marked bodies are also sites of the subaltern as racial difference is more often than not read hierarchically. "Race has become a trope of ultimate difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific beliefs systems which – more often than not – also have fundamentally opposed economic interests", claims Gates (1986:5). Those clashing economic interests are the real reason why people so tenaciously

cling to the idea of difference grounded in race. Therefore, in Gates's view, "current language use [of the term 'race'] signifies the difference between cultures and their possessions of power, spelling out the distance between subordinate and superordinate, between bondsman and lord in terms of their 'race'" (1986:6).

In literature, too, the dynamics of racial subordination often converge with the dynamics of racial representation. Gates holds that literacy is "the emblem" that connects "racial alienation" with "economic and political alienation" (1986:9). Literary discourse, as well as critical discourse are, to his mind, a battleground for the racial dimensions of power. Like Gilroy, who pointed out that race as a cultural and literary category was created by those in power to solidify the social hierarchy and to uphold the relations of power, Gates asserts that the great white Western tradition is not "universal, color-blind, apolitical, or neutral,"(1986:15) as we, readers, were led to believe. Conversely, both literature and critical practice contain an ideological subtext that strives to prevent any democratic change in power relations and to preserve the status quo. Ever since the Enlightenment, contends Gates, writing has been valorized as the supreme expression of human reason because, as Hume claimed, it was the ultimate sign of difference between animal and human. Consequently, the human status was ascribed only to those who could master "'the arts and sciences' the 18th century formula for writing" (1986: 8). Therefore "if blacks could write and publish imaginative literature," argues Gates, "then they could, in effect, take 'a few giant steps' up the chain of being […]" (1986:8). According to Gates, black people did accept the challenge by trying to "recreate the image of race in European discourse" (1986:11), but time did not bear out the effectiveness of this strategy because black people were not liberated

from racism with their writings – they "did not obliterate the difference of race, rather the inscription of the black voice in the Western literatures has preserved those very cultural differences" (1986:12). Thus Gates, like Glissant and Gilroy, takes a stand against back essentialism which in his opinion fell into the trap of uncritically accepting the precepts of Western political thought. "When we tend to appropriate, by inversion, 'race' as a term for essence – as did négritude movement," concludes Gates, "we yield too much: the basis of shared humanity" (1986:13). To get out of this unproductive situation, Gates advises all non-canonical and/or Third World critics to "analyze the ways in which writing relates to race, how attitudes toward racial differences generate and structure literary texts by [black people] and about [black people]" (1986:15).

My reading of Kincaid's text was inspired by Gates's and Gilroy's observations about the correlation between race, literacy and power. It also adheres to Glissant's model of relational identity which has superseded the model of rooted identity, a concept I extend to include not only the collusion of races, cultures and languages but also criss-crossing of several other rubrics of identification such as class, gender and sexuality within a single nation or "race." In other words, I explore intra-racial divisions within black singularity when these mutually affective categories interact to either empower or dis-empower a black subject.

The Autobiography of My Mother, Kincaid's 1996 novel, focuses on the character of Xuela Claudette Richardson – a Dominican woman of mixed ethnic origin (Scottish-African on her father's side and Carib on her mother's side). Xuela muses on her life from the vantage point of her old ripe age and examines her relations with the colonial culture fleshed out in the person of her opportunist father – Alfred Richardson – an ex-policeman

and magistrate who amassed a sizeable fortune by humiliating and robbing others. He is the embodiment of the colonial presence – a ruthless capitalist whose "skin was the color of corruption: copper, gold, ore" (Kincaid 1996: 182). Since Xuela lost her mother when she was born, and was abandoned by her father (who disposed of her by committing her to the care of a woman who washed his dirty laundry), the orphaned and disinherited Xuela is left exposed and vulnerable to the habitual brutality of colonial life which leads to her self-destructiveness and moral deformity - she refuses to love anyone but herself and aborts every child she conceives. She eventually marries a white doctor Philip, having poisoned his first wife Moira, but doggedly refuses to reciprocate his love and treats their relationship as an occasion to settle the score with the white colonizer's race.

The Autobiography of My Mother presents a whole range of perspectives on the problem of identity formation by dramatizing the cultural construction of Xuela's and her father's subjectivity. Both of them are Creoles with hyphenated identities – Scottish-African in his case, Scottish-African-Carib in hers. Both of them are aware of the fact that identity is not a given, that it is a matter of choice and a political stance – not physical phenotypes but behavior, loyalties and values are what makes a person either black or white.

Alfred, named by his Scottish father after Alfred the Great, gives preference to his paternal lineage and disowns his maternal African heritage. He fails to appreciate his mother Mary, who "remained to him without clear features though she must have mended his clothes, cooked his food, tended his schoolboy's wounds, encouraged his ambitions […]" (Kincaid 1996:183). Her surname is unknown – she is one of the African people, and "the distinction between man and people remain[ed] important

to Alfred, who [was] aware that the African people came off the boat as a part of the horde, already demonized, mind blank to everything but suffering," while the white man "came off the boat of his own volition, seeking to fulfil a destiny, a vision of himself in his mind's eye" (Kincaid 1996:181). In "the struggle between the hyphenated man and the horde," that takes place in Xuela's father, the hyphenated man "triumphs" (Kincaid 1996:188) with the effect that the father comes to "despise all who behaved like the African people; not all who looked liked them but all who behaved like them, all who were defeated, doomed, conquered, poor, diseased, head bowed down, mind numbed from cruelty" (Kincaid 1996:187). The father thus represents a shift from biological to social determinism – for him race is a matter of social status, demeanor and worldview. Blackness is not anchored in bodily characteristics but is determined by subaltern social position, non-rational worldview and pagan beliefs. As he relentlessly toils to raise his social standing through the multiplication of earthly possessions, he suppresses Obeah beliefs and practices and takes great pride in becoming a very religious person because, to his mind, social advance obliges to moral elevation. According to his daughter's contrary opinion, "the more he robbed, the more money he had, the more he went to church, it is not unheard of liking. And the richer he became the more fixed the mask on his face grew" (Kincaid 1996:40-1).

The metaphor of the mask was presumably borrowed by Kincaid from Frantz Fanon's seminal study *Black Skin, White Masks*, which, according to some critics, must have given Kincaid an incentive to write the novel. It describes the phenomenon that Fanon called 'Negrophobia' – the collective Caribbean unconscious that equals black with ugliness, sin and immorality. In Fanon's view, black people in West Indies "internalized" or

"epidermalized" the racist views of themselves, believing that "one is Negro to the degree one is wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual" (1967:192). Therefore, Fanon contends provocatively, all the black man dreams about is to rid himself of his black identity of an inferior.

The way into the white world runs along the class axis: "One is white, as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent" (1967:51-52). Therefore the acquisition of wealth grants a black man entry into the genteel world. Alfred's rise to middle class status results in his "lactification," to use Frantz Fanon's term again, and even though he becomes an alienated mimic man, totally unable to see through his sham identity, he succeeds in deploying the bourgeois culture "as a means of stripping himself of his race" (1967:225). Though his appearance – his red hair, grey eyes, pale skin and elegant white clothes – underscores his elevated social status, the novel makes it abundantly clear that it is his upward class mobility that defines his racial affiliation. Alfred's social trajectory from "black" village policeman to "white" landowner and magistrate illustrates that race is a variable category contingent on other identificatory categories such as class.

While the father allies himself with the myths of white civilization, education and refinement, Xuela does not subscribe to this enlightened philosophical frame. She gives preference to the forces that oppose the expansion and triumph of these myths. She chooses "savagery" and asserts: "whatever I was told to hate I loved and loved the most. I loved the smell of the thin dirt behind my ears, the smell of my unwashed mouth, the smell that came from between my legs, the smell in the pit of my arm, the smell of my unwashed feet. Whatever was native to me, whatever I could not help and was not a moral failing I loved with the fervor of the devoted" (Kincaid 1996:32-33). Xuela believes that what white culture deems "bad" must, by

definition, be "good." In this spirit she passes judgements on what constitutes physical beauty: "My nose, half flat, half not, as if painstakingly made that way, I found so beautiful that I saw in it a standard which the noses of the people I did not like failed to meet" (Kincaid 1996:100). The world in which Xuela lives, ruled by the Manichean oppositions, requires that a black person, like Xuela or her father, should make political and ideological choices – they must either uproot or brandish their nativism; adapt either conformist or reactionary stand.

When Xuela chooses "the native" it is obvious that she feels affinity with the exterminated Caribs rather than with the ex-African people, who survived but lost their bearing in the modern world. They are pictured as zombies, half dead, half alive, "walking in a trance, no longer in their own minds" (Kincaid 1996:133). Having lost their native cosmology they have been severed from their own inner imaginative life – they no longer trust what they intuitively know. Unlike them, Xuela fends herself against losing access to "the inner life of her own inventions" and ardently believes in the redoubtable influence of Obeah on everyday life. While her father considers Obeah to be "the belief of the illegitimate, the poor, the low" (Kincaid 1996:18) for Xuela it is an alternative epistemological frame, through which she makes sense of the world. When on the way to school, she sees one of her classmates lured to death in the river by a *jabalesse* (she-devil in Caribbean folklore) she never relinquishes her faith in the realness of the event she witnessed in spite of the fact that to admit having seen such an apparition "was to say that [the black children] lived in a darkness from which [they could not be redeemed" (Kincaid 1996:9). Xuela chooses that darkness and learns to "[separate] the real from unreal" (Kincaid 1996:42). At night she can hear the screeches of bats or "someone who had taken the

shape of the bat," the sound of wings of a bird or "someone who had taken the shape of a bird" (42); "the long sigh of someone on the way to eternity" (Kincaid 1996:43). In light of the loss of collective memory and careful erasing of the past, which Glissant described in *The Caribbean Discourse,* Obeah provides Xuela with a means for the imaginative repossession of the past. As she lies in her bed at night concentrating on the sounds coming form outside she finds herself in the "dark room of history" (Kincaid 1996: 61-2):

> I could hear the sound of those who crawled on their bellies, the ones who carried the poisonous lances; and those who carried the poison in their saliva; I could hear the ones who were hunting, the ones who were hunted, the pitiful cry of the small ones who were about to be devoured, followed by the temporary satisfaction of the ones doing the devouring […] (Kincaid 1996:43)

Xuela's steady belief in the power of Obeah – an epistemic perspective that undermines the colonizer's ontology – is a sign of her resistance, her stubborn refusal to be confined within the Western grids of knowledge.

Xuela's father "whitens" himself climbing the social ladder; by contrast Xuela inverts her father's trajectory and "blackens" herself transgressing gender roles. Even though she marries way above her own class and race she does not to do it with a view to becoming a mother and a lady. She not only refuses to be a bearer of children but also uses her sexuality to subvert traditional colonial scripting of femininity. Her uninhibited eroticism taps into the stereotype of sexual wantonness of the black female body that was bequeathed by slavery, perpetuated by colonial plantocracies and enhanced by the repressive Victorian sexual mores. It

contrasted the alleged black female promiscuity with the idealization of the white female body. Xuela is aware how this dynamics of differentiation operates and what purposes it serves: “a lady,” according to her definition, “is combination of elaborate fabrications, a collection of externals, facial arrangements, and body parts, distortions, lies and empty effort” (Kincaid 1996:159). That definition is at variance with the way Xuela perceives herself: “I was a woman and as that I had a brief definition: two breasts, a small opening between my legs, one womb, it never varies and they are always in the same place” (Kincaid 1996:159).

Xuela uses her sexuality to draw a line between herself and Moira, a white English lady who is the best proof that emancipation did not erase the analogous divisions between men and people, ladies and women, on which the concept of Englishness depended: “she was a lady, I was a woman and this distinction was for her important, it allowed her to believe that I could not associate the ordinary – a bowel movement, a cry of ecstasy – with her, and a small act of cruelty was elevated to a rite of civilization” (Kincaid 1996:158-9). Moira is presented as an asexual woman who does not share a bedroom with her husband and who looks like a man – her hair is “cropped close to her head like a man’s,” (Kincaid 1996:156) and her femininity boils down to two little breasts likened to “two old stones” and “a broken womb” (Kincaid 1996:147). She is proud of the color of her skin – the most visible marker of racial differentiation, but Kincaid’s narrative points to the futility of clinging to skin color as a major determinant of identity. Moira undergoes posthumous epidermal permutation – her skin turns black as a result of poisoning, and eventually, as it turns out, with both Xuela and Moira being black and childless, what differentiates these two female protagonists is their contradictory attitude to sexuality. It is the exhibition of

her uninhibited sexual agency that makes Xuela "black," just as Moira's impaired sexuality makes her "white."

Though Xuela's characterization fits into the racist stereotype of the over-sexualized black woman, Kincaid deftly changes the dynamics of colonial sexual representation because in the case of Xuela the sexual encounter with the white man does not trigger her sexual exploitation. On the contrary, in her relationship with Philip, Xuela uses her sexuality to subjugate and exploit him. Although at first she assumes the role of a slave, binding his belt around her wrists, still she controls their sexual act, giving Philip directions which he obediently follows. In this way the representation of the colonial encounter with the sexual other is subverted – Philip in not the dominant subject who projects his sexual fantasies on the racial other but a sexual slave enacting Xuela's wild fantasies. According to Gary E. Holcomb and Kimberly S. Holcomb, Xuela simulates the reversal of colonial power and dominates Philip to shift agency from the master's to the slave's body and blur the distinction between the two.

Through the renunciation of maternity and her narcissistic and predatory sexuality, Xuela defies the colonial power that wants to reduce her to subaltern position. Kincaid allows Xuela to hold on to the Manichean economy of colonialist discourse and the racist and sexist stereotype of black female sexuality to show that historical contexts are also constitutive of identity. In this way Kincaid not only exposes the mechanism of colonial ideological system, its logic of interracial encounters and its categories of representation, but first and foremost, she reveals that there is a concealed power dimension that determines the workings of racial instability. Race enhances meaning through adherence to or violation of gender and sexual roles that can respectively subject or liberate an individual from colonial

and patriarchal domination. Consequently it becomes impossible for the reader to treat race, gender and sexuality as "discrete categories of analysis" (2005: 109). As Judith Butler claims:

> [though] there are good historical reasons for keeping 'race' and 'sexuality' and 'sexual difference' as separate analytic spheres, there are also quite pressing historical reasons for asking how and where we might not only read their convergence, but the sites at which the one can not be constituted without the other. (1993: 169)

Similarly Xuela's father understanding of race as entwined with social position undermines the colonial and early postcolonial concept of racial identity determined by lineage, dissent or blood. His conceptualization of race as white/black binary also reinforces the Manichean system of white bias, but at the same time it puts emphasis on the fluctuating meaning of race which is irrevocably connected with power. Race and class become tropic configurations or interrelated axes of power and the protagonists are "whitened/empowered" or, by inference, "blackened/disempowered" as they travel up or down the social scale.

"The complicated divisions of class-race-color stratification," which in Hall's opinion replaced "the legal castes of slavery," (1985:281) are compounded by the protagonists' lingual affiliations. Language is a key factor forming the Caribbean social reality. Although Kincaid's novel is written in elegant Anglo-American English, her careful designation of the code of her protagonists' *parole* is very informative of Caribbean social choices. In the Caribbean, standard English or French are used in official situations – they connote respect and respectability. English Creole or French patois or pidgin are scorned as the languages of the illiterate and

dispossessed. When a middle class person uses Creole vernacular it is usually to speak to a social inferior, for example a servant. In literature, however, this code-switching, from English/French – the language of the colonizer to Creole/patois, the language of the colonized dark masses is more discordant as it reflects social insecurity and anxiety produced by color-coded social stratification.

This linguistic continuum frames the social panorama of Kincaid's novel. The father who wants to rise socially and, in the words of Fanon, "be elevated above his jungle status" (1967:18), uses standard English to make himself socially acceptable. He speaks English with strangers as a way of manifesting his cultural affiliation and exercising his supreme colonialist authority. Whenever he addresses his countrymen in English, he not only renounces his blackness but also reasserts his right to dominate and abuse them because "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (Fanon 1967:18).

Xuela's stepmother abides by the same logic. When Xuela arrives at her house, the stepmother speaks to her in patois to emphasize the class distinction between them, to discredit her and "make her illegitimate" by associating her with "the made-up language of people regarded as not real, the shadow people, the forever humiliated, the forever low" (Kincaid 1996: 30-1). Using pidgin is, to misquote Fanon, "a manner of classifying [her], de-civilizing [her]: (Fanon 1967:32). It is meant to be a calculated insult whose aim is to draw attention to the fact that they – Xuela and her stepmother - do not belong to the same social caste and will never be equals.

Therefore, as Kincaid's narrative makes clear code-switching is a continuous practice, an ongoing interaction that tips the balance in interracial and interpersonal relations and reveals the two-dimensionality of

hybridized population. The father shifts his idiom and speaks Creole when he is with his family. For Xuela these moments offer brief glimpses of the remnants of his genuine selfhood: "I associated him speaking patois with expressions of his real self" (Kincaid 1996:190), she claims. Xuela speaks patois to her white husband, while he addresses her in Standard English: "He spoke to me, I spoke to him, he spoke to me in English, I spoke to him in patois. We understood each other much better that way, speaking to each other in the language of our thoughts" (Kincaid 1996:219). At the same time, Xuela gives preference to English as the language of her social discourse. The first words she speaks are in English, "the language of a people [she] would never like or love" (Kincaid 1996:7), but feels nevertheless compelled to deploy it to meet her father on equal terms. Like him, she considers patois a language of cultural and social inferiority as well as cultural impurity brought about by creolisation. Reverting to speaking English – the language of the privileged – is a means of severing her from the network of relationships that bound her with the zombie-like native population.

Kincaid, who grew up in Antigua, must have heard very frequently Antiguan Creole as well as her Dominican mother's French patois but she has never mastered these dialects and consequently she does not use them often in her novels. The fact has led another Caribbean writer Merle Hodge to contend that:

> [the] novels of Jamaica Kincaid actually sit on a cusp between fiction and essay […] Dialogue in Creole would have set up such a contrast of codes as to create a focus which is not a part of authors theme. Code-shifting invites attention to issues such as class and cultural difference, issues which are not central to [Kincaid's] novels. (quoted in Réjouis 2003:214)

While Merle Hodge praises Kincaid's choice of excluding vernacular inscriptions from her prose as an appropriate creative strategy to avoid dealing with the problem of cultural syncretism and class conflict, in my opinion the absence of such inscriptions does not rule out Kincaid's interest in those issues. It is my contention that Kincaid's "descriptive" code-shifting – her insistence of informing the reader which languages/dialects the protagonists apply in different social contexts and personal circumstances – makes 'class and cultural difference' the central theme of this novel.

Kincaid establishes an interesting dialogue with her predecessors and cotemporaries by supplying a female perspective on the theories of creolisation and by complementing their discourses with her own observations about the tropic representations of race, gender and class that overlap and collude in the process of identity formation. Like Glissant, Gates and Gilroy she is dismissive of the claims of black nationalism which instead of exploding imperialism, helped to entrench and solidify the unjust social structure that was the legacy of colonialism. Xuela repeatedly emphasizes her disavowal of essentialism: "I refused to belong to a race. I refuse to accept a nation" (Kincaid 1996:225-6), and she pours scorn on the "natives" who "bogged down in issues of justice and injustice, and they had become attached to claims of ancestral heritage, and the indignities by which they had come to these islands, as it they mattered as if they really mattered" (Kincaid 1996:117). By overlooking and ignoring experiential rifts caused by class division and gender, nationalism and its discourse perpetuated patriarchal and social stratification forced on the colonized people by the imperial rule, which Kincaid's narrative strives to subvert. The post–essentialist discourse was, likewise, a predominately male affair,

very frequently aware of its own deficiencies and shortcomings. In *Against Race*, Gilroy admits that the interrelatedness discourses on race, gender and sexuality is "something that is further than ever from being settled and that defines a new and urgent need for future work" (2000:45). *The Autobiography of My Mother* is an important book that addresses these issues and contributes to the delineation of sociopolitical and discursive texture of the Caribbean, enlarging the study of racial and social relations with a new female perspective that highlights the representational interdependence of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Even though Kincaid's characters are still bound by the Manichean allegory (Abdul R. Jan Mohamed's term), their race is no longer literal – it is metaphorical and relational. Racial markers do not create in her novel a picture of the historically objectified Caribbean subject that is defined by certain presuppositions about the commonalities of his or her character, making it impossible for the reader to approach protagonists with a set of pre-established racial meanings and stereotypes. In the words of Carine M. Mardorossian, the writing of contemporary Caribbean women, such as Kincaid, forces readers to adopt new reading strategies which emphasize not whether but when characters are "black" or "white," and it bears witness to the fact that, to quote from Maryse Condé, "[there] are no races only cultures" (1987: 30).

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MADNESS AND MARGINALITY IN PATRICIA DUNCKER'S *HALLUCINATING FOUCAULT*

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Abstract*: The goal of this paper is to make an incursion into Paul Michel's (fictional schizophrenic writer) brain, trying to decipher the cause of his insanity and his homosexuality. The story described oscillates between Michel the novelist and his Reader and Muse, Foucault, who swaps places with another Reader, the young scholar.*

Key words*: homosexuality, madness, rape, loneliness.*

Introduction

The character that shares the story with us is an unnamed male character, a young scholar at Cambridge University who is writing his doctoral thesis on the (fictional) writer Paul Michel. In the process he meets a fellow student, very documented in all that literature means, also nameless but designated *the Germanist*. Their relationship switches from romantic to professional. She is familiar with Paul Michel's literature and pushes the narrator to see beyond the printed books, pushes him to go and meet the real flesh and blood Paul Michel. The quest begins and the encounter with Paul Michel is overwhelming. The young male graduate student leaves the halls of Cambridge University and descends to the forbidden places of an isolated asylum to find the Writer, who has been imprisoned there for nine years, because he has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Here, the novel brings to life a love affair like no other. "The love affair between a writer and a reader is never celebrated", Duncker writes in the novel, but in almost 200 pages she praises in various ways not only this love, but also inspiration and respect. On a first and crucial level, we have the intimate love between writer Michel and reader Foucault, and on a secondary level, the reader

turns to be the narrator himself. Paul Michel's death eases his way of being near the man he loved the most, his Muse, his Reader, Michel Foucault. In order to understand Paul Michel's subsequent evolution, it is important to know his background. This paper will only deal with his homosexuality and madness.

The Background of Paul Michel

Paul Michel was an only child. His childhood provided him with really intense memories. He used to spend his day mostly with his mother, who lived in the middle of the city as if she were in the countryside, planting vegetables in the garden. What is memorable about her is that she used to be fanatically clean.

> She scrubbed everything; the kitchen, the pots, the sheets, the stairs, father, me. I remember the smell of that rough, unscented soap, when my father opened his arms, scoured until the skin was red and the hairs still damp, and called – alors viens, petit mec. And I remember how I flinched when he kissed me. (Duncker 1997:65)

This quotation is already relevant for the relationship father and son had. His father was 'alien territory, to be traversed with caution' (65). He worked all day long on the railways and appears to be peripheral for the Michel family. Memories about him are sparse and not very dense. As specialists declare (Rosario 1997:10), usually gays and lesbians lack role models, especially if they come from heterosexual family background. This is the case of young Michel, whose father is quite absent from the family context. In addition to this, the boy's dad has only the faintest presence in the novel and in his son's life. He almost vanishes under the readers' eyes, which only catch glimpses of him bringing home money (as he was earning

well) or going out to the movies with his wife. The father does not show up in the presence of his son and does not exercise any kind of influence upon him. The boy never pretends something like that, as he has always been used to this distance. The single masculine part his father plays is the patriarchal role: financially supporting the family, though not completely. Duncker deprived this young father of this least passionate task, meeting the financial needs with grandpa's vineyard, a continuous source of money.

As a testimony to the withered connection between father and son, when the boy's mother died, Michel never went back to father, nor did he keep his name. There are, though, some characters whose presence in the novel offers real introspection in Paul Michel's life. In contrast with father, the mother meant a lot to Paul Michel. Her son was aware of every curve of her body.

> […] and I slept beside her, curled against the shiny texture and white lace bodice of her slip. She smelt of lavender and nail polish. I used to gaze, fascinated, at the strange convex curves of her painted toenails as if they were the single sign of a pair of invisible shoes. Sometimes she slept on her back with her arms folded, like a dead crusader. I crouched against her, feeling like an aborted foetus, not daring to indicate that I still lived. (Duncker 1997:66)

The deep and intimate relationship he develops with his mother is clearly visible in all the fragments evoking her. To him she is a goddess, the ultimate goddess. His father was mostly absent; his grandfather was an intransigent and unforgiving vineyard man, while his grandmother seems to have lost herself much before he was born. The 'aborted foetus' points to the deepest and intimate connection mother and baby have before birth, it is a bond intelligible just to them, which shaped much of his subsequent

evolution. Normally, Paul Michel resorts to his mother, the only pillar of his childhood. She is the mother, the woman, the goddess and the whore, capable of spending hours cooking or doing homework, being a nymph with beautiful face and the body of a mermaid, or posing as a daring and extravagant woman when smoking. She is so crucial in all the directions of Paul Michel's crossroads that the adolescent gives up any childhood activity. In the novel we do not see mates playing, we don't see the youngster participating in any group activities. He is a lone wolf living for his beloved mum. He is also completing her lonely and tragic destiny.

She came from a cruel background. Despite the prosperity of her parents, the mother suffered from poverty of feelings, or their expression. Her father was a huge monster, everyone feared him, he "did not know the meaning of compromise or forgiveness" (67). Grandma, on the contrary, was always whispering and humming to herself, being ignored. She was her husband's victim, marrying him meant "to slam the door shut on her own happiness" (67). This difficult existence Michel's mother had to cope with filled her with grotesque scars, without permitting her to lead an autonomous life. This 'poison' will eventually make her skin crackle and soon die. She is presented as the single person able to cope with the temperament of her father, Jean-Baptiste Michel. The grandfather is pictured as an extremely strict man, whom you cannot provoke and get away with it (70) He was a huge man who trusted no one and argued with everyone. He owned the vines of Gaillard and had the reputation of being a skilful dealer, profit oriented. The grandfather treated all women in the family violently.

Due to his unhappiness and uncontrollable dissatisfaction, he cannot admit the presence of anyone content or willing to live according to their

own will, especially a woman. Therefore, he intends to physically and emotionally 'deny' his daughter, a woman with enough power to resist him. This controlled process of destruction visited upon his daughter cannot remain without traces. He considered it a sign of weakness to be refused, so when his own daughter opposed him, he needed to dominate her. It would be possible to speculate a lot upon this rape and imagine what could have happened if Grandpa had had several previous attempts even before the boy was born.

Rape is a form of humiliation imposed on women. It is not so much the result of violence; feminists have tied it to the explosion of pornography. A little more than two decades ago, feminist Robin Morgan contended that "Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice" (Bristow 2002:148).

Rape and pornography are the two halves of the same whole. Leading radical feminist Dworkin states that pornography

> as a genre is male power […]. Male power, as expressed in and through pornography, is discernible in discrete but interwoven, reinforcing strains: the power of self, physical power over and against others, the power of terror, the power of naming, the power of owning, the power of money, and the power of sex. These strains of male power are intrinsic to both the substance and production of pornography; and the ways and means of pornography are the ways and means of male power. (Dworkin 1992:83)

Andrea Dworkin connects pornography to male power and economic control, conferring one more time a complete masculine value and force binding men together. Her conviction is that pornography acts as a form of degradation of the superior male over women; it is a reinforcement of male power and status. The ideology of male sexual domination posits men to be

superior to women due to their penises; and physical possession of men over women appears therefore to the male of the species as a natural right of the male. “Male power is the raison d’être of pornography; the degradation of the female is the means of achieving his power.” (Dworkin 1992:84)

Jean-Baptiste Michel is the incarnation of the rapist and abuser in the novel. His male power stems from his tough character, whose descriptions totally dehumanize women. He appears to live on his own, being everybody’s master and praising himself with the fear that is his aura. After totally reducing his wife to silence, even more, to madness, he gets to physically subject his daughter to the supremacy of his penis. *The embodiment of power* represented under all its groups (physical force, possession – physical, mental and the power of owning, economic control) needs fulfilment with the submission and humiliation of his daughter, the only person who dares to raise her voice in front of him. His gesture is actually a form of control over women; by abusing his daughter specifically he earns the victory of his penis over *women’s inferiority*. A rape consumated upon his flesh and blood offspring means so much more than raping any woman. This heartless despot may have consumated sexual affairs with other women, but the submissive force of this action prostrates the last obstacle in the proclamation of his utter superiority. This brief gesture of selfishness committed to please himself situates Jean-Baptiste Michel in the brotherhood of men that define the parameters of a woman’s sexual being as her identity. More explicitly however, “the power of sex is ultimately defined as the power of conquest” (Dworkin 2002:152). Rape and pornography are not just a sexual dehumanizing act here, but the abuse over his daughter can be decoded as the ultimate supremacy of male over the

female, who eventually gets to decompose her physical and mental identities step by step.

Homosexuality

Friedman explains in his book entitled *Male Homosexuality: a Contemporary Psychoanalytical Perspective*, that homosexuality's origins are much closer to the concept of gender identity.

> According to Stoller (1985), *gender identity* 'is a term used for one's sense of masculinity and femininity; it was introduced to contrast with 'sex', a term that summarizes the biological attributes that add up to 'male' or 'female''. (1034) Money and Ehrhardt (1972) define the term as follows: 'Gender identity is the sameness, unity, and persistence of one's individuality as male or female (or ambivalent) […] especially as experienced in self-awareness and behaviour. Gender identity is the private experience of gender role, and gender role is the public expression of gender identity.' (Friedman 1988:33)

Obviously, gender identity arises from a subject's feeling of belonging, integrating or even acting according to the societal expectations of one sex or the other. Paul Michel presents a kind of troubled gender identity; he has a persistent sense of himself as shamefully masculine. His context did not show him any male in his childhood he could take after. His father was missing, his grandfather was a despot. With his childish mind, young Michel realized the two men only created pain and conflicts, so he was aware of their negative influences. Subconsciously though, he defies 'manly' behaviour and tends towards the female conduct, or sentiments, consequently looking for men. A blurred family equilibrium may alter the balance of traditional habits and turn it vice versa for ever. Such gender

identity pathology is much more common among men who are exclusively or predominantly homosexuals (Friedman 1988:35), and its continuation after the onset of adult age is stronger if the child has shown it since childhood.

> In Erikson's model, identity development refers to the development of individual personality, a stable core sense of self, within the context of the social milieu in which the individual finds him or herself. Identity develops through the resolution of a series of tasks specific to each developmental stage. For Erikson and those following in his tradition, the notions of stability and interiority are key. (Esterberg 1997:14-15)

Stability is not a constant in Paul Michel's life; the witty novelist has lacked steadiness ever since he was a child. Not everybody places the emphasis on personality; sociologists, for example agree that identities "are located in the interaction between the individual and society. Identities, thus, are always in process." (Esterberg 1997:15) Lesbian and gay identities develop, and socially progress with the subject. In the beginning, there is a period of uncertainty about the self, which will gradually turn into the moment of 'integration'. Paul Michel's homosexual identity was carved from early adolescence, being largely shaped by his inadequate family background.

There have been tons of ink used in explaining the emergence of either sex from the Oedipal crisis, motivating the process of boys' or girls' becoming heterosexual or homosexual. To recapitulate Paul Michel's post-Oedipal gender identity, I would like to resort to Richard Klein's explanation. Psychoanalysts call the Oedipus complex a moment of major developmental differentiation in personality.

> Conversely, in this theory, the development of the male homosexual requires the postulation of the father's absence or distance and an abnormally strong identification by the child with the mother, in which the child takes the place of the father. (Kosofsky 1985:23)

It seems that the novelist Paul Michel faithfully followed this pattern of becoming and identification. His actual homosexuality comes out of his deep bonding with his mother, his father therefore was absent most of the time, and he never represented a model for the boy.

The presence or absence of the boy's relationship with his mother has been thoroughly studied, and following Freud's thoughts, Rosalind Minsky wrote:

> If he is never able to separate sufficiently he may be unable to form satisfying relationships with women because they will always represent potential emotional engulfment. However, the boy may try to compensate for this absence by finding a cultural substitute. (Minsky 1996:44)

This example matches perfectly the context of Paul Michel whose cultural substitute for women turned out to be books. I have tried hard to prove why the narrator should not be surprised by Paul Michel's sexual becoming, due to family constraints. These factors will put a spell on his sexuality, but we should not forget to mention different facts that characterize men, and which do not always serve them. The cliché will call *a man* independent, powerful, brave, aggressive, a leader, protective, and so on. The number of adjectives could be long continued. We expect things to be so, because they have been so ever since we've known our minds. Fewer

people are aware of the male physical vulnerability, without mentioning scary documented statistics about their higher foetal mortality or the fact that they are more likely than girls to get sick. Men's ambition in smoking or drinking defeats them sooner than it would do for a woman, and suicides rank as more common among men. Aurora Liiceanu declares that the constitutional frailty of boys and the slowness of their turning into adults affect their relationship at separation and loss of close relatives. (Liiceanu and Năstase 2007:82)

This theory reinforces once again Michel's vulnerable being and delicate family. In the same study, Liiceanu points out that manhood is hard to achieve when you know the general expectations in society; it is nonetheless often impossible, being given the inferiority of men. The male survival equipment is much below the similar kit available to a woman; this could be an answer to the numerous desperate gestures men make. The burden of Paul Michel is simply explicable by the previous pages, we may have even expected such a tremendous and great personality to end his days confined to a mental institution. It seems that Paul Michel has to carry the onerous burden of his whole family on his frail shoulders.

Going back to his childhood years, there is one more important event that offers co-ordinates for his subsequent existence: he was educated by monks. At the age of puberty, he was thirteen at the time, the severe education combined with the religious rituals carried out by a teenager who was trying to seduce older boys impacted on his development. His conflict with religion loomed as he openly declared his homosexuality. He loved life according to his own rules; always breaking the rules. He was accused of being an atheist, an unscrupulous man, with no values. He was involved in politics, too, in the radical left; this also offended many people who defined

his marvellous writing and political approach as the two distinct sides of a breach. Paul Michel though has never given up religion or belief, but reshaped them according to his credo.

In his prime, religion comes to save him again taking the shape of the nuns nursing him in the psychiatric hospital. Paul Michel praised nuns for their tolerance and extreme humaneness, and he preferred them to doctors, because nuns are more direct. Even though a professed atheist, the writer fills in the breach by his personal creed, a belief that has guided him since childhood.

One major element that re-establishes the connection between Paul Michel and the nuns is the general opinion that classifies both of them as marginals. Most of the saints are considered mad, their stance often much akin to that of Paul Michel. He explains to his younger, less experienced friend:

> The saints were always visionaries, marginals, exiles from their own societies, prophets if you like. They went about denouncing other people, dreaming of another world. As I did. They were often locked up and tortured. As I am. (Duncker 1997:105).

Paul Michel's rapport with the church had an autobiographical source of inspiration, Patricia Duncker declaring herself a Catholic. Even though it might sound paradoxical, this spiritual writer has always been preoccupied by the dark side of life, considering that peripheral people, like Michel, the nuns or herself share a lot in common.

> I am a Catholic writer in the Graham Greene mould. […] If I had been a writer five hundred years ago I would probably have been a nun and told you, quite calmly,

> that my main preoccupations were the four last things: Heaven, Hell, Death and the Judgement […]. (Duncker 2003)

Madness

Madness bursts out as a result of Paul Michel's schizophrenia. The medical problems are immense, patients suffer a lot and are treated with strong medication, patients are incapable of feelings, besides, have trouble in adjusting to society. Patricia Duncker claims that she owes the medical information to a friend in France who has been working with schizophrenics.

> I have a friend in France who's worked with schizophrenics for the last 30 years. She's seen the different ways that schizophrenia has been perceived during that time – because even now, no one really understands it, no one knows where it comes from. She holds an open clinic, so I visited her there with some trepidation and it was absolutely incredible. You always think that people who are off their heads are going to be just a little bit eccentric, but these people were absolutely mad – raving! But there was such a sense of community there; it was harrowing but quite beautiful, in a way. (Mitchell 2002)

A much-discussed source of schizophrenia can be an outburst of a certain kind; in Paul Michel's case we can speak of politics. Being involved in politics, and a radical thinker, 1968 meant for him the very onset of madness, the structure he built on, later: "In the case of Paul Michel his lunacy was somewhat subsumed under the rubric of contemporary politics. He went quite mad in 1968." (Duncker 1997:45)

Throughout the novel, a recurrent theme is the alleged incapacity of schizophrenics for love. How could we define then the relation between Paul Michel and the narrator? "Paul Michel was an extraordinary man. All

schizophrenics are extraordinary. They are incapable of loving. Did you know that? Of really loving." (47)

He changes his place with the narrator, crossing the boundary from insanity to sanity: "Listen, petit, he said gently, you are twenty-two and very much in love. I am forty-six and a certified lunatic. You are much more likely to be insane than I am." (149). This twisted situation alters the reader's knowledge or imagination. Paul Michel is no longer a lunatic from an asylum, but the mature person capable of helping and supporting younger people.

Duncker masterfully exemplifies schizophrenia at the moment when the narrator succeeds in taking Paul Michel out of the hospital. Instead of being joyous, the patient is mostly desperate. His speech becomes flat, monotonous and he behaves inappropriately. The hospital is now his home; he has got no other place to go. Loneliness is a crucial point in schizophrenic existence. The novel offers us glimpses of Paul Michel alone, with no stable relationships, but the recurrent theme is more painful in disease. He classifies loneliness in two parts: the necessary and the agonizing one, necessary to write, while the other one is painful and hard to endure. The first one is the chosen solitude: you decide to live on your own and listen to your interior rhythm. It can turn out to be rewarding if you are a writer. Sometimes, writers turn to "female staff or family servants to keep their egos afloat." (113) But Paul Michel preferred total privacy. This chosen solitude is also a consequence of his homosexuality.

This hurtful type of solitude shakes Paul Michel's existence and is consistent with his madness. Madness is most frightening in those rare moments of lucidity when the insane refer themselves to what we call

'normal people'. The contrast is abysmal; hallucinations, delusions, distortions of reality, are all typical of schizophrenia.

> Then you begin to live what you believe in. The most terrifying thing though is the way in which the colours change. I saw the whole world in violets, reds, greens. Nothing was subtle any more; just primary, violent colours. You can't eat. It is as if there is pain, pain everywhere. You lose track of time. Like entering a tunnel of colours […] I put on an act. You know that. You're right. A born exhibitionst. But when I was mad I wasn't acting. I couldn't express myself, except through violence. I felt I had to defend myself. It was as if I was being constantly attacked. And I felt that I had no substance. I was transparent. (108).

Madness builds up new characters and destroys the old ones. Yet scientists contend that schizophrenia is not about split personality. It is about the temporary modification of perception. Madness makes you imagine a new universe according to your own rules. Paul Michel's hallucination is triggered off by the sight of tanks on the streets of Paris. It is when the border between reality and hallucination becomes blurred. He becomes a stranger to himself.

Being a born exhibitionist, Paul Michel plays with the concept of madness. We live in a world with no limits or constraints, where everything is possible. This reality in permanent flux encounters virtual reality. Our existences simply melt away in this sphere of exaggerate intimacy, as Baudrillard called it, the 'pornography of information'. In Paul Michel's mind, madness alternates with absolute freedom. Madness is the real world he lived in, the aching, dominating existence. The bright, sunny side of life is envisaged under the form of virtual reality, difficult to get access to, but totally rewarding.

Paul Michel's brain was still capable of playing games with everything that represented the norm, the 'real' life. Imagination has turned him into a dangerous person for the others, while he himself was stepping on the path of lucidity. The institution categorized him as a fearful, problematic patient, just because he *simply refused to become normal*. Paul Michel praised existence under its most unusual forms. He certainly wanted to get rid of the disease, but he did not mean to turn boring, flat, mean and ordinary. He lived for the moment, he liked being an exhibitionist. Normalcy would not allow such behaviour. Paul Michel lived inside a game and the game, though difficult in the beginning, permitted the narrator to meet his idol day after day. The playing mind of Paul Michel made him a man "without limits or restraint." (105) The hospital staff "had no access to his mind, but he understood theirs perfectly. He was a free man." (105). Freedom is not merely a state of being; it is rather a state of mind. Paul Michel prides himself on his sexual outcast status, and proudly admits that this status gives him freedom. The liberty of mind offered both Paul Michel and Foucault the courage to openly recognize their homosexuality. Unfortunately, Foucault's life ends tragically, being defeated by AIDS, and Paul Michel gets himself killed in a car accident.

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A CRITICAL DISTANCE

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***Abstract**: After achieving literary success in the United States, Edith Wharton moved to France in 1913. This newly acquired physical distance from her homeland also gave her a critical distance. A short study of Wharton's portrayal of Americans living abroad with their cultural differences and generation gaps, and an analysis of their language difficulties and communication problems in The Children will reveal the influence of her adopted culture on her perception of American society.*

***Key words**: Americans living broad, cultural differences, adopted culture, American society.*

France was Edith Wharton's country of adoption, her country of choice. Born into a well-to-do New York family in 1862, she grew up during the period of rapid social evolution and industrialization which followed the Civil War. Many of her novels and short stories are set in late 19th century New York, describing the mores and customs of a once all-powerful social elite which was gradually disappearing. *The House of Mirth*, her first novel which was a popular success, published in 1905, described the life of a young woman living in the morally corrupt world of the nouveaux riches in New York at the end of the 19th century. New York continued to provide the background of her writing after she moved permanently to France in 1913. Her Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Age of Innocence,* published in 1920, described with a certain nostalgic irony the disappearing social conventions of the New York social elite. At the same time that she so aptly criticized the social hypocrisy she created a bittersweet image of a lost idyllic past. When Edith Wharton published *The Children* in 1928 she was still drawing inspiration from her homeland, creating an ironic portrait of American society, but there was a difference.

She was no longer writing about the past, the end of the 19th century, but about the present, the beginning of the 20th century. And she was no longer writing with the perspective of an insider living in New York, but from the optic of an expatriate living in France – and she wrote with humour. A short study of her descriptions of Americans living abroad with their cultural and generation gaps, and the analysis of several references to language and communication in *The Children* will reveal the relevance of this new critical distance.

As a child in the late 19th century, Edith Wharton spent much time travelling and living in France and Italy with her family. After she grew up and married she continued these frequent journeys with her husband, travelling extensively in England. Hermione Lee points out in her biography of Edith Wharton that "from 1908 onwards, she visited England for several weeks in almost every year of her life, and in 1913 and 1914 she hovered on the edge of deciding to make a life for herself there, like Henry James" (2007:234). She was easily able to adapt to a culture which was so similar to her own, and felt at home there. But she did not write about England, she wrote about America. And from this vantage point she was able to gain new insight into her own culture. We often think that travelling and visiting foreign countries makes you aware of other cultures, which of course it does, but it also makes you very aware of your own culture and to what point you are part of it. When Edith Wharton moved to France after divorcing her husband, she settled there permanently for the rest of her life, and added another perspective to this critical distance from her homeland – that of language. Although she was fluent in French and well integrated in French intellectual circles, she was an expatriate and this new position gave her an additional insight into her own country. Although she did write of

France, she wrote mainly of America, the country she had left behind. Unlike Henry James, a fellow expatriate and very close friend, who became a British citizen before his death, Edith Wharton remained steadfastly American.

Edith Wharton criticizes various aspects of early 20th century America in her novel *The Children.* Her main characters are wealthy Americans, products of the new society made rich by new money made in shipping, real estate, and banking during the industrial revolution. They have diplomas from the best schools – but have no education. They come from good families, but do not take care of their own children. Their social life has become more important than their family – but they have no real friends. This is the America Edith Wharton chose to criticize. From her vantage point in France she easily perceived and parodied this new generation of Americans.

The Children is the story of Martin Boyne, a middle-aged bachelor, a Harvard educated civil engineer, who has finally decided to commit himself by proposing to Rose Sellars, an attractive recently widowed friend of longstanding who he has always admired from a distance – keeping her safely on a pedestal. Taking a boat from Algiers to Venice he is in the midst of imagining his amorous declarations when he meets reality in the form of the Wheater children. The Wheater children are an unruly band of siblings and step-siblings belonging to the wealthy American 'jazz set' as Edith Wharton described the early 20th century equivalent to the jet set. Their parents, Cliffe and Joyce Wheater, belong to the group of affluent Americans who spend their time travelling abroad in Europe in elite social circles where new money mixes with old money, where traditional values

have lost their hold, and where home has become a series of expensive hotels.

There are seven Wheater children. Judith, the eldest, is a child-woman whose sole desire is to keep the children from being separated again by another divorce or remarriage. Thierry and Blanca are the eleven year old twins – totally non-identical. Thierry is the physical weakling and intellectual, while Blanca is the completely superficial little girl interested only in the latest fashion. Zinnie is the fruit of a rapid marriage between Cliffe Wheater and Zinnia Lacrosse, one of Hollywood's rising stars who later divorces Wheater to become Lady Wrench by marrying into the English aristocracy and rising a little higher on the social ladder. Bun and Beechy are the Italian twins, children of Prince Buondelmonte and a late travelling circus artist who Joyce Wheater magnanimously, unofficially, and temporarily adopted after her short marriage with the prince. Chip or Chipstone is the product of a second marriage between Cliffe and Joyce during a brief period of calm in their tangled relationships. He is the beautiful baby, good-natured and cheerful who symbolizes the Wheater's second chance. All these children from various unions between different nationalities and aristocratic lineages form a family. They lead a nomadic life in Europe – travelling from luxury hotel to luxury hotel by train or cruise ship, following the seasonal changes of a social elite who have lost their landmarks. The children struggle to recreate the stability their parents are no longer able to give them.

Martin Boyne has reached a point in his life where he is also seeking stability. He imagines a happy romantic secure life married to Rose Sellars, his intellectual equal. This idyll exists of course only in his imagination. He himself realizes this when he acknowledges that the free communication

between them was actually in the "imaginary conversations in which it was he who sustained both sides of the dialogue." (Wharton 2006:237) Like a child, Martin Boyne is seeking stability, but he is unable to really commit himself. When the Wheater children burst into his life, he feels released from an adult obligation. When he is with the children he feels that it is like "getting back from a constrained bodily position into a natural one." (Wharton 2006:245) But this is a reality in which he plays a false role – that of the father who he is not. And when Boyne oversteps this role, when he finally admits that he is physically attracted to the very young Judith, he is quickly thrust back into his role of friendly and trusted guardian.

Americans are often said to be big children and in her novel, Edith Wharton parodies the childish behaviour of Cliffe and Joyce Wheater who are parents in name only. Their marital mishaps – divorces and remarriages – seem to be just part of a game played out among the current fashionable international set of nouveaux riches, actors and aristocrats. Their total disregard for the welfare of their children except when they can be used for egotistical purposes would be shocking if not treated in such a humorous manner. Joyce Wheater's amorous interest in her son's tutor or Zinnia Lacrosses' temporary desire for a maternal image only to please her newest husband make us smile at the same time as they reveal the shallowness of this new generation of Americans. Cliffe and Joyce are very concerned with appearances – with the image they present to the world. The description of the Wheater family on their new yacht *The Fancy Girl* is the image they want to present, but not at all the reality.

> Cliffe Wheater, in his speckless yachting cap and blue serge, moved about among his family like a beneficent giant, and Mrs. Wheater, looking younger than ever in her white yachting skirt and jersey, with her golden thatch tossed by the breeze fell

> into the prettiest maternal poses as her own progeny and the "steps" scrambled over her in the course of a rough-and-tumble game organized by Boyne and the young tutor. (Wharton 2006:79*)*

The description of Cliffe and Joyce's so-called high society friends at the Lido is both humorous and disturbing.

> All about them at tables exactly like theirs sat other men exactly like Lord Wrench and Wheater, the Duke of Mendip and Gerard Ormerod, other women exactly like Joyce and Zinnia and Mrs. Lullmer […] Every one of the women in the vast crowded restaurant seemed to be of the same age, to be dressed by the same dress-makers, loved by the same lovers, adorned by the same jewellers and massaged and manipulated by the same Beauty doctors. (Wharton 2006:154)

Like Edith Wharton, Martin Boyne is observing his fellow humans and noting the conformity of their social behaviour – like sheep, they all resemble one another.

Edith Wharton's description of the actual children is on the other hand more indulgent. Forced to grow up early, in a situation which is not of their choosing the children show remarkable strength in the face of adversity. What is interesting is how the children seem to swing between adult and child behaviour. Judith is particularly poignant in her total emotional commitment to keeping the children together, an attitude which is countered by her very pragmatic approach to achieving her ends. She does not condemn her mother's immature behaviour with her new young lover, but seems to understand it as inevitable. In the end the children are much like their parents. In imitating their behaviour they obviously become more and more like them. Judith's attractiveness, Terry's scholarly pursuits, eleven-year-old Blanca's engagement to a lift boy, Zinnia's craving for presents,

Bun's circus antics, Beechy's maternal instinct, and Chipstone's Buddha-like composure and good-humour are all characteristics which seem to foreshadow their adult lives.

The difference between generations can be likened to the differences between languages and between cultures. The children develop between themselves their own rules and social codes. Unlike their parents who seem to communicate by innuendos and unspoken assumptions, they are direct and very logical. Martin tries to cross this barrier. He adores being with the children, but he misinterprets Judith's directness. He is sure that there are troubled emotions underneath her calm surface, but he is assuming what he wants to see and not the reality. Judith is startlingly candid. She does care for Martin – as a family friend who may be able to help her keep the children together.

Martin Boyne also tries to change the nature of his relationship with Rose Sellars. For years they have been friends and "their relation had been maintained in the strict limits of friendship." (Wharton 2006:84) And now that Mrs. Sellars has been recently widowed Martin decides to change this relationship to finally propose to this woman he has always kept at a distance on her pedestal. But like a child who wants a toy, the real pleasure is in the anticipation. Once he obtains what he wants, in this case the possibility of Rose Sellars' hand in marriage, it becomes less important. Martin changes his object of desire and it becomes Judith, a fifteen year old child who is unobtainable because of her youth. At the end of the story, when Martin returns after a four year absence, he sees her through a window, but does not approach her, does not try to change the image in his mind.

Edith Wharton pokes fun at modern American education and child-rearing with her amusing description of Princess Buondelmonte's theories on learning. The Princess arrives with the latest degrees in Eugenics and Infant Psychology, obtained from an unheard of university in the no man's land of Texas and maintains that children should be "properly psychoanalyzed and that their studies and games" should be "selected with a view to their particular moral, alimentary, dental, and glandular heredity." (Wharton 2006:278). The allusions to Freud and Malthus are evident as Wharton skilfully shows the gap between theory and practice when children are involved.

The children also create their own moral codes much as their parents do. Zinnia's love for presents is justified by her decision to share with the others if she receives chocolate but to keep any jewellery for herself. Similarly, Blanca's obsession with clothes and fashion is pardonable because she is such a pretty little girl. Judith steals from her own father in order to have the necessary funds to keep the children together – and this theft is also taken very lightly because of Judith's basic good intentions.

Having lost their ties with one set of parents and one country, the children develop their own rules for language. This new language and system of codes which they develop bears some resemblance to the acquisition of a second language, perhaps because at the time the book was written Edith Wharton was herself living in France and speaking a second language daily. Boyne is at first surprised that the children refer to their parents by their surname. But the logic of the situation becomes clear to him when Miss Scope explains to him that the names *father* and *mother* had to be applied successively or simultaneously, to so many different persons that it is less confusing to just use surnames. Similarly the children are not

always called by their real names. The use of nicknames is also a gentle mockery of the early twentieth century American fad. We can only smile when we learn that Bun and Beechy's real names are Astorre and Beatrice and that Chip is actually named Chipstone. As far as spelling is concerned, anything goes – and it usually is closer to phonetic transcription than anything else. When Terry asks Martin to intervene on his behalf to ask his parents for a tutor, he explains that Judith can do nothing for him – she doesn't know how to spell – and writes stomach with a 'k'. (Wharton 2006:43) So in the children's world, spelling is not important, but they realize that to be taken seriously by adults, they must write correctly. Similarly, Judith says that she cannot marry, because she cannot spell.

The errors the children make in acquiring their first language are often the errors a foreigner makes when acquiring a second language. Although Edith Wharton spoke French fluently, she was doubtless very sensitive to logical grammatical or pronunciation errors. Bun speaks "an noath", a "nawful oath", they have all "sworen' on Scopy's book. The difficulty to distinguish where one word stops and the other begins is common to children as well as to second language learners. Instead of swearing on a Bible, the children swear on Miss Scopes's 'Cyclopaedia of Nursery Remedies' – their logic is again infallible – this is the book that will cure all their ills.

Similarly, Edith Wharton is very sensitive to the misunderstandings which can result from the misinterpretation of a word. When Princess Buendelmonte announces 'when Astorre and Beatrice come to live with me the first thing I shall do is to make them both co-operate", Bun understands the word "operate", and immediately bursts into tears assuming that there will be a medical operation. (Wharton 2007:294)

Edith Wharton carried this theme of misunderstanding and misinterpretation one step farther when she created the scene where Martin Boyne finally declares his intentions to Judith. He explains that he has a solution which will allow all the children to stay together – and in his mind he is thinking of marrying Judith and adopting all the children – but he is not direct – and Judith assumes that he wants to adopt all the children, including her. Boyne is devastated and must come back to reality.

Thus we can see that from her vantage point in France, Edith Wharton was able to create a biting satire of the new American generation of the 20's, which she did not describe as the lost generation. The caricature of the modern American family on the derive in Europe, drifting from one luxury resort to another is both humorous and sad. Their lost values have been replaced by false values as they continue unwittingly on their endless journey going nowhere. Martin Boyne is both sympathetic and ridiculous. In contrast to her former works, Edith Wharton uses humour to soften her criticism of her homeland. Perhaps with age, or perhaps with physical distance from her subject she was able to add this new dimension.

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TRAVELLING WITH WOLLSTONECRAFT: LETTERS FROM SCANDINAVIA

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Abstract: *In her Letters from Scandinavia, Mary Wollstonecraft gives an account of her journey which is a metaphor for a creative and critical process. Her journey is not only an itinerary but also a series of unexpected events; in going to Scandinavia Mary chose a particular kind of travelling full of questions, which mask achievable, but at the same time unreachable destinations.*

Key words: *travel literature, language, feelings, imagination, solitude, female subjectivity.*

1. Introduction

Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark is a collection of twenty-five letters written by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) and published by J. Johnson in 1796. They recount Wollstonecraft's adventurous journey to northern Europe which was recommended by Gilbert Imlay, her friend and partner at the time of the French Revolution. Wollstonecraft's letters, however, are more than just a typical example of travel literature, as they can also be seen as a powerful trope for the critical process involved in the discovery of places that are physically reachable but figuratively unattainable. Hers is a journey full of unexpected incidents and adventures, characterised by a two-way movement: that of the author towards the text and *vice versa*. Wollstonecraft's letters, then, are not only remarkable on a social level, as they enable the reader to travel into the history of different societies as a

result of the narrator's first-hand experience, but also on a stylistic level, due to those semantic and polysemous shifts that make Wollstonecraft's language new and unique.

Wollstonecraft's travels revolve around two poles: the real world and the literary one. Indeed, Wollstonecraft's choices pertaining to content and style allow many of the rejected alternatives - the "possible worlds" theorised by Corti - to emerge. In fact, the *Letters* constitute an important step in the development of the author's personal style. As a feminist and Jacobin avant-garde writer, she creates a narrative that breaks with many of the conventions of eighteenth-century travel literature, in an era generally known as "the age of travel":

> My reason obliges me to permit my feelings to be my criterion. Whatever excites emotion has charms for me (Wollstonecraft 1987:123).

The choice of feelings as a basis for her opinions surely constitutes a revolutionary factor at the end of the eighteenth-century. We are faced with two levels of investigation: on the one hand, the role of Wollstonecraft as a woman, and life in general; on the other, the formal rules of a text.

> The most essential service, I presume, that authors could render to society, would be to promote inquiry and discussion, instead of making those dogmatical assertions (Wollstonecraft 1987:85).

If "the spirit of inquiry is the characteristic of the present century", she writes, it can also provide the stimulus to acquire "a great accumulation of Knowledge". According to the rationalistic nature of her intellectual education, Mary Wollstonecraft pursues a specifically formal kind of

knowledge that is constructed through an unbroken dialogue with her reading public. Travelling through the text, readers have the opportunity to compare the different views and ways of life of a generation.

The author is also the main character in a narration that questions several epochal issues. Such a dynamic travel-account entails the endless shifting of cultural perspectives: public and private, social and individual. The first-person narrator constantly addresses the reader using a language containing specific references to spatial and temporal markers. All these strategies help the readers to be involved in the dynamic succession of the narrative deriving from the people she meets and the events occurring during the journey. As a consequence, the thematic, spatial and temporal threads are turned into formal, stylistic and grammatical relations, which are woven into the textual fabric. Therefore, the *Letters* describe both a real journey to the North of the world and a metaphorical pilgrimage into the intricate labyrinth of the author's soul. The constant shifting from the autobiographical plane to a more properly symbolic level leads to a series of metaphorical and linguistic operations. Sharing Wollstonecraft's view of the language and of the world, the reader comes to know and appreciate usages and customs typical of her culture – meant as a dynamic network of relations involving people, activities, rules, values, creeds, traditions, future perspectives, ways of life and styles of discourse. The latter are factors through which Mary's social identity is constructed and negotiated, disclosing her intellectual position, her relations with other people, her role in that very society she was defying with her dreams and utopias.

At the time of the composition, Wollstonecraft had just lost the opportunity of "a career and identity as a female philosopher and public intellectual in France" (Kelly 2001:15), due to the fact that England was

against the French Revolution. In this light, her travels to Scandinavia should also be interpreted as a psychoanalytical review of her personal needs and hopes. Travelling was meant as a pause, an attempt at displacement from what was tormenting her both as a woman-writer and as a sympathizer of the Revolution. In the *Letters,* the author thus reveals her deepest self and discloses her feelings, thoughts, dreams and aspirations.

Wollstonecraft employs the rhetoric of the sublime to connect with the natural beauty of the wild and the imposing scenery of the northern landscape; she alternates natural descriptions with political judgements and news; social and economical information about life in those countries; her relationships with the host families; but also her inmost thoughts. Almost an epistolary novel, the work is rich in mysterious and disquieting elements, while constantly giving a double perspective on public and private issues: on the world as it is and how it should be and on a lost but still desired lover. Wollstonecraft as a "female philosopher" contributes to the contemporary revaluation of pathos, a category she conceived, according to taste, as an uncontrolled expression of feelings and creativity, anticipating themes and stylistic features of the later Romantic literary production. Her writing, in fact, was to influence the aesthetics of such poets as Wordsworth and Coleridge.

2.1. Themes: "I leaned on a spear that has pierced me to the heart".

Wollstonecraft's diary starts after eleven days of navigation while on board a boat not meant for passengers. Although she is exhausted, Wollstonecraft keeps on reporting "the rude beauties of the scene": "whilst warmed with the impression they have made on me" (1987:63); it would later prove to be a happy choice. It is soon made clear that the adventurous

and eccentric narrator is travelling with Fanny, her baby child, and Marguerite, a young French waitress who has been working with her since they lived in Le Havre. Once in Gothenburg, Wollstonecraft leaves Fanny with Marguerite after a two week stay. Then, she embarks alone for Stromstad where she visits the fortress of Fredrickstad. She then moves to Larvick, in Norway, and then to Tonsberg, where she stays for four weeks. She crosses the Skagerrak passing the rocky and wild coasts of Larvick. She travels, always by sea to Helgeroa, to Risor and then to Christiania. She returns to Gothenburg, but on horseback, via Stromstad, to rejoin her daughter. She crosses the Kattegat to reach Denmark and stops at Copenhagen. Crossing the Great and the Little Belts, she gets to Schleswig and to Hamburg, where she boards a regular boat for Dover. She finally returns to London in September.

All in all, her wandering lasted three months, from the end of June to the beginning of October 1795. At that time, almost all of Europe was at war with France, so travelling was quite a dangerous undertaking. Little was known about Scandinavian society in Britain or in France, which is why Wollstonecraft decided to write about those countries and their culture. Readers are promptly informed of the political importance of Denmark, more commanding than Norway, and not far behind Sweden; of the strong influence of the Danish statesman, the Count A.P. Bernstorff; of the dramatic murder of King Gustav III of Sweden, which happened in 1792; of the Danish affair between Princess Matilda and the royal doctor Struensee, which stirred English public opinion, and "excited" Mary's "compassion" (1987:176). The unnamed receiver of the *Letters*, ambiguously referred to as "you" or "my friend", is told about the splendid and unexplored natural

landscape of the North: “I pause again breathless, to trace, with renewed delight, sentiments which entranced me” (1987:110).

The unexplored world of Nature is the ideal background and, at the same time, the real protagonist of the author’s moving, intimate and absorbing reflections, recounted in an “unrestrained” flow, as announced in the Advertisement, where the pronoun ‘I’ is repeated fourteen times.

The “Heart and mind”, “intellect and heart”, “mind and feelings” of the *Letters* are the core (expanded by imagination) of her opinions: a “heart” making her fall painfully in love with Gilbert; a “mind” leading her to dissent from the historical and moral discourse against Godwin’s positive view of social progress. In line with Malthus (whose *Essay* was published in 1798), she investigates the possible damage caused by a “perfectly cultivated” future world. In a way she endorses the physiocrats Francois Quesnai’s and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot’s theories, the advocates of agriculture, whose ideas she had learnt in France (1987:130).

Wollstonecraft’s is a figuratively mythical voyage characterised by a pressing timetable but with no fixed plan. Far from any typical eighteenth-century abstraction, she prefers the detailed description of daily life written in a “sentimental” and poetic language. Passing from general to particular issues, she brilliantly pieces together her conjectures in an almost detective-like manner.

Wollstonecraft explores public and private experience through the principle of solidarity which is addressed to the whole community rather than to individuals: “I have then considered myself as a particle broken off from the grand mass of mankind” (1987:69).

Travelling, in her opinion, is not only a way of knowing and understanding how different cultures develop and progress, but also a way to discover some of the hidden aspects of human nature (1987:172).

Being self-critical and travelling are both ways to attain the goal of a liberal education and the northern Countries, according to her, are an excellent example of a high form of civilization (1987:173).

During her Scandinavian wayfaring, Wollstonecraft particularly appreciates the cold, inhospitable North, especially Norway (which she added to the list of enchanted romantic destinations). Even the living conditions of the convict workers in the fortress of Christiania seem to her quite bearable (1987:145). She was also interested in prison reform: many of her friends had had to endure the terrible conditions of captivity in the dark and damp French goals.

While depicting the northern landscape, Wollstonecraft conveys her moral and social ideas. In some of the most striking pages of her work (see letter thirteen), Wollstonecraft delivers a detailed and competent account of the Danish 'bailiffs' of Christiania, dealing with the theme of institutionalised despotism. She makes highly scathing comments on the immoral effects of all public executions (1987:168). According to her, "the virtues of a nation", synonymous with its scientific conquests, "bear an exact proportion to their scientific improvements" (1987:173).

Her observations about the limitations and the possibilities for the western world to improve after the collapse of the values brought by the French Revolution, are linked to an idea of community where the role of women is more balanced. Wollstonecraft often dwells on the plight of women, which she had already addressed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The

solitary voyager willingly reports on women's clothes, tastes, behaviour and customs, according to their social condition and cultural awareness; sadly, she has to establish the truth of their being a party to their own subjection: like slaves, women are cruelly punished once they have betrayed male expectations. (1987:177).

She deplores her daughter Fanny's fate, not only for being fatherless:

> I feel more than a mother's fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of her sex […] Hapless woman! What a fate is thine! (1987: 97).

The narrator's unnamed daughter is made a focus for the text's concerns about the future of a "democratic and egalitarian society" (Kelly 2001): she is a symbol of all women who must endure the wrongs of a sexist society.

In line with Adam Smith's theories, she pays attention to the lack of balance between work and profits (1987:120). As regards the economic output of Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft points out its importance (1987:121).

A critical attitude is shown with regard to the behaviour of the merchants, "men devoted to commerce", vulgar and impudent agents who "seem of the species of the fungus" (1987:191). She deplores particularly that "a contraband trade makes the basis of their profit", and that "the coarsest feelings of honesty are quickly blunted" (1987:131) by a greedy and cruel business. Lots of citizens were driven to make large profits by greed, even during wartime, as was happening, for instance, in southern Europe (1987:170). Such practices were favoured by the promotion of an immoral market. Wollstonecraft also dwells on the "debasing" effects of business on culture and believes the human brain can be "embruted" by

such a cruel kind of trade. However, she is not as pessimistic as Goldsmith in the *Deserted Village* (1770); she suggests, instead, that commerce should be "regulated by ideas of justice and fairness and directed toward the ideals of independence and benevolence" (1987:195). Wollstonecraft contrasts the imaginative creation with a destructive kind of moralism; the latter is associated with Gilbert, who seems to be more interested in his financial speculations than in Fanny and her (1987:193). Indeed, at the root of Wollstonecraft's peregrinations lies her paradoxical attempt to recover a "mushroom fortune": that is a fortune deriving from a war fraud (Holmes, 1987:21-26). Besides compromising herself by accepting to collect money from illegal trade on Gilbert's account, during her Norwegian voyage she is also mocked by his indifference: he does not even rejoin her in Hamburg, which he had previously promised to do. A sense of betrayal emerges from all this. "A woman of observation" and a passionate woman, capable of melancholic thoughts, Wollstonecraft longs for the truth (letter twelve). In vain does she dream of "an asylum [...] from all the disappointments I am threatened with" (1987:149).

However, she will not find a safe shelter even in Britain, where she realizes that nothing has ever changed (1987: 189).

Wollstonecraft's travels are thus oxymoronically suspended between a state of curiosity and a state of knowledge; between surprise and discovery; between exile and the opportunity to meet people from different civilizations; constantly comparing the "inside" with the "outside", the self with the "other". Knowledge is epistemically addressed towards the private and public spheres of her life at the same time; it is a means to compare the cultural, commercial, urban and social organization of the Scandinavian

countries with that of England and France, of London and Paris: "What a long time it requires knowing ourselves" (1987:122).

Wollstonecraft's challenge of all 'boundaries' stems principally from her pursuit of 'solitude' or 'solitariness'. It is characterized by her awareness of being a revolutionary and progressive woman full of contradictions, forced to pay with solitude her fight for the emancipation of women: "I cannot immediately determine whether I ought to rejoice at having turned over in this solitude a new page in the history of my own heart" (122); nevertheless, loneliness can also bestow some rare 'moments of bliss' which finally give sense to her life: "In solitude the imagination bodies forth its conceptions unrestrained " (1987:119).

2. 2. The Plot and the Language

Wollstonecraft's style is an excellent example of what has been termed as "female" writing. This is shown not only by her grammatical choices but also by a multi-levelled symbolism linked to the body and to gender issues. The female body (described in the acts of dressing and undressing, of walking, resting, sweating, bathing, trembling and so on) is the touchstone around which all narrative prolepses and flashbacks revolve. The author is present in terms of the body; in her writings she characteristically tends towards questioning (even in affirmative sentences); tones of surprise can be detected in general notations, used as narrative strategies aimed at mirroring the desire to know but also a strong uncertainty. It seems as if Wollstonecraft could not directly expose her own ideas due to a sense of insecurity:

> Life what art thou? Where goes this breath? This I, so much alive? In what

> element will it mix, giving or receiving fresh energy? - What will break the enchantment of animation? [...] Is this all the distinction of the rich in the grave? (1987:109)

Like many women writers, Wollstonecraft does not employ violent or explicit vocabulary or direct terminology; for instance, she uses the word 'attachment' to describe the affair between Matilda and Struense. In letter nineteen, a circumlocution is used to describe the premarital sexual relations that official fiancées are allowed to have in Norway (1987:172).

Wollstonecraft employs a large number of cultivated Gallicisms, like 'grand', 'dormant', 'solitude', 'vestige' and 'adieu', a word ending many of her letters. Her language exalts the emotive linguistic function, in order to establish a close contact with the adressee. The reader and, above all, Gilbert, are indirectly addressed; they act as private inferences in the text.

She prefers the phatic and conative functions to the referential one, even if most of the letters are rich in informative contents and instructive comments. Moreover, a series of spatial and temporal markers contributes to the formulation of real and passionate descriptions together with a highly deictic language employed in many passages.

The first-person narrator of the *Letters* generally mediates assertions – 'I am persuaded', 'I am convinced', 'I mean', 'I see', 'I hear', 'I like', 'I love', 'I wish'. As a subject, it can be split up into other selves performing different functions. Wollstonecraft's perceptive self describes her travel adventures as a perceptive and phenomenological experience; on the other hand, her cognitive self is in charge of recognizing the world and its rules (things as they are and how they should or could be, offering solutions and asking questions); her pathemic self declares her disappointed 'great

expectations'. These are to be meant as instances of the modulations of Wollstonecraft's subjectivity, often marked by inner conflicts. Even the plot can be interpreted as the result of the interaction of Wollstonecrafts' selves. The main aim of the events related in the *Letters* is that of calling Gilbert's attention, together with the reader's. This is achieved thanks to several references to memories, reproaches and broken promises. The textual fabric is semantically inscribed on the story of a woman in love; it fulfils some implicit narrative needs by means of linguistic displacements. So, the private story unifies the whole narration around the paradigmatic axiology on which the text is built.

Wollstonecraft's curiosity as a traveller combines with her determination as a stubborn lover. Her wish to be loved again by Gilbert becomes an obsession which clearly emerges little by little during her journey. She is aware of her defeat; nevertheless her sad condition increases the intensity of her feelings, which inspire her descriptions of the Norwegian fiords, of the Swedish harbours and of the Danish moorings.

The author undertakes her exploration as if it were both a sentimental and a rational experience, "by giving the indulgence of feeling the sanction of reason" (1987:129). She is overcome by her wish to know, which she feels as a duty. She deplores her sad condition of a deserted lover, but on an exquisitely anthropological level, she makes comments and evaluates ideologies and customs of almost unknown countries. Her first and foremost passion is her curiosity, the latter is the chiasmic passion *par excellence*, according to Greimas. It is built on will and knowledge; it must be obstinate against all kinds of difficulties, both material and cognitive.

Her unreturned love makes her melancholic and reticent, often fluctuating between hope and despair, "heart and mind". She is always

looking for consent which is never to be achieved, notwithstanding her narrative strategies aiming to involve the receiver emotionally.

Overlooking the sea, "the terrific ocean beautiful", at Tonsberg, she delivers her strong sense of communion with nature. It is a metaphorically sublime embrace, mirroring the passionate nature of her relationship with Gilbert, a man whom she disapproves of on a cultural level. The description of such breathtaking views recalls a kind of intimacy with nature involving both senses and soul (1987:110). Her more explicit fluctuations finally lead her to recognize the dysphoric nature of her love.

The rhetorical and conversational style of the *Letters* shows the gradual change in Mary's state in relation to explicit attempts at manipulation and seduction involving unexpressed desires, the wish to reform and self ostentation. Her pessimism increases in relation to her will either to acknowledge or to ignore Gilbert's indifference: "Why should I weep for myself? Take, O world! Thy much undebted tear" (1987:196).

This is the end of letter twenty-four, where she deplores human greed and the love for outward appearances (1987:186). At the end of her journey, "the woman wailing for her demon-lover" (as Coleridge suggests in *Kubla Khan*) has won neither Gilbert's love nor his "treasure ship", both the opposite poles of an unattainable quest.

Wandering over the filthy landscape of Dover, she has no questions left to ask:

> my spirit of observation seems to be fled - and I have been wandering round this dirty place, literally speaking, to kill time (1987:197).

3. Conclusion

According to Godwin, "if ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book". The *Letters* mostly deal with an epiphanic kind of discovery of northern nature. Conceived in Romantic terms, they are about social and humanitarian issues, related to a new idea of progress. As a rationalist thinker, Mary connects her personal story with the main plot. The choice of a first-person narrator owes a lot to the success of the book, notwithstanding its abrupt conclusion. The author's passion is what Greimas has defined "anxiety"; it gives rise to the deep psychological complexity of the main character.

Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian journey implies a double movement towards an inner and an outer kind of knowledge, while she herself seems unable to master her anxiety due to her progressive awareness of being defeated as a lover. These are feelings characterising the real nature of her quest as a Jacobin revolutionary thinker. All this will end in her attempt to commit suicide by drowning. Her ethical outlook is antithetical to Gilbert's, as is shown by her invective against any immoral kind of trade. Thus, her anxiety corresponds with her unintentional wish to ignore the inadequacy of Imlay as a husband. Such restlessness is reflected by the large number of questions and doubts which are scattered throughout the text. We are faced, therefore, with both a verbal and pragmatic pursuit of a lost lover, ending with an attempt to kill herself.

Wollstonecraft's passionate syntagmatics combines her insatiable desire to travel with her condition of deceived lover. This takes place through the process of linking together will and knowledge, duty and possibility. However, her letters will achieve no effect on her lover and her diary unexpectedly ends with the narrator's silence. She is ready to leave "with the first fair wind for England". Her anxiety to leave (together with

her wounded sensibility) acts as a brake on her imagination which is the heart of her travel book. Her Romantic attitude gives way to "reason", which will induce her to attempt suicide.

> [...] And now I have only to tell you, that at the sight of Dover Cliffs, I wondered how any body could term them grand (1987:196)

Once in Dover – letter twenty-five, the shortest – she is only struck by the cliffs' lack of grandness. Here 'grand' disparagingly refers to Gilbert, her fiendish and immoral lover who had clouded her rational faculties. Death as a form of regeneration becomes the only means to recover her personal dignity and rationality, which she had only momentarily lost.

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AMANDA CROSS AND "THE QUESTION OF MAX"

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Abstract*: Carolyn Heilbrun, writing as Amanda Cross, had written four mystery novels prior to The Question of Max in 1976. Perhaps secure in her success, Heilbrun became politically strident and partisan in this novel, starting a trend enduring in her later novels. Her villains thereafter often were her more "politically incorrect" characters. Her novels remained entertaining but her ideological bias became quite obvious. Thus her later fiction should be understood in terms of its political posturing on social issues of interest to her, with gender issues being high among these.*

Keywords*: Amanda Cross /Carolyn Heilbrun, gender issues, mystery novels, political ideology.*

Introduction

Carolyn Gold Heilbrun (1926-2003), using the pen-name of Amanda Cross, had written four mystery novels prior to *The Question of Max* in 1976, each winning critical acceptance. Perhaps secure in her success, Heilbrun became more politically partisan in this novel, starting a trend sustained in her later novels (Marshall 1994:81). Thus *The Question of Max* marks a turning point in her literary approach to her subject matter. Thereafter her villains were easier to detect because they often were the "politically incorrect" characters in her stories. Her novels remained entertaining but her ideological bias often was quite obvious. As a political liberal, she betrayed her hostility toward both Republicans and conservatives in the way she presents them as characters in her fiction.

Carolyn Gold Heilbrun as Professor of Literature

Carolyn Gold was born on 13 January 1926. Her family was Jewish but dissociated themselves from Judaism and they lived a secular life. Her family moved to New York City when she was six, and she remained in New York City for most of her life. In 1945, while still an undergraduate at Wellesley College, she was courted by and married James Heilbrun. Susan Kress remarked that he

> […] 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" (1997:25).

something of an ironic remark about a woman who so clearly personified female autonomy and independence in her later years.

As a senior at Wellesley College Heilbrun began her career as a writer. Even then, in the mid-1940s, she revealed an interest in women's issues, especially in women's education, well before the "second wave" of the feminist movement. By the 1960s the women's liberation movement was gaining momentum and Heilbrun emerged as an important theoretician of feminism and as an advisor for other women scholars. She was willing to speak out for women and she had found the academic position from which to do so.

Earning her Ph.D. in English Literature at Columbia University in 1959, in the 1960s she secured a tenure-track appointment at Columbia, and remained at Columbia for most of her career, with occasional sabbaticals and visiting professorships elsewhere. Heilbrun became quite well-known, both as an academic and a feminist, as the author or co-author of 11 non-fiction books. Heilbrun eventually emerged as 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).

As a tenured professor of literature at Columbia University, a successful novelist and well respected author of ten non-fiction books, by the 1980s she had emerged as a prominent figure in the academic world of the United States. Her book *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988) had emerged as a must-read text in women's studies and women's literature courses. Collectively her writings, both non-fiction and fiction alike, contributed substantially to women's literature and to the promotion of the women's movement in the United States. She was instrumental in creating the image of "the new woman" in feminist ideology and in literature (Pervushina 2000; Pervushina and Kania 2008:84). She was elected the president of the Modern Language Association (Kress 1977:4) for 1984. She used the influence of this position to serve as an advocate for women's issues, especially the problems of women in the academic and professional worlds (Pervushina and Kania 2008:80, 84).

Carolyn Heilbrun as the Novelist Amanda Cross

While still an untenured junior faculty member in the 1960s she authored her first mystery novel, *In the Last Analysis* (1964). She used the pen-name Amanda Cross to protect her fledgling academic career. She worried that her novels would be viewed as frivolous and might block her path to tenure (Heilbrun 1988:110; Boken 1996:58). Whether or not her concerns were justified, she was granted tenure on schedule. She received several promotions at Columbia, both before and after her second identity

was revealed, rose in rank to full professor, and later was named to an endowed chair.

For her mystery novels she created the fictional character Kate Fansler who also was a university literature professor. She solved cases by understanding of human nature and relying on something vaguely like a woman's intuition. The plots are modeled on the British "drawing room mysteries" which Heilbrun liked (Walton and Jones 1999; Pervushina and Kania 2008:81). Yet her mysteries are distinctly different from those of both classic and contemporary male writers because of her inclusion of women's issues. The novels routinely referred to socio-political events at the time each novel was being written (Pervushina and Kania 2008:81). Thus she was among the first to link the criminal motivations of the offenders in her novels to the women's issues of the times (Roberts 1985). In doing so, she approached these issues and events from a liberal and partisan pro-Democrat ideological perspective.

This is most obvious in *The Question of Max* (1976). This novel marks a turning-point in her writing on several dimensions. Previously she had focused her stories on plots reflecting applications of the ideas taken from real authors, Sigmund Freud (*In the Last Analysis,* 1964), James Joyce (*The James Joyce Murder,* 1967), W. H. Auden (*Poetic Justice,* 1970), and the Greek classical drama, *Antigone* (*The Theban Mysteries,* 1971).

In contrast to her earlier novels, in *The Question of Max* she creates fictional literary figure around which to tell her tale. There are hints that she drew on events from the life of the real May Sarton (1912-1995) as a model for her fictional Cecily Hutchins. Cecily's associations with the characters Dorothy Whitmore and Frederica Tupe-Reston, also bear some similarities to Sarton's relationships with Juliette Huxley, Marie Closset, and Judith

Matlack. Heilbrun was particularly impressed with Sarton's book, *Plant Dreaming Deep* (1968), "a book Carolyn Heilbrun believed represented some of Sarton's best writing and which led to their friendship. With the publication of this memoir Heilbrun credited Sarton with opening vistas for creative women by suggesting that a single woman, living alone, can have universal truths to tell" (Blouin 1999). Heilbrun became literary executor for the Sarton papers after Sarton passed away in 1995 and had been a champion and friend of the reclusive lesbian author for many years.

Carolyn Heilbrun as an Ideologue

Heilbrun's ideological views were refined gradually over time and reflect the developments and periods of feminism in the United States. "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 and Kania 2008: 81). Her social views clearly were of a liberal-progressive political orientation, but never radical or extreme.

After *The Question of Max* Heilbrun's novels are far less "literary" and more "contextual," with their focus on the dynamics of universities and male-female relationships within them. She also strengthens her ideological voice after *The Question of Max*, having been more muted in her first three novels, and only having ventured into the controversial political issues of the Vietnam War in *The Theban Mysteries* (1971).

Also in *The Question of Max* her central character Kate Fansler has undergone a major change in her social status. In the first novels she was single and happily so. But in *The Question of Max* she is married to Reed Amhearst. He is an important character in those earlier novels as a male

friend and confidant, but plays a lesser role in this story. Reed had proposed marriage in *The James Joyce Murder* (1967:49), but their marriage occurs "off stage" and is not featured in any of the novels. The marriage of her otherwise independent and autonomous character may have become a problem for Heilbrun among her feminist supporters. It was about the time that a feminist had written that "a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle" (Martin 2008). As a moderate feminist among more ardent feminists, she may have sensed that the Fansler-Amhearst marriage was a mistake, and may have regretted "marrying off" Kate, thus creating another turning point in the series. Indeed, as if to correct the error, in *The Question of Max* we find Kate choosing to be living alone and apart from him for lengthy periods of creative introspection. This also emulated May Sarton.

In this novel Cross's characters raised the scandals of Richard Nixon multiple times (QoM:72,75,82-83). As if aware that she was overdoing it, Cross has Reed say, "Could we stop taking about Watergate?" (QoM:82), but she does not, indirectly referring to Nixon and his scandals several more times (QoM:103,105-106). She later presents Max as being wrong in defending conservative positions (QoM:150).

There is precious little reason to suspect Max in the crime, or that even a crime had occurred. Yet he becomes a suspect to Kate because of his right-wing positions on 1970s social and political issues, his outspoken sexism, and his snobbery (QoM:149,161,186). Cross eventually does produce an unlikely confession from Max and an attempt on her life by him thereafter (QoM:187-192), but the confession and crimes make precious little sense. The actual motive is explained as a cover-up of a secret, but the dark secret needed no cover-up. Max killed someone who knew that an existing will was about to be changed against his interests – but it was not

changed before the deceased passed away from natural causes. That means the old will was still the legally binding document, regardless of the intentions of its author to amend it. The knowledge that the victim had about plans to change the will was of no legal consequence. This it is a flawed story, built upon a false premise, and driven by its writer's ideological prejudices.

Perhaps she sensed that she had gone too far down the ideological path before writing her next novel. After a five years hiatus, what may have been her best work followed, *Death in a Tenured Position* (1981), published as *Death in the Faculty* in the United Kingdom (Walker, Cardale and McKenzie 2009), and was sharply focused on gender and equity issues in a university, a topic she knew and understood very well. The deceased is an attractive middle-aged WASP female professor of literature at Harvard University. Suspicion falls on her male colleagues, motivated by a disdain for women in their ranks, but Fansler shows that her death is a suicide, although clearly related to her mistreatment at the hands of her un-collegial male colleagues. Although still expressing clear ideological viewpoints, this book stayed focused on issues bearing on the story and does not range over broader social and political topics.

Alas, *The Puzzled Heart* (1997) offers another example of far too much ideology and political ideology running through the plot. The story involves the kidnapping of Kate's husband, and the murder of a youthful woman private investigator. The killer is never identified, but suspicion is narrowed down to either an older right-wing woman activist or her college-age son. The criminal motivation is complex and confused, based on a thirty-year old grudge against Kate, coupled with right-wing politics, followed by ideological betrayal.

Heilbrun's obvious bias in favor of Democrat and liberal causes continued in her later works, appearing with a vengeance in *Honest Doubt* (2000). She attacks the Republicans for seeking William Jefferson Clinton's impeachment (HD:103) having a character say, "The Republicans were out to get him, no other considerations allowed." A second character 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).

It seems both ironic and out of character for Heilbrun to be defending President Clinton even after the evidence was in that he was a chronic womanizer, adulterer, and sexual harasser. He was the very embodiment of the worst sexist characters she created earlier and routinely put down in her novels and whom she also confronted in her academic career. The allegations of Clinton's sexual misconduct with Monica Lewinsky and other women were confirmed at about the time she was writing so stridently on his behalf.

Her character Woody Woodhaven associates family values with fascism (HD:129) - a troubling perspective that reveals that Heilbrun was out of touch with the American political main stream by this time in her career (Pervushina and Kania 2008:82). She uses another of her characters, Larry Petrillo, to reveal another of her anti-conservative 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 willfully blind to the fact that the Clinton impeachment,

which she decried in *Honest Doubt* (2000:103), "arose from the fact that Bill Clinton lied so easily and so often, that it almost cost him his presidency" (Pervushina and Kania 2008:82). Having lied under oath in a judicial proceeding, it was his perjury, and not his sexual misconduct in itself, that warranted the impeachment action by the Congress.

In her next and final novel she is even more strident and unbalanced in her attacks on what she deemed to be conservative values and institutions. In *The Edge of Doom* (2002) she inserts statements highly critical of George W. Bush (EoD:114) that have no bearing on the plot, the characters or the context.

Conclusion

When Heilbrun used her fiction to express her viewpoints on feminism, women's issues and the life of the university (Murphy 1999:120), she told a good mystery tale. In the more ideological novels though (QoM, PH, HD, EoD), her villains became too obvious. They were shallow ideological strawmen to be beaten about not only for their crimes but for their contemptible ideological values.

There were subtle hints of her ideological orientations in her first novel (Roberts 1985), but as Marshall suggests (1994:81), Heilbrun took a more decidedly ideological approach with *The Question of Max*. This made this novel a turning-point in her literary career. It follows another turning-point, her gaining tenure at Columbia. Once assured of employment security, she was more free to challenge and offend those with whom she frequently disagreed. And disagree she did (Heller 1992).

Even with her excessive ideological bias and overt proselytizing on social issues, the Amanda Cross novels remain well worth reading. She was

an important social advocate, especially on gender issues, but with her blatant political biases and distorted perceptions about political issues, a reader of her novels must be aware that she never intended to present a balanced argument. These obvious faults do not detract from the focus she brought on the flaws of American university, American society, or on what she thought America should become. While she was alive she sparked lively debates in American academic circles. But a true debate requires that voices from competing perspectives need to be heard or read. The contrary views will not be found within the pages of a Cross novel or a Heilbrun academic book. Astute students of American studies will have to bring the counter-balance in for themselves.

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The Conundrum of Gender

A DANDY DISMISSION OF THE NATURAL AND PURE IN BYRON'S *DON JUAN*

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Abstract*: To demonstrate that even a poet of nature like Byron can dismiss the natural, the focus of the present analysis will be on the Haidée episode, where the only creature of the wild in Don Juan will be gradually turned from an inartificial innocent into a made-up harlot by Byron's dandyism. The defeat of pure Aurora in favour of the more refined and stylized Fitz-Fulke will be also discussed, as well as the matter of nature's provocations which can bring about the worst in the human being.*

Keywords*: naturalness, wilderness, innocence, romanticism, artificial beauty, perversity, naturalism, dandyism, libertinism.*

In *Don Juan*, Byron is not very generous with the creation of beautiful personalities characterized by innocence and gracious naturalness of conduct, though this does not appear entirely impossible, due to the two concessions he makes in this respect: Haidée and Aurora. But, if the girls begin their mission in the poem as ideals of perfection, they do so only to be subsequently got rid of, in manners that demonstrate the author's dandy incapacity of accepting such creatures for long or believing in their concrete existence. It is entirely fascinating to witness the process in which Haidée, the creature of the wild in the poem, who brings outcast Juan back to life, will be gradually turned from an inartificial innocent into a made-up harlot by Byron's dandyism. Let us not forget then Aurora's distinction allowed only in the context of her almost immaterial structure, a symbolic message banishing the possibility of excellence into an earthly being made of flesh

and blood. Or even more importantly, her meaningful final defeat by the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, a theatrical, 'synthetic' woman, whose stylization overcomes rapidly the girl's 'inurbane' chastity.

Haidée' is the child of nature in every good sense, possessing the wild beauty of her island and the tempestuous but noble soul shaped by the landscape around, which transforms her into Juan's only sentimentally correct mistress. Byron wanted her flawless and sincere, almost paying a tribute to womanhood through her: "Haidée spoke not of scruples, asked no vows / […] never having dreamt of falsehood" (II. 190). Nonetheless, he ended by demolishing her up to annihilation. The process starts as soon as she is presented, when her glance produces the comparison with a venomous snake implying death: "'Tis as the snake late coiled, who pours his length / And hurls at once his venom and his strength" (II. 117).

Biblical Fall is hinted at, where Haidée is Eve or the serpent of Eden. "Nature's bride" and "passion's child" (II. 202), as the poet names her, acquires a satanic dimension, reminiscent at the same time of the imperfection of the natural, primordial woman who tempts her Adam-Juan into a new Fall, by appealing to his instincts. This first subversion of Haidée's naturalness-perfection by the insinuation of diabolic corruption within the couple, anticipates Byron's rejection of his own ideal creation, the nihilism he is to display in connection with whatever Haidée represents.

Playing God, the poet allows the two to discover for a short time a paradise of love in an earthly Garden of Eden. Nature is their accomplice, as if to make up for the horrors it had produced not long before in the shipwreck scenes, while the language gains heavenly peacefulness:

> On the lone shore were plighted / Their heart. The stars, their nuptial torches, shed / Beauty upon the beautiful they lighted. / Ocean their witness, and the cave their bed, / By their own feelings hallow and united; / Their priest was solitude, and they were wed. / And they were happy, for to their young eyes / Each was an angel, and earth Paradise. (II. 204).]

Away from a world of mimesis and hypocrisy, this type of love is an escape into originality, where the joy of living consists in simple things like free eroticism and the man-nature communion: "She loved and was beloved, she adored / And she was worshipped after nature's fashion" (II. 191). From what is said overtly in the text, this harmony is shattered by Lambro the mercantilist, who is nevertheless a mere tool in the equation. From what is implied, Haidée and Juan are guilty themselves for the ruins of their Heaven because of their desire for social conformity, dictated by the greedy human nature. From what is neither told nor suggested, but rather inferred, the very dandy within Byron was bored with so much beatitude. Awaking from "an opium dream of too much youth and reading" (IV. 20), the poet declares that such love indeed is called romantic and we, the mortals, envy it, but "deem it frantic" (IV. 19). Therefore the interlude must finish, because "theirs was love in which the mind delights / To lose itself, when the old world grows dull, / And we are sick of its hack sounds and sights" (IV. 17), needing to breathe some other air for an instant, but not forever.

After remarkable efforts of keeping Haidée the embodiment of virginal sincerity and natural qualities, her status is suddenly changed. Speaking about this auctorial switch, Charles LaChance (1998:278) notices that "the sympathy the reader is seduced into experiencing for Haidée is strangely maligned by the writer". Nothing more correct. Except that this malignity is not strange at all if we try to understand the phenomenon

behind the transformation. Haidée's naturalness when we make her acquaintance is breathtaking. Her beauty is not enhanced by any of those tricks used by the emancipated women of the world. Everything – from her hand-made dress which "was many-coloured finely spun", to her "small snow feet [which] had slippers but no stockings" (II. 121) – demonstrates that she is far from the use of artifice. If the girl wears expensive Turkish shoes, she 'cuts' their elegance by omitting the stockings; if she is adorned with diamonds, they are carelessly scattered through her hair, whose "locks curled negligently round her face" (ibid.). Obviously, unlike those powdered ladies of the salons whose visage loses freshness in the day light, she does not need complicated cosmetic strategies to make a striking appearance.

But Byron is a dandy and we know that dandies are horrified in front of the inartificial females. These creatures' visceral, natural constitution could be at least covered by jewellery, make-up, spectacular clothes, so as to be more tolerable, thinks the fashionable. And this is exactly what Byron does with his Haidée, who, before Lambro's return, turns into a different woman. Her fault resides in excessive authenticity, a quality the lord did not believe women were able to possess and, awakened from his momentary reverie, he takes it back. In 1819 *Blackwood's Magazine* comments upon the Juan-Haidée romance:

> how easy for Lord Byron to have kept it free from any stain of pollution! What cruel barbarity, in creating so much beauty only to mar and ruin it! This is really the very suicide of genius (Rutherford 1970: 172).

The 'cruel barbarity' is in fact 'cruel dandyism', or even more correctly, simply 'dandyism', since it is known that among the many facets of the word, cruelty is included. As for the 'very suicide of genius', the

exact opposite is true. Had Byron kept the 'beauty', the whole story would have become dull and lifeless. It is precisely this dandy taste for contradictions that prevents both writer and reader from being bored. To sabotage the pirate's daughter, whose naturalness had probably become either frightening or abominable for her creator, his misogyny needed to demolish her pedestal, to reject her uniqueness and bring her closer to her sisters, by including her in the circle of socially mediated desires. Referring to Haidée's madness and final sufferance Paul Fleck (1996:96) remarks that "nowhere is the passage from innocence into an experience which totally disorients and distorts the essence of innocence more tellingly or tragically told than in the Haidée episode". The 'passage from innocence' is made earlier, when Haidée "after her "natural marriage" has become a little more cunning", states Marchand (1965:182) and we have every reason to believe that it starts with the girl's beginning to look like a courtesan.

If when she first appears her "brow was white and low, her cheeks pure dye / Like twilight rosy still with the set sun" (II. 118), towards the end of her 'mission', at the feast, the colours used are far more daring. Her "eyelashes, though as dark as night, were tinged" and her "nails were touched with henna" (III. 75), without spoiling her naturalness, Byron reassures us, because "those large black eyes were so blackly fringed / The glossy rebels mocked the jetty stain / And in their native beauty stood avenged. (ibid.), while in the case of the henna covering her hands, "the power of art was turned to nothing, for / They could not look more rosy than before" (ibid.). But he knows that this is not true. Something is irremediably changed and from now on Haidée will never be the girl of the woods again. The poet's dandyism was stronger than his idealism and the temptation of the artificial more powerful than the secret longing for unaltered simplicity.

After all, with the dandy, make-up is compulsory both for himself and for the woman, deployed to enhance grace: "artifice cannot lend charm to ugliness and can only serve beauty" (1964:34), preaches Baudelaire in his essay *In Praise of Cosmetics*, teaching that the artificial black around the eye "renders the glance more penetrating and individual, and gives the eye a more decisive appearance of a window open upon the infinite" (ibid.).

It is most likely that Byron prefers this Haidée who "was like a vision" (III. 76) to the completely natural variant. The statuary, idol-like femininity, which due to adornment resembles a magic, supernatural creature (Baudelaire, 1964:33), appears much nobler to the dandy than the visceral woman giving birth and nursing children. Not only does this arsenal of eye-liners, powders, lipsticks, etc., contribute to the harmony of the traits; it also becomes an effective mask that helps the fashionable deny whatever is not convenient for him.

Since he started in this direction, Haidée is now coiffed, – having a "silken fillet" (III. 73) in her hair – coutured, – wearing a dress elaborated in detail, with "buttons formed of pearls as large as peas" (III. 70) – and bejewelled excessively – "twelve rings were on her hand" (III. 72.) – showing off her beauty in a manner much appreciated by any dandy. Within certain limits and keeping the Oriental elements, Haidée is urbanized. The banquet she organizes stands as additional proof.

Starvation in the cannibal episode is followed by decent eating as long as Haidée remains Nature's bride. As soon as she becomes urbane, moderation is replaced by exaggeration. It is now that the idea of noble feast begins to be trivialized, not from the point of view of the food's quality, but from the point of view of quantity. Food is wasted uselessly: "The dinner made about a hundred dishes" (III. 62) and the banquet proves to be an orgy

because “they were diverted by their suite, / Dwarfs, dancing girls, black eunuchs” (III. 78). The culinary and sexual appetite overlap in a general confusion presided by Haidée.

If “she was above all other heroines the embodiment of his youthful ideal of innocence, beauty, and tenderness” (Marchand 1965:187), Lambro’s daughter remained so for a while only, fulfilling perhaps all Byron’s secret desires and longings for natural, sincere femininity. Her depravation however, demonstrates that the poet changed his mind, with the cynicism of the dandy who having lost the credulity of youth, does no longer trust women’s sincerity. We are aware that Byron is critical about Haidée’s switch of personality, presented as cause of human predestination, when lust for unnecessary materiality becomes disturbing and punishment for greediness must occur. Yet, he could not help ruin her naturalness, probably driven by a sudden attack of what Adriana Babeţi (2004:74) calls overt despise towards this inferior species, the woman, as expression of the primal, natural state. Haidée, prostitute-like, is more manageable, closer to the dandy’s world than the virgin who rescues Juan.

And to make sure that the nature in Haidée will not prevail, she will die together with her unborn baby. The poet considered her the only woman in the poem deserving to carry a child. But she is also the only woman who is killed, she the daughter of the wild is dismissed more radically than any other female in the poem. Her biological function of giving birth needs to be suppressed as nature’s fertility and fecundity are most repellent to the dandy. Thus, the unpleasant intrusion of infants – who were not exactly Byron’s passion, given the fact that he neglected his own – is avoided. Feminine naturalness must be resisted at all costs, is one of the many messages of the Haidée episode, repeated further on in the English cantos

through Aurora's annihilation in her quality of possible possessor of Juan's heart.

Aurora is a genuine Christian heroine, a special personality in whom the blend of strength and sensibility is doubled by a consistent dose of immateriality. She enters the scene as an improved version of Haidée, the educated townswoman surpassing in quality her wild variant. What remains to be clarified are the mechanisms lying behind her creation, and more importantly the auctorial choice of forbidding her the victory in the dispute over Juan.

To start with, it is interesting that a poet who once declared "I have not loved the world" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: III. CXIII) "and I loved thee, Ocean!" (ibid: IV. CLXXXIV) decides to ascribe Aurora, a resurrected Haidée without Haidée's shortcomings, to the world he loathes. In connection with the subject, Andrew Rutherford (1962:203) remarks that despite its shortcomings, English society was able to produce an ideal of womanhood like Aurora, who is both perfect and an equal to Haidée, the creation of nature. It is particularly this choice of placing perfection in the bosom of a world Byron declares to hate, that appears surprising, doubly so as Rutherford's definition of the two girls as equals is not entirely accurate, overlooking the advantage of Aurora's complexity. Boyd completes the comparison between the two – "a flower and a gem" (XV. 58) – by specifying that Aurora is the "English gem" whereas Haidée is the "Greek flower" (1958:30). In the confrontation between 'Greek' and 'English', the latter will prevail, although the former incorporates everything the poet cherishes: wilderness, freedom of the soul, beatitude. But special as it may be, the flower is ephemeral, it must fade under the weight of time and civilization; the gem, on the other hand, is long-lasting.

Aurora is therefore refined without being hypocritical, sincere without being immature, pure without being naïve. After having conceived such a woman, the Byronian dandy begins to doubt the possibility of her existence in flesh and blood. The fashionable will never place the female on an altar unless she has something magic, unreal, that annuls her disturbing carnality. To be worth the attention, she must be "a divinity, a star […] a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds wills and destinies suspended to her glance" (Baudelaire 1964:30). If she is not a prostitute or an Amazon, she should be supernatural in order to be accepted by the dandy. Haidée herself resembles a nymph or a sea goddess many times, although she is also very terrestrial: "round her she made an atmosphere of life" (XV. 74), especially after her fall. Aurora, who does not give any sign of weakness when confronted with temptation, cannot be a lady like the others. If she were fully concrete, the poet would admit that it is possible for women to be flawless, which is indeed too much to ask from a dandy. It is more convenient therefore to think of her as "a beauteous ripple" (XV. 55) giving joy for a second and then dissolving in the air, as a "young star who shone" (XV. 43) to delight the eyes, remaining intangible at the same time. From the star to the angel made of light, there is only one step: "In figure, she had something of sublime / In eyes which sadly shone as seraph's shine. / All youth but with an aspect beyond time" (XV. 45), an aspect that sends both to eternity and the Edenic past.

This purity, combining tradition and faith and almost reaching sanctification, determines Beatty's thesis that *Don Juan* moves towards Christianity. Through Aurora, who is "the realised ideal from which satire takes its energy and authority" (1985:211), closure takes a turn in which "religious beliefs are maintained […] despite their incessant disputation" (

205) and the poem "ends like any comedy, with a joyously recovered starting point" (187), operating retrospectively over the whole narrative. It is an idyllic surmise, alluding to a reconsideration of Byron's views, "a sceptic with authentic religious understanding" (155) who is thought to have returned to more orthodox feelings. Considering the numerous religious elements surrounding Aurora, with her spirit "seated on a throne / Apart from the surrounding world' (XV. 47), Beatty's theory is not altogether untenable. However, appearances must not deceive. Byron does not become a repentant Catholic who turns his face to God ceasing to play the Devil. He makes light of religion as he does of everything else. Beatty declares that 'religious beliefs are maintained' due to Aurora who can "connect Juan and the poem trustingly to their existence" (198-199).

If that is the case why does Fitz-Fulke and not Aurora take Juan? Where is the 'recovered starting point' when progress is thwarted by a new variation of the Julia episode which opens the poem? Hadn't libertinage closed the poem, the prelapsarian paradise restored by Aurora could have been credible. Of course, Beatty provides an explanation for that too, showing that there is a choice not to view Fitz-Fulke as another Gulbeyaz or Catherine, but as a natural sex drive who represents some new "comic confidence" (93), transcending the destructive Eros embodied by the Empress and intervening at a moment when "sexual arousal" plus "spiritual fear" (267) are awakened in Juan by Aurora.

The Duchess incorporates too many symbols to be treated as mere 'comic confidence'. Besides being Juan's condemnation in many ways, she is also Aurora's executioner. The girl cannot be killed literally like Haidée, because she is a gem, but she can be put aside along with whatever she signifies. In accordance with Beatty's ideas, David Goldweber speaks about

Aurora as a character who "makes clear the manifest presence in our world of genuine miracles and redemptive ideas that are available for those who trust them" (1997:175).

The problem is that Byron does not seem to trust miracles, at least not until the end, since his belief lasts but briefly and the hero renouncing his spirituality does not affect the author in any way. Fitz-Fulke's revelation, achieved within the requirements of a most authentic naturalism, defeats once for all any pretences of possible sublimity.

As for what Beatty considers the rekindling of Juan's 'spiritual fears', they represent very little in comparison with his much stronger corporeal fears where Juan caught with his mouth open at the sight of the ghost, is comically but significantly reduced to a kind of innocence that throws him back rather into infantilism than into spirituality. That is why we find it difficult to support Guy Steffan's evaluation of the hero: "his history is the growth of natural man into social man and of naïve youth into sophisticated maturity" (1963:100). At the end of the poem, Juan is as natural and unsophisticated in manifestations as the most antisocial man, a final peal of Byron's dandy laughter at those who are anxious to join the company of the beaux without deserving it. Aurora's abandonment is another sign that dandyism will never admit divine domination, – although the temptation may exist – preferring to see vice triumphant, a form of revolt against the merciless force of nature – destiny with which the beau must fight every day in order to preserve his dandyism.

And there is another element that renders Byron's respect for religiosity and purity questionable. The misogynist within him cannot leave Aurora completely unstained. Moyra Haslett speaks about

> the contamination of even the 'virginal' Aurora within the sexualized sphere of *Don Juan*" (1997:273) because she is "implicated in the innuendoes of Socratic 'phantasies' and the impression that remains is that she may yield to Don Juan (ibid.: 249).

Under the circumstances, John Cunningham's doubt is legitimate: "is she heavenly and unfallen? Or is she, as may be the case, attracted to Juan's earthly beauty?" (1982:84). These can remain but speculations: Byron does not make very explicit moves in that direction. Aurora smiles at Juan, but this is not necessarily a sign of weakness. However, Byron does demean her in another manner, demonstrating that his moods about her are as mobile as his moods announcing nostalgia for Christianity. Aurora is 'a ripple', we have seen, "a beauteous ripple of the brilliant stream" (XV. 55), which speaks about her graceful immateriality in the whirl of social events. Later on, in a new lesson about life and the world, the poet declares that although "truth's fountains may be clear, her streams are muddy" (XV. 88). But Aurora is herself part of the stream, even if only "a guest […] of the brilliant stream" (XV. 55), which means that her transient corporeal presence is not protected from the mud. When the river is dirty, it is impossible that the ripple be spotless. Nihilism, the dandy devaluation of all values outpowers again the absconded need for chastity and natural miracles.

At the bottom of *Don Juan*, there is a desire towards complete simplicity of the heart and spontaneity of impulse, expressed explicitly in Juan and Haidée's brief idyll. Dandyism however interferes, determining Byron to reject naturalness and transform the island into a consumerist paradise presided over by a flawed heroine. The ulterior turn of mind, longing to encounter purity once again, invents Aurora only to dismiss her before the very end. What is remarkable in this slalom of contradictory ideas

is the auctorial dandyism of playing so much upon the concepts of innocence and perversity, that sexuality and fallen experience may be often taken by readers and critics alike for repentance, for attempts of reunion with a paradise of perfection and innocence, which a fashionable may desire as a fleeting whim at the most.

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AVATARS OF FEMININITY: AGEISM, MASKS AND ALL THINGS STEREOTYPICAL

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***Abstract**: This paper sets out to identify shift in terms of paradigms and stereotypes of femininity in two chick lit novels. More specifically, the vacillation that the female characters in these two novels undergo in terms of self-location on the yuppie-housewife continuum constitutes the focus of this study.*
***Keywords**: ageism; social masks; stereotypes; yuppie-ism.*

Introduction

It is the main assumption of this paper that there's been a shift in terms of paradigms generated in gender studies – as apparent both in the specialized literature and in 'chick lit'. The research question that has informed this study reads: has the working woman of the 2000's in her 'female cyborg' (see Haraway) stance been relegated to a position of paradoxical inferiority in relation to her blue-collar, uneducated, menially-employed counterpart?

A perusal of recent chick lit novels yields evidence in this respect. Specifically, the extracts I am using as data to substantiate the claim above belong to two novels falling within this genre: Janice Kaplan and Lynn Schnurnberger's *Mine Are Spectacular!* (2006) and Sophie Kinsella's *The Undomestic Goddess* (2005). In both novels, the female protagonists vacillate between their professional-infused lives, their rampant yuppie-ism on the one hand and the penumbral traditional, housewife role they have dismissed.

Definition of the 'Female Cyborg'

This new breed of working woman (see Haraway 1989) - who is also seeking maternal fulfilment, at times Frankensteinian by appealing to lab-assisted reproduction - is now redefined in chick lit novels. This redefinition

is achieved through the multiple, alternative family configurations she temporarily inhabits (i.e. second or third marriages, step children, artificially conceived children etc.)

The 'cyborgness' of these heroines' flawless designer lives at times fails them. What I term here 'designer life' is defined as both aesthetically chiselled appearance (see 'the body beautiful') and their career-accommodating in vitro fertilisation, deferred to meet the right timing, on the one hand, and the paraphernalia of power, i.e. the high-tech objects that occupy their workplace on the other hand. Yet, as mentioned above, all this at times fails them, thereby instantiating surprising relationships of symbiotic co-dependence with their staff or hired help, the latter turning out to be more effective in task-solving that their highly-skilled employers. Hence an ambiguity as regards who the real master is, and who the submissive party. Issues of epistemology arise, in terms of what kind of 'knowledge counts', whose expertise. In other words, is it the higher education, social stratosphere-bound expertise of the employer that is ideologically dominant here?

The following conversation between Samantha, a successful lawyer turned housekeeper in the aftermath of unforeseen circumstances at her firm, and the bodyguard of the exclusive neighbourhood where she is now employed can be decoded in terms of epistemology:

> 'I can't do it.' The words come out before I can stop them. 'I can't do this job. I'm …hopeless.' 'Sure you can.' He rifles in his rucksack and produces a can of Coke. 'Have this. You can't work on no fuel.' 'Thanks', I say, taking it gratefully. I crack open the can and take a gulp, and *it's The most delicious thing I've ever tasted.* I take another greedy slurp, and another. 'The *offer* still stands,' he adds after a pause. 'My mother *will give you lessons if you like.'*

> ‘Really?’ I wipe my mouth, push back my sweaty hair and look up at him. ‘She’d … do that?’ ‘She likes a challenge, my mum.’ Nathaniel gives a little smile. ‘She’ll *teach you your way around a kitchen. And anything else you need to know.’* He glances quizzically towards the smeary mirror. I feel a sudden burn of humiliation and look away. I don’t want to be useless. I don’t want to need lessons. That’s not who I am. I want to be able do this on my own, without asking assistance from anyone. But I have to get real. The truth is, I need help. Apart form anything else, if I keep on going like today I’ll be bankrupt in two weeks. I turn back to Nathaniel.’That would be great,’ I say humbly. ‘I really appreciate it. Thanks.’ (Kinsella 2005:156-7; italics mine)

Indeed there are epistemological issues cropping up here: what kind of knowledge counts, whose expertise? Is it the highly-trained, perk-pampered city lawyer’s – or the housekeeper’s? Patriarchal modes of production are evoked here, whereby traditional, private-sphere confined feminine work is underrated. Samantha, the City lawyer had not so far valued this kind of expertise that she now considers for a change in her career (she quits her job as an attorney due to hubris in her work and looks for an anonymous housekeeping career in suburbia just to keep a low profile for a while). Suddenly Nathaniel’s mother, a housekeeper herself, becomes a guru of domestic efficiency, laying out surprising topographies of functionality of the kitchen and other staff quarters. Samantha feels feeble at this new turf that she is not sure she can actually appropriate.

Quite the opposite happens in Kaplan and Schnurnberger’s *Mine Are Spectacular!* where Sara, the protagonist, tries with gusto to put on a new hat: that of housewife whose many functions include that of pleasing the spouse, being aesthetically there in a geisha-like manner, whilst preserving an a-septic suburban habitat (for aesthetics and manipulation of space in the postmodern household, see Zukin 1990).

Sara fails miserably in carrying out this novel persona, i.e. the housewife, as this family's life is hopelessly, irretrievably yuppie. Therefore the romantic ploy she organizes at home ends up being a caricature of housewifery.

The insecure first person narrative of her exploit reveals the precariousness of her endeavour. And so does the husband's opaque attitude:

> My plan has definitely made an impression on Bradford. *But not the one I intended. I'm looking for romance* and Bradford's *figuring we need a new housekeeper.* 'Have a hard day, sweetie?' I ask, trying to get things back on track.'You bet', Bradford says. He turns around and *finally notices me in my nightie.* 'You're *ready for bed,* he says in surprise. He glances at the clock on the side table and then looks at me with concern. 'It's early. I'd figured we'd have a nice dinner, but are you *feeling sick or something?* 'Sick is exactly what I'm feeling. And kind of stupid. I pulled out all the stops to make a perfect night, and instead I've made a perfect mess. 'I wanted tonight to be special,' I say. 'Candles. Music. And the stuff on the stairs was rose petals. I picked them myself.' I flop down on my bed. Right now I feel so ridiculous I just want Bradford to go away. But instead he comes over and puts his arms around me, holding me tightly and massaging my shoulders. 'I'm so sorry,' he says, obviously feeling equally ridiculous. 'This is wonderful of you. I don't know what I was thinking. *I guess my head was still at the office.'* (Kaplan and Schnurnberger 2006:150)

Pathetically, the rose petals are mistaken for dirt by the husband who remarks they need a new housekeeper. The whole topography of desire that the wife is trying to set up is a flop as the husband's mind, as he notes, is too much at the office. Yuppie-ism overrides all. Indeed these two stances that Sara takes are the two ends of the yuppie–housewife continuum that seem to

be too remote from each another and thus irreconcilable. As for Bradford, the 'male gaze' proves non-existent here, as his preoccupation is for domestic efficiency solely, pristine cleanliness and order as opposed to random romance.

Sara is further disturbed by the pestilential presence of the ex-wife who visits at some point and marks out her territory as it were, the scene yielding a two-fold hybridity: 1. that of she-wolf; 2. that of domestic territory vs. professional turf at work; in both those areas exertion of power being the issue. Faced with the nerve of the ex-wife, Mimi, Sara has to reconsider reclaiming her territory at home, all too intent on her turf at work so far. She has to get re-acquainted with all skills feminine:

> I take a deep breath. Any second, the woman's going to *lift her leg* and leave *her scent.* But this is *my territory* now. And it needs protecting. 'The right thing for you to do right now is leave,' I say, trying to keep a nasty tone out of my voice. And failing. 'Tsk, tsk, Sara,' Mimi says in a suspiciously honeyed tone. 'We're all one family, after all.' One family? I'm pretty sure the law in this state allows only one wife per household. (Kaplan and Schnurnberger, 2006: 90-1; italics mine)

Yet another confinement, this time class-informed, is instantiated when Sara's step daughter negotiates a night out with friends. Sara is confused about the address the daughter needs to get to and has an enlightening conversation with the doorman at her house in this respect. Enrique, the doorman (a stereotype can be decoded here in that it is a Latino that is employed in this menial job) proves knowledgeable about exclusive neighbourhoods. Again Sara relies on the expertise of staff and reversal of epistemologies is apparent here:

> Hadley Farms. Manor Haven. Why do all these *suburban communities* sound

like rest homes? 'Heather's sister's picking me up in the Mustang convertible,' Skylar continues, grudgingly giving me more information. 'She just got her driver's licence.'Now I'm stumped. Is Bradford's daughter allowed to get in the car with a sixteen-year old? I don't even know what I should be more worried about – Skylar in the car with a newbie driver or nubile teenagers driving with the top down. Hopefully the car's top, not theirs. 'I have some errands. I'll drive you instead.' I say, grabbing for my wallet. 'Over my dead body,' Skylar retorts, slamming the door behind her. Dylan looks up at me with a big grin. 'Now what are we going to do, Mom?' he asks happily. He's never had a sibling before and Skylar seems to be providing a certain level of entertainment. I take a moment to think who I can ask about this, and in a burst of inspiration, I rush to the intercom. 'Enrique?' I entreat. 'At your service,' says the friendly doorman from his guard post at the gate. 'What can I do for you today?' 'Skylar's driving with her friend Heather's sister over to Manor Haven. Can you tell me where that is? I'm thinking about following them.' 'Don't bother.' Enrique says soothingly. 'I'll keep an eye on them. It's just two gated communities over. All private roads between here and there and the speed limit's ten. Cops at every corner flag anybody going over fifteen.' Who says suburban children are overprotected? (Kaplan and Schnurnberger 2006: 88; italics mine)

Escapism – if short-lived - is at work here when Sara makes an attempt at getting away from it all, i.e. from the confinements mentioned before, by engaging in the sub-culture of the road literature, by breaking the speed limit, read breaking loose from the confinements and pressures of yuppie-ism. She instantly becomes a knight errant with a difference: hers is not an aimless wandering, where risk is the name of the game, but controlled commuting from home to work, thereby expediency and efficiency replacing risk. Ergo her escape is but a simulacrum in terms of postmodern trajectories:

Amazingly, I get both myself and the Z-4 back to Hadley Farms intact. Not a

> scratch on either of us. *My first time driving on a major highway and boy was it fun. Hair blowing in the wind.* A truck driver giving me a honk and a thumbs up. CD player blaring Outkast's 'Hey Ya!' Good song, bad English. I don't let the kids in my art classes say either 'hey' or 'ya'. But strung together, the title hit the charts and rocketed to number one. Listening to it, I *hit the gas pedal and broke thespeed limit. Rocketed to fifty-six.* (Kaplan and Schnurnberger: 88; italics mine)

Finally, masks, more or less cosmetic, are used by Sara in order to boost her professional life where ageism creeps in:

> 'And I realize the future can be whatever I want. *Who would have thought that I'd have a whole new career in TV at forty-one?' 'Aren't we thirty-eight?'* Kate asks. I smile. You may need to be thirty-eight. But I'm happy with what I am.' So many things seem possible now. You know what? Getting *older and smarter and more* confident isn't that bad.' […] 'I'm feeling pretty good,' I admit. Without thinking, I *squirt a dab of the Lip Venom onto my pinkie and swipe it across my mouth. Within seconds, my lips are burning, my eyes are tearing, and I feel like my face is on fire.* 'Oh my god, this hurts!' I say, letting out a yelp and frantically searching for a tissue. There are lots of *beauty options out there as you get older, too.* But you have to be careful about your choices. This is one I wish I hadn't picked. *Next time I'm sticking with my own Clinique lip gloss.* (Kaplan and Schnurnberger:267-8; italics mine)

The ways appearance is manipulated to create 'the body beautiful' is part and parcel of feminine paradigms. The use of costume and mask, be it ritual or social in the history of mentalities strand is laid eloquently by Bogatyev (1989), who identifies consistency in the rites of feminine seduction over the ages. In other theorists' views, the costumed and 'masked' body "[…] becomes a counter-cultural image, temporarily

usurping the models of the mainstream." (Bakhtin and Morris quoted in Percec 2006:156-157).

Here, the protagonist has an attempt at divergence from the old, incremental paradigms of mask-wearing, by using a new cosmetic product, which her face instantly rejects. Hence she finds comfort in her old ways, the safe old mainstream paradigms she inhabits: "Next time I'm sticking with my own Clinique lip gloss." Surface (facial cosmetics) and depth (paradigms of the mainstream, more accommodating of her age) are intertwined here in a subtle game of aesthetic (i.e. artificial youthfulness, beauty) and ethical (stay-true-to-your-age in a medium such as television) manipulation.

Conclusion

All in all, in all this choreography of shifting roles, masks, the female cyborg emerges – not necessarily triumphant – but definitely protean, ever-changing. It is this very ideological versatility that makes her diachronically viable.

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The Problematic Mother-Daughter Bond

TRAGIC-COMIC TWIST: DAUGHTERS AS MOTHERS

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Abstract: *In Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes, classified as melodrama but conveying tragic features, and in Neil Simon's comic play The Gingerbread Lady, the relationships between mothers and daughters progress in a tragic-comic twist because daughters behave as mothers and the mothers as daughters. Regarding genre and role changes the traditional genre and typical mother-daughter and family relations have been corrupted in both plays.*

Key words: *object relation, tragedy, comedy, melodrama, mother-daughter relationship*

Introduction

Alexandra: Are you afraid, Mama? (TLF 200)

Polly: Aren't you, Mother? Admit you are afraid of me. (TGL 224)

These are the questions asked by two different daughters, drawn by two different playwrights; Lillian Hellman and Neil Simon, in two different plays; *The Little Foxes* (TLF) and *The Gingerbread Lady (TGL)*. In these two plays, the former classified as a melodrama or as a tragicomedy in the 1960s, and the latter as a comedy, the roles of the daughters and mothers seem to have been twisted because the daughters are the ones acting as mothers and mothers are the ones acting as daughters. This tragic-comic twist in the roles of daughters and mothers will be discussed in a comparative way focusing on the genre differences and the altering mother-daughter relationship in both plays.

For centuries, the relationships between mothers and daughters have been questioned and handled as one of the major themes in literature and drama. Many scholars from a wide range of different disciplines have sought to understand these complicated mother-daughter relationships. Thus different perspectives from multidisciplinary backgrounds tragically or comically evaluated and analyzed the complex mother-daughter relationships in various ways. For instance, because of the way the plots are constructed and the relations are set out, for Lillian Hellman the relationship between a mother and a daughter is evaluated as melodramatic or tragic, and for Neil Simon tragicomic or comic. It is striking that these two plays, essentially written in such different genres as melodrama (*The Little Foxes*)

and comedy (*The Gingerbread Lady*), both picture an altered mother-daughter relationship rather than a traditional one. In both of these plays the mother-daughter relationship and the manner in which it is handled, breaks the general protective mother stereotype image, and by altering the accepted mother-daughter roles portrays daughters acting as protecting mothers and mothers acting as rebellious daughters. Both daughters by separating and individuating from their mothers try to create a separate self and develop a healthy mother-daughter relationship.

Mother-Daughter Relationships

That the relationship between mothers and daughters has been expressed either in tragic or comic manner in literary works may be accounted for in terms of *object relation theory* that emerged in 1970s. This rejected the traditional connectedness between mother and daughter and concentrated on the daughter's need to differentiate herself from the mother rather then seeing herself as same as her mother. Thus, *object relation theory* focuses on the *duality* of daughters' individuation process because the creation of *sexual identity* requires separation from the mother whereas the development of *gender identity* requires closeness. During these separation and closeness periods the daughters object to their mothers and act in hatred towards them. According to the traditional Freudian psychological theory in the 1960s, the mother-daughter relationship was centered on the daughter's struggle to become a female human with heterosexual, individual identity (Miller-Day 2004:6). In the late 70s, in mother-daughter relationship, mothers were responsible for their daughters' gender identity and *My mother/My self* was the major theme of Nancy Friday but in the 80s the mother-daughter relationship argument began to

shift from a traditional point of view that analyzed the identification of the daughter according to her mother to a pattern that identified mother according to her daughter (Miller-Day 2004:8). In other words, protection of the self of the daughter required separation and individuation from the mother rather than closeness with her. This shift led to a new, neo-Freudian, view that emerged in the 90s. According to the neo-Freudian perspective mothers began to see themselves in their daughters and act towards their daughters as they act towards themselves. They become like their own mothers and own daughters.

Obviously, the mother-daughter relationships, in literary works portray various mother and daughter types in tragic and comic relations and speeches. When the relationship is presented in a comic manner it strives to provoke smiles and laughter because both wit and humor are utilized. In general, the comic effect arises from the recognition of some incongruity of speech, and action or character revelation. The incongruity may be merely verbal as in the case of a play on words, exaggerated assertion or physical, as when stilts are used to make a man's legs seem disproportionately long (Holman 1986:89). Viewed in another sense, comedy is considered to deal with people in their state, restrained and often made ridiculous by their limitations, faults, bodily functions, and animal nature.

In contrast, tragedy is considered to deal with people in their ideal or godlike state. Comedy has always viewed human beings more realistically than tragedy, and drawn its laughter or its satire from the spectacle of human weakness or failure: hence its tendency to juxtapose appearance and reality, to deflate pretense, and mock excess. The judgement made by comedy is almost always critical (Holman 1986:90). Compared to tragedy

which is the record of human strivings and aspirations, comedy is a lighter form of drama and aims primarily to amuse and end happily.

Tragic-Comic Comparison of the Plays

Simon's play *The Gingerbread Lady* is essentially a comedy in which frustration and stress are expressed with humorous dialogues, it is considered as a drama in three acts rather than a comedy because of the way it ends. And Hellman's play, in which greed for power and wealth are expressed with dramatic dialogues, is essentially considered as a drama in three acts, too. Even more, because of its characters, *The Little Foxes* can be seen as a melodrama but one with black comedy tendencies. This play was first performed on Broadway in 1939 and Simon's in 1970. So, over three decades later Neil Simon, who practised the comic craft with skill, wrote a play in the form of drama but classified as a comedy. This intertwining of the genres has also twisted the mother daughter roles.

Throughout the play, *The Gingerbread Lady,* the comedy is generated through funny dialogues and Polly's attitude towards her mother. Polly, who calls her mother by her name, Evy, rather then calling her "Mother", acts like a typical mother questioning her daughter, and like a mother she even gets angry with her for not eating properly:

Polly: Did you eat?

Evy: Yes, I think . . . Listen to what happened. I ran into this girl friend of mine who used to work in the clubs ---

Polly: What do you mean, you think so?

Evy: I ate, I ate! I had a sandwich for lunch. . .

Polly: You mean you haven't had anything to eat except lunch?

Evy: It didn't say "lunch" on the sandwich. Maybe it was a "dinner" sandwich,

I don't know. (TGL 183)

The incongruity of speech in Polly and her mother's dialogue awakes humor. In Simon's play, ironically, the humorous dialogues are serious but not the subject, and in Hellman's play which derived its strength from melodramatic qualities, both its dialogues and subject are serious. However, Hellman said once in an interview that she saw her play more as a comedy, albeit a "black comedy", not to be taken so seriously. In fact, the typical melodramatic quality is driven away in the play because in a melodrama a reward for virtue and a punishment for vice should be provided. However, Hellman does not provide reward for virtue: Alexandra who stays aside from the corruption and pitiful Birdie who protects Alexandra by warning her against the planned marriage between her and Leo (Birdie's own son with bad virtues). Nor does she punish vice: Regina who is responsible for her husband's death by not giving him his medicine. Hellman explained why she had not provided a reward for virtue and punishment for vice, indicating that she saw humor in the greedy sparring of the Hubbards' in the same way she had seen humor mixed with disgust in her mother's money-obsessed relatives (Wright 1987:154). Thus, even though the characters may be pictured in terms of vice and virtue and the events as stolen bonds, spilled medicine, death on the stairs, the play is partly melodramatic (Moody 1972:104) and partly "black comedy". Yet, overall the play is classified a melodrama progressing through tragic events; the dialogues are therefore set out in a serious manner. The dialogues between Alexandra and her mother Regina differ from the dialogues between Polly and her mother Evy, because there is nothing humorous in their dialogues.

Starting from the very beginning of the play, Regina and Alexandra's relationship is very serious and strict; Regina is the one ordering, and Alexandra is the one obeying as usually seen in a typical mother-daughter relationship. Regina sees herself as the only one to judge the events and make decisions:

> **Regina**: There is nothing for you to understand. You are simply to say what I have told you . . . .
>
> **Alexandra**: Yes. He may be too sick to travel. I couldn't make him think he had to come home for me, if he is too sick to ---
>
> **Regina:** *(looks at her, sharply, challenging).* You couldn't do what I tell you to do, Alexandra?
>
> **Alexandra**: *(quietly).* No. I couldn't. If I thought it would hurt him (TLF,153).

The dialogues set out the relationship between the mothers Regina and Evy, and their daughters Alexandra and Polly. Yet, while the relationship between Regina and Alexandra changes at the end of the play, the relationship between Polly and her mother continues the same as it began. While Polly always questions her mother, Alexandra learns to question and in doing so becomes a daughter acting as a mother. It is significant that the two daughters differ greatly from each other, but both act much more mature than their mothers throughout both plays. In fact, while Hellman turned her play into a social drama through her dialogues, Neil Simon through his humorous dialogues turned his play into a social comedy.

Altering Mother Daughter Roles

The way mother and daughter relationship is handled in both plays shows that years and social changes have wrought their effects on this

controversial relationship. For example Polly, a lovable seventeen year old young girl in Simon's *The Gingerbread Lady*, is a daughter who can express her thoughts openly and do what she wants but Alexandra, a delicate-looking seventeen year old young girl in Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, is an obedient daughter unable to question and express her thoughts freely. However, at the end Alexandra also becomes a decision-maker and does not obey her mother any more. In a way Polly (1970) is sort of representing the future life of Alexandra (1939) and, of course, the teenager of the future. Therefore, the question Alexandra asks at the end of *The Little Foxes*: ***"Are you afraid, Mama?"*** seems to have been carried a step further by Polly in Simon's *The Gingerbread Lady:* ***"Aren't you, Mother? Admit you are afraid of me".***

Daughters and mothers generally clash with each other during the daughters' teenage years, and the daughters start to rebel against their mothers' decisions; but in these two plays the mothers are the rebellious ones. Moreover, the mothers are in need of warning and protection and are unaware of their responsibilities towards their daughters. In *The Little Foxes* Regina, the cold, hard, determined and materialistic mother is a strong character but a captive of her own greedy desires. This is why she even wills to bargain away her daughter's future happiness, but Alexandra manages to stand aside from such a bargain and at the end of the play by explicitly expressing her thoughts, wins her future happiness. (Bigsby 1992:281) In *The Gingerbread Lady,* Evy an alcoholic mother has a very weak character. Her daughter Polly is the one that controls her and tries to save her mother from becoming a crumbled lady (Gingerbread Lady). Therefore, Polly treats her mother as if her mother was the daughter and she

herself acts as if she was the protective mother. In fact, throughout the plays, both daughters act more mature than their mothers.

Regina in *The Little Foxes*, rather than acting as a mature mother and a mourning wife plans to leave her daughter and her house to go to Chicago where she would lead the life she had dreamt of for years, but Alexandra prefers to live in the small town in the South rather than live with her mother in Chicago. On the contrary, in *The Gingerbread Lady* Polly prefers to come and live with her mother and save her from alcoholism, instead of going and living with her father. Of course, both these daughters have their own rights to decide whether to stay with their mothers or to leave them. Certain events forced the daughters to decide and act as adults rather than teenagers. For example, for Alexandra the death of her father and her mother's attitudes, and for Polly her mother's alcoholism, forced them to make such decisions and object to their mothers' desires. The reasons hidden behind the daughters' decisions are hidden in the events that form the plot patterns of the plays. As a matter of fact, the plot of *The Gingerbread Lady* is relatively straightforward. The characters are well drawn. The protagonist, Evy Meara, represents a universal character, a mother who cannot walk through life without the crutch of alcohol. Evy is surrounded by other 'losers': Jimmy Perry, Lou Tanner and Toby Landau, which enhances the reality effect, since it is quite common for people to associate with others not unlike themselves (McGovern 1978:115).

All the characters are introduced in the first act, as Jimmy Perry waits for Toby Landau to bring Evy home from a week's stay in a sanatorium where she had been taken after being found floating face down in her bathtub. Jimmy Perry, the homosexual friend, and an unsuccessful actor in his forties are waiting in Evy's apartment for her arrival. Lou Tanner is

another friend who is a crude stud. He can play the guitar well but he cannot compete in the creative arena. Toby Landau: a narcissist friend whose life has always revolved around herself with the main emphasis on her outward appearance. And there is Polly, Evy's teenage daughter, who has been living with her father and stepmother since her parents' divorce seven years before, who is almost an idealized character. She acts and she seems more mature because of the life she has led.

Evy, her mother has been an alcoholic for about twenty years. So, it is logical to assume that Polly has had to mature early simply to survive. Polly arrives saying her father gave permission for her to stay. After hugging each other tightly they talk about Evy's physical appearance. Polly reminds her mother of the present she had given her eight years before:

> Don't you remember the Gingerbread house with the little gingerbread lady in the window? I have always kept it to remind me of you. Of course, today I have the biggest box of crumbs in the neighborhood. Come on, be a sport. Buy me another one this Christmas. (TGL,171)

Tragically, *the gingerbread lady* crumbles, and it is clear that if her mother starts drinking again she will crumble again and this pattern will continue endlessly. Therefore, Polly comes to stay with her mother, to save her from crumbling once more. In other words, Polly wants to protect her mother from falling into depression. Though Polly's arrival makes Evy happy she does not want her to stay with her because she fears that she cannot be good at "mothering":

> I was feeling very motherly one time. I bought a couple of turtles, two for eighty-five cents, Irving and Sam. I fed them once. In the morning they were floating on

> their backs. I don't think I could go through that again […] What kind of influence would I be on you? I talk filthy, I have always talked filthy. I'm a congenial filthy talker (TGL,171).

It seems that whenever Evy tries to survive, she is crumbled just as the crumbs of the gingerbread lady cookie. Polly does everything she can to stop her drinking, and the mother wants Polly to leave her alone but Polly never seems to give up her struggle to save her mother, because she is aware that her mother is afraid of loneliness. Therefore, she does not want to leave her mother on her own:

> **Polly:** No! What is it, Evy? Am I getting kicked out because you're afraid I'm going to grow up to be a crutch instead of a person? Or do you just want be left alone so there's no one here to lock up the liquor cabinet? (TGL,219)

Actually, both of the daughters are aware that their mothers are afraid of loneliness, even though they would not admit they are. Therefore, like a mother asking her child, Alexandra and Polly ask the similar question; *"**Are you afraid?"*** Of course, being aware of the facts, both daughters act as mothers towards their mothers by punishing them for their faults. For instance, Alexandra knows that her mother is responsible for her father's death because of her greediness. Although she does not implicitly blame her mother she punishes her by not joining her to go to Chicago. Namely, by rejecting what her mother wants Alexandra for the first time reacts against her mother and tries to make it clear that she is changing/growing. The last dialogue between Alexandra and her mother reflects the change in their relationship:

Regina: We'll leave in a few weeks. . .

Alexandra: Mama, I'm not coming with you. I'm not going to Chicago.

Regina: *(turns to her).* You're very upset, Alexandra. . .

Regina: Would you like to come and talk to me, Alexandra? Would you – would you like to sleep in my room tonight?

Alexandra: *(takes a step towards the stairs)* ***Are you afraid Mama***? (TLF,200)

Alexandra, who is a very clever girl, does not blame her mother directly but ironically asks: *Are you afraid (ashamed) of what you did Mama*? Regina may seem to be the winner in the end; a materially victorious lady, but in reality she is a loser as a mother because Alexandra clouds her victory by refusing to go with her and by not obeying anything she says. Thus, Regina succumbs to fear and defers to her daughter. (Bigsby 1992:283) Throughout the play, the relation between Regina and Alexandra has been very formal. Alexandra loved her uncle's wife Birdie more than her mother because the former was more loving and protective of her, while Regina failed her daughter in what love and protectiveness are concerned. She only thought of becoming a rich woman, and she victimized her own family to fulfil her wish.

On the other hand, in Simon's play, though the mother is an alcoholic and in a critical situation, the daughter and her mother have a more loving relationship than Regina and Alexandra. The mother tries to share everything with her daughter. Evy does not tell Polly to do things, furthermore she listens to her and even keeps apologizing. Though she does not lead a decent life and she is not a rich woman, she respects her daughter and feels proud of her daughter worrying about her; she even feels guilty for not being with her all the time:

> […] *My daughter is worried about me (she puts her arm around Polly again)*. Do you know what it is to have a daughter worried about you? It is the single greatest pleasure in the world. . . In the world . . . *(To Toby)* you can have your toes tickled by a Jap - I'll take a daughter worrying about me any time. *(She sips from her glass. She is beginning to lose coordination and control).* I don't even deserve it. The truth, Polly, I don't deserve it. You grew up, you saw the bus driver more than you saw me, am I right? (TGL,203)

Obviously, Evy's words show that she is fond of her daughter but not very adept at mothering. In fact, Polly - the mother daughter - is always concerned about her mother. She even telephones a bar to ask about Evy's possible whereabouts. But Evy thinks that her daughter is acting like a "seventeen-year-old cop" (TGL,186). However, Evy starts drinking whenever she hears about the problems of her friends and when she wants to escape the harshness of life; for example, in Act Two, they are planning to give Toby a birthday party. They learn that Jimmy has been fired from the theatre and is very sad, and Toby comes in complaining about her husband. Toby tells Evy and Jimmy that her husband wants a divorce. Briefly, all of the characters have problems. Evy starts drinking again, because all the problems that she has experienced and has heard from her friends have disillusioned her. Polly is the only person who does not disappoint her. Her friends have problems, her lover Lou has left her and gone away with a nineteen-year-old girl. Afterwards he returns, but she does not want him any more. Actually, Evy is in need of love and wants to feel needed and wanted, but she cannot find the things she wants and this lures her to alcoholism.

When Polly admits she has taken a drink or two in the morning to make her throbbing head stop hurting, Evy feels responsible, but at the same time she admits that drinking is the only thing that makes everything

bearable. Polly also shows her understanding of her mother's addiction when she asks:

> **Polly:** Is that what it is, Evy? Is that what it does? Make things bearable?
> **Evy:** (*Nods)* Mm-hmm. And if you take enough, it even stops the throbbing . . . Jesus, three weeks and I turned my daughter into a lush (TGL,215-216).

It is obvious that the only way for Evy to bear the things she is confronted with is through alcohol. Polly, in fact, wants her mother to fight against her addiction. She reminds her that they have a date with her father and his wife Felicia. This scares Evy because she does not feel ready for such a meeting with her ex-husband and his wife. Polly tells her mother that she has to go to the date to convince them that she can look after her daughter. Even though Evy herself does not believe that she can take care of her daughter, Polly insists and asks in anger:

> **Polly**: (angrily) Is it such a goddamned big deal to need somebody? If you can need a bottle of Scotch or a Lou Tanner, why can't you need me? (TGL,19)

Towards the end of the play, Polly returns, telling her mother that she has forgotten her wallet, only to see her mother sitting in the dark and drinking. This disturbs Evy, and she yells "Get out of here." (TGL,224), to which Polly replies: "*That's why you kicked me out. Because you're afraid of me. Aren't you, Mother?* ***Admit you're afraid of me****"* (TGL,224). In fact, Polly is asking her mother if she is afraid of her seeing her (Evy) when she is drinking or afraid of seeing Polly growing up with her and becoming a woman like herself. And finally seeing her daughter as a mature and mother-like person, Evy says; "*When I grow up, I want to be just like you*"

(TGL 227). The play ends with Evy's words, which indicate that she will start to grow and change for her daughter. There is a kind of hope that she will get over her drinking with her daughter's support. Polly will act as a mother who teaches her child to survive, and teach her mother to fight and survive instead of destroying herself or being crumbled into pieces.

Conclusion

In certain respects, in *The Gingerbread Lady*, people are funny at one level and deeply tragic at another. They are pitiful because they are not actively rebelling against the circumstances and weaknesses which imprison them, but instead seem resigned to beating their fists against the bars until their knuckles are bleeding in empty gestures which presage failure. (McGovern, 125) All of the characters, even Toby, will quite probably continue to live hopeless, frustrating lives. Only Polly can escape if she closes the door on alcoholism, and therefore, first of all, she has to save her mother from alcoholism.

On one level *The Little Foxes* also has people who are deeply tragic because power has been decisively shifted already, but the moral world is still in a state of flux (Schlueter 1990:131). The world has been displaced, its moral failures were simply too great. Society is corrupted, and Alexandra is the only one to stand aside from the corruption. If she wants to continue that way she has to shut the door on her family or else save her mother from being corrupted and materialistic.

Both mothers are captives because Regina is trapped in a hate-filled marriage and stifled in a small town that offers her nothing. She desperately wants romance and the stimulation of a large city while she is still young enough to enjoy them. (Wright 1987:153) Yet Evy thinks that the only

person to enjoy life is her daughter, not herself. Thus she prefers to close herself in a room and drink. She thinks of destruction whereas Regina thinks of enjoyment. These two different mothers embody two different types of motherhood and the daughters represent two facets of daughterhood, yet both of them are seventeen and out of corruption's way. They are very understanding, mature teenagers and they are able to redeem their mothers.

Consequently, whether the play is written in the form of comedy or tragedy, the relationship between mothers and daughters can be presented partly comically and partly tragically because the mothers can act as daughters and daughters as mothers - as seen in both Hellman's and Simon's plays. The tragic-comic twist in the daughter and mother relationship is striking, but at the same time it alters the typical mother-daughter roles that are continuously changing.

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HARPER REGAN - A FEMALE PROTAGONIST'S FLIGHT FROM PERSONAL CATASTROPHE: HER VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY AND RETURN TO REDEMPTION

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Abstract: *This article analyses a woman's personal tragedy and her flight from home as a consequence of disquieting problems in her family. On her journey she has a series of crucial encounters which can be seen as a turning point in her life, contributing to her learning process towards a wiser perception of the human psyche. At the same time, the play provides glimpses of a social malaise existing in English society.*

***Key words**: Stephens, pornography, confrontation, trauma, truth, prejudices, forgiveness*

> "Why aren't our younger writers writing major roles for women?" (Rebellato, 7 March 2008).

Introduction

The author of the play *Harper Regan*, Simon Stephens, was asked the above-quoted provocative question by Nicholas Hytner, Director of the National Theatre, London, during a script meeting. He was furious at this remark because he had been conceiving a play about a man, Seth Regan, who returns to Stockport to see his dying father. "When he reassessed his ideas for the play, recasting the central character as a woman, it seemed […] as if that was somehow always the play he wanted to write and had not realised it" (Rebellato 2008). Stephens then decided to root a more deliberately female structure for the play that starts with Harper's drive to see her father before he passes away.

Simon Stephens, born in 1971 in Stockport, Cheshire, is considered a significant voice in English theatre. Until 2005, he was a member of the literary department of the Royal Court Theatre, London, holding a leadership position in the Court's Young Writers' Programme. He has currently published about ten plays, his first being *Bluebird*, produced in 1998. His plays are often humane examinations of family life, as in *Harper Regan*. Stephens has explained that this latter play, with a female protagonist, is a structural response to the gendered nature of his play *Motortown* (2007), a story about a squaddie with a gun who is very male, very phallic (Rebellato 2008).

Study of *Harper Regan*

Harper Regan, a two-act play, opened in the Cottesloe, National Theatre, London, on 23 April 2008, notably directed by a woman director, Marianne Elliott. The eponymous heroine, a 41-year-old working mother living in Uxbridge, is played by Leslie Sharp. While the first act of the play dramatizes Harper's loss of self-esteem and existential *angst*, the second act reveals her psychological progress through her confrontation with disquieting truths in her married life. After encountering lonely males and her estranged mother during her flight from home, she finally returns to her husband, Seth, who has caused the family's affliction and who needs understanding and forgiveness.

Harper's odyssey starts off when her slimy boss Elwood Barnes denies her permission to visit her dying father in hospital. We witness Harper's turmoil when she is faced with the harrowing power of her boss who takes advantage of his position to harass her. The scene is quite *pinteresque* in its theatrical form, structured around duologues, with long pauses and silences. This technique, employed repeatedly throughout the play, reveals Harper's confusion when she is threatened with losing her job: "[If] you go, I don't think you should come back" (Stephens 2008:3). She is asked a series of disquieting questions concerning her personal link with his office, and her teenage daughter Sarah. Finally, Harper has the courage to tell him that "[if] I don't go, I don't know what I'll do" (6). She is aware of her subject status as a woman who is exposed to the *male gaze* of her boss (cf. Aston 1995:41-45). Rather than responding to her dilemma, he smirks at her and delivers a long speech on the function of the internet, claiming to watch "measured amounts of porn" and finding it enthralling to be able to "arrange illicit sexual encounters online" (8). At length he asks Harper

about her husband Seth. It is only at the end of the play that we comprehend why there is such an uneasy relationship between Harper and Barnes; it is implicit that he knows Seth's story, using this tacit information to defy her. This feeling is intensified by the repeated stage directions: *They look at each other* (11).

On her way home Harper is crossing the Grand Union Canal that connects London to Birmingham. On top of the bridge she runs into a seventeen-year old black youth, Tobias. She tells him that she comes to this bridge every night to have "a bit of a look" (12). Faced with the bleakness of life, the canal is a kind of "No-Man's Land", where Harper gets a glimpse of natural life to meditate on her existence. Furthermore, the bridge can symbolize the possibility of escape by crossing it towards an unknown shore and the beginning of a different life. Harper's emotional confusion, caused to an extent by the fruitless encounter with her employer, leads her to initiate a puzzling tête-à-tête with Tobias. This awkward situation is underlined by the stage directions: *He looks at her, says nothing. He looks away from her, says nothing* (11). Strangely enough, being black himself, Tobias turns out to be a racist confessing that he hates all the Poles "round here" (17), but he also hates his smell, his hair, his bedroom (16). These odious reactions may have been instilled by his father, an obsessive patriarch who relegates the role of women to staying at home as modest housewives and dedicated mothers.

Both Tobias and Harper are lonely figures who, after a lengthy chat, start to fancy each other. Harper confesses that she "wanted to talk to somebody" (18). Tobias, in turn, acknowledges that he likes older white women, who for him are "almost like a kind of dream" (19). Harper, on the other hand, seems to have developed a lustful eye for the youngster when

she acknowledges: “I like the way you raise your drink up to your mouth” (19). At the end of the play (scene ix) we learn that Harper had pursued Tobias for some time, not daring to approach him. This dormant longing for a teenager calls to mind the tragedy of Phaedra, who ultimately succumbed to her yearning. Nonetheless, Tobias can be seen as a kind of *good angel* to Harper, with a therapeutic faculty. Significantly, the author has chosen a name that is the Greek version of the Hebrew biblical name *Tobijah*, meaning *Jehovah (God) is good*. This idea brings to mind a play by James Bridie, *Tobias and the Angel*, written in 1930 (produced by the BBC in 1938). In this play a man, his dog and another man, who is secretly the Archangel Raphael, encounter trials and tribulations on a long journey.

The third scene is set in Harper’s kitchen where her husband Seth is testing his daughter Sarah’s knowledge of geography for a forthcoming exam. She explains that glaciers are “huge sheets of moving ice […] that erode the land” (20). Then she gives a lengthy definition of how glaciers are formed. This turns out to be one of the most fascinating metaphors of the play:

> Glaciers begin to form when snow accumulates and remains in an area all year round. If temperatures don’t rise enough to completely melt the snow, snow continues to accumulate. Each year, new layers of snow bury and compress the previous layers. […] This compression forces the snow to re-crystallise. During re-crystallisation, the crystals interlock to create ice that essentially behaves like rock. Once a mass of compressed ice reaches a critical thickness, it becomes so heavy that it begins to move (20).

Unwittingly, Sarah is reproducing her mother’s emotional condition, whose burden of heavy layers of worry and suspicion over recent years has

now reached an unbearable weight and "critical thickness" which threaten to suffocate her. Harper Regan, "after years of frozen attitudes, begins her own glide – away from her daily life" (Clapp 2008:469). However, her movement away from her family may either lead to erosion or to restoration. The scene reveals Seth's preoccupation and uneasiness regarding the happiness of his family who had to settle down in a new environment. We feel Harper's frozen, critical attitude towards him, their estrangement and his eagerness to please her. She informs him of the confrontation with her boss, expressing her wish to leave and to find another job. At the end of the scene, Harper significantly tells Seth: "I'll move. I'll go now. I won't be long". The stage directions tell us: *She stands still for a short time. They have no idea what to say to each other* (29).

Before Harper begins her flight, she follows her daughter to a recreation ground. Sarah has furiously left the house after a quarrel with her parents, in particular her mother, who had objected to Sarah's going to a party during exam time. Now Harper tries to make up for the row by giving Sarah some money, but above all by talking to her to clear the air. We learn why Harper takes such a keen interest in Sarah's successful studies because of her own failure: "I wish I'd done geography. I wish I knew about the world a bit more" (32). Harper has led a frustrated life and this fact adds another layer to the burden on her shoulders. Later on it is revealed that her parents divorced when she was fifteen. This blow seems to have been one of the reasons why she abandoned her studies after O-levels. The scene starts with Harper's concern about a piece of masonry that fell from "somewhere" and "could or would have killed her" (30, 33). Sarah's scientific reply to her apprehension - "[d]epends on the distance it fell from. The trajectory" (33) – induces Harper to reflect on a persistent, looming danger in our lives: "Yes.

It's a bit unsettling. You think you know where you are and then […]" (33). The suspension points here are quite significant, because they tell us that Harper stands at a crossroad and is about to choose an unknown path that might change her own and her family's life. The talk between mother and daughter ends, grippingly, when Sarah, a Goth and ecologist, talks about the future of the world and the fact that "[we] as a species […] are killing ourselves" (35), which she learned in "The Theory of Grand Design". Both articulate fears and wishes: Harper, who "always wanted a leather jacket" (33) and Sarah, who sometimes wishes to have a brother (37). Undeniably, the mother-daughter relationship is an important theme running through the play. Later on there is a dramatic argument between Harper and her own mother, and a final altercation with Sarah, which illustrate that they can be brutally sincere, but also extremely painful.

Subsequent to the encounter with her daughter, and only after stressing that she loves her husband and her family (37), Harper decides to go AWOL. Mountford (2008:467) has referred to her decision as "a unique ripple of rebellion in the millpond of conformity". Indeed, Harper, who has resigned to the gloomy circumstances of her life, has now decided to rebel against it. She knows what her flight implies. Being the family's main wage earner, she is aware of the impact on their life, risking their livelihood. However, she feels that she has to re-examine her relationships with the people and the world around her. Thus Harper sets off on her solitary odyssey and we are given snapshots of this journey. The minimalist design created by Hildegard Bechtler, consisting of a series of dovetailing, revolving and versatile boxes, underlines Harper's solitude. At the same time, the gliding sets give the impression of a road movie, folding the different locations - the suburban home, the recreation ground, the bridge, a

hospital corridor, a pub, a posh hotel – in and out of each other in a cinematic, kaleidoscopic production, just as Harper keeps moving along the road. (Significantly the name Harper seems to be derived from "to harp", meaning to go on and on).

On a Tuesday morning Harper arrives at Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport, to see her dying father. She learns, however, that he has already passed away. At first she manages to keep emotional control by asking Justine, a frustrated nurse, a series of general questions, such as her work in the hospital, particularly in situations of terminal illness. She then wants the nurse to tell her what happened that led to her father's sudden death. She is given the following medical report:

> His condition deteriorated very rapidly. He was already in a full coma by the time he got here. The levels of critical insulin in his blood were so low. He didn't wake up. He didn't suffer any pain. He was asleep when he died (40).

This report does not allay Harper's anxiety, and she goes on asking about feeling, pain and breathing. She discloses that she "wanted to put (her) fingers in his wound" (40), to see if he felt it. Then she brings up the matter that disturbs her most: "Was he on his own"? (41). It is only after the affirmation that he *did* die on his own, that Harper bursts into tears and collapses, because, as she says: "I never told him how much I loved him" (42). She then reveals the terrible implications provoked by her desire to see her father for the last time:

> I flew up last night. I'll lose my job now. My husband can't work. We have to borrow money so that my daughter can go to university and the interest on the

> repayment is just crippling and I asked my boss if I could come and he said no … so now … we've had it, basically (42).

After this dramatic event Harper is sort of shell-shocked and, rather than going to see her mother who lives nearby, "she drifts from one situation to another" (Sierz, 470). Previously she had suffered a brutalizing emotional shock when her husband was convicted and dismissed from his employment. Now she has received another poignant blow caused by her father's death. This traumatic state may explain why she behaves seemingly irresponsibly during a few transitory, flirting moments, first in a pub with a coke-snorting journalist, and then in a posh hotel with a married man. This behaviour can be explained in Freudian psychoanalytic terms, that is, how trauma can affect and disturb the human psyche (cf. Buse, 173, Frontier, 84-90).

It is only eleven o'clock in the morning when Harper is drinking "*a glass of white wine*", while Mickey Nestor, a journalist, is drinking "*a large glass of whisky"* (45). Being in a kind of neurotic stupor, Harper is unaware of having been the object for some time of the man's *gaze*. Finally, she is "*startled out of her reverie*" when he complements her on her attractive shoulders. He offers her another drink, a smoke and even cocaine, all of which she categorically refuses. Even so, Harper listens to his lecherous, hateful ramblings with contemptuous sham curiosity, such as his self-important admission that he delights in watching porno on the Internet. This increases Harper's repugnance as it calls to mind her employer's analogous leisure pursuit. However, the journalist's long, detestable anti-Semitic speech, his stink of whisky and horrible aftershave (55) tops her abhorrence. The only thing she likes about him is his leather jacket. She abruptly ends

the encounter by crushing her wineglass into his neck in a moment of orgasmic fury, running away in his jacket. Momentarily Harper seems to have turned into a monster, a *harpy*, which is evoked by her name and her action, carrying off the man's jacket. The long-coveted leather jacket bestows on her a new kind of identity, making her look younger and punk. Moreover, by being a *man*'s jacket, a *macho* article, it can act as battle gear to shield her during her odyssey.

Several critics have referred to this last scene as Harper's "descent into hell of her own creating" (Spencer 2008:468), especially if an analogy with Stephens's play *Motortown* is established, where on his return from Iraq a disaffected soldier inflicts murderous slaughter in Britain. Others have made a comparison with David Mamet's *Edmond* (1982), as Nathan and Evans (2008:470). There is in fact a kind of parallelism between Harper's and Edmond's actions at the beginning of the play when the latter, a respectable New York businessman, walks out on his wife. Harper, however, leaves her husband to explore her psychological state, whereas Edmond wants to discover Manhattan's most squalid side, irreparably sliding towards crime and self-destruction. Conversely, Harper's *descent* is transitory. Her unexpected violent act is almost certainly the outcome of her traumatic past experience to release her tensions by taking revenge on a certain class of men who perceive women as objects of desire, such as the journalist and her boss. Maybe her vengeance is also directed, unconsciously, towards her husband, who has caused her a lot of suffering. Harper does finally *ascend* from her experience strengthened as a person who can face life's problems and make peace with the people she loves.

After this bout of striking violence Harper wanders in a stupor for hours. She finally turns up in *[a] beautiful hotel room in central Manchester*

(56) where she has arranged a date on the Internet with a married man, James Fortune. Still in shock caused by her brutal action, she confesses the incident to the perplexed stranger. In fact, her initial embarrassed conversation with James communicates the heroine's overwhelming need to reveal her most intimate secrets. And she is *fortunate* enough that this stranger listens to her. In fact, as with other characters in the play, the author has chosen symbolic names: *James*, a noteworthy apostle and a supplier of *Fortune*. Indeed, James Fortune turns out to have a therapeutic effect on Harper, giving her self-confidence, sympathy and gentleness. For the first time, our heroine is capable of revealing the transgressive secret that has been disturbing her marriage:

> Two years ago my husband was arrested on suspicion of taking pornographic photographs of children. He used to go to the park near our house during the day […] and take photographs. […] He was reported to the police by somebody who I thought was a friend of ours. They weren't pornographic. They were outside. He'd […] upload them onto his computer. *A pause*. When the police came round they took his computer away. When they charged him they told him that if he pleaded guilty then his trial wouldn't have to go to jury and he decided that that would be fairer to me and to Sarah. […] He was put on the Sex Offenders Register. Which strikes me as bit unfair (63).

Harper goes on to explain that her husband, in spite of being an architect, could not find any more work after his disgraceful arrest. Uxbridge was the only place where *she* was offered a job. Having hardly any qualifications, she leapt at the chance to have the wherewithal to maintain her family. She then mentions the ensuing estrangement with her parents, who believe Seth to be guilty, while she herself is convinced of his

innocence. As James has the gift of listening patiently, he becomes a kind of psychotherapist who can help her to liberate her accumulated anxiety, which is finally achieved in their sexual union. However, before having sex, Harper tries to overcome her embarrassment and shame by dancing with James, enjoying his gorgeous smell, and listening to his *completely beautiful* (65) voice, when he sings her the romantic, cheesy song '*She's Not You'* by Elvis Presley.

Interestingly, after this healing union Harper is at last capable of calling at her mother's house. They have not met for the last two years as a consequence of Seth's arrest. We sense the disturbing uneasiness between them, particularly Harper's antagonism; she rejects any offer of hospitality. This violent mother-daughter confrontation is one of the most forceful scenes in the play, as it dramatizes one of the pervading themes, that is, to say the *unsayable*, to scrutinize what is the truth and what is a lie. Harper has never forgiven her mother for trying to damage her faith in her husband. And it is precisely her banal prejudices that have caused the turmoil of her daughter's reaction. In her rage Harper accuses her of her partiality and lack of sympathy towards Seth and her father: "I'm feeling quite angry with you for what you did to Seth and … for what you did to Dad" (74). The climax is reached when her mother tells Harper that her father always thought that Seth was guilty and that she should have left him. This is a shocking disclosure, as Harper is convinced that it was her mother who influenced her father in his judgement. Harper's veneration for her father is suddenly shattered. *She puts her fist to her mouth* (76). After a lengthy silence, Duncan Woolley, her mother's new husband, and his apprentice Mahesh enter the room. Their presence contributes to lessening the accumulated tension (also inferred by their symbolical names). Duncan's character is

described as warm and comforting who has given Alison a cosy security. They both have the capacity to console Harper in her grief, by telling her how sorry they feel about her father's death and how much they liked him. Mahesh lost his own father five years ago for whom he still sheds the occasional tear. To comfort Harper he explains that grief can be compared to waves that come but then "get a bit further apart" (79). After this interruption, mother and daughter continue with their mutual accusations. Harper wanted to be loved unconditionally, not to be let down by her mother. After her mother's repeated insistence that she wasn't lying, that she was telling the truth (80), Harper is filled with revulsion. She is shaking with blazing anger when she hears her mother say: "I'll still be glad that I told you the truth about what your dad thought about Seth because that was an important thing to do" (81). Their mother-daughter bond seems irreparably torn, though there is a vague hint of reconciliation when Alison, looking through her lace curtains at the sky, tells Harper that it is "going to be a beautiful evening. The rain's all cleared up" (81).

Subsequent to the shocking confrontation with her mother Harper decides to return home. On her way she meets Tobias again and tells him about her broken heart regarding the truth about her father, who was a "much worse person" (84) than she had ever realised. She entreats Tobias to change his attitude towards his "moping, grumpy" father to avoid "[r]egret. That's what's poisonous. Regret and fear. And guilt. They're terrible" (84). She tells him that her journey has been unsettling, that it has made her think a lot. She insists on the necessity to tell the truth. So she confesses that it was no chance meeting two days ago, but that she had been following him for weeks (87). She strokes his hair and he has an erection. Perhaps her attraction to the boy, a mixture of eroticism and motherliness, helps her to

understand facets of her husband and herself which finally facilitate forgiveness.

Back home, Harper is subjected to Sarah's allegations; she accuses her of being "a selfish, thoughtless, cruel woman" (90), having caused a lot of suffering to her husband, who behaves "like a wounded dog" (91), muttering away to himself that it is his fault that she left. This violent mother-daughter confrontation parallels Harper's with her own mother. Once again an unwelcome truth is revealed when Harper, with a dreadful heaviness, decides to tell Sarah that her father may not be entirely without guilt as regards the photographs he took of little ten-year old girls. At her mother's house, Harper became conscious of the importance of telling the truth, even destroying Sarah's adoration for her father. When Sarah is confronted with the choice of judging her father innocent or guilty, she recoils from accepting that he is in any way to blame. Her reaction is analogous to her mother's in reference to her idealized dead father. The following speech reflects Harper's learning process attained on her odyssey, having become a much wiser and more perceptive woman:

> […] He might have liked those photographs more than he said. […] I don't think he'd break the law. I don't think he'd look at the websites. I don't think he'd buy any videos. […] But I don't know what he was thinking in that moment and I don't know that he would never think those thoughts again. I can't go into his head. I can't prise it open and stop his brain from thinking those things if he ever happened to. […] I wish I could.
>
> It's not [horrible]. It's just true. I don't hate him for it. Or blame him for it. Or think he's anything but […] We act like idiots. We have the ability to be really cruel. Again and again and again (95).

The protagonist has discovered that one has to acknowledge even excruciating truths. We have been taken "efficiently but unobtrusively along some of the corridors of Harper's mind, although the door marked "problem husband" proves tough to open" (Mountford, 467). The doubts about her husband's problems are not totally dispelled, - whether he is a perpetrator guilty of paedophilia, or a victim of an unjust social system - but in the last scene there is the hint of a hopeful future, a future where the fracture might be healed. Both Harper and Seth are glad to be together again, though there is some awkwardness about them. Harper knows that for a couple to survive, their relationship has to be based on truth. That is the reason why she tells Seth about her sexual escapade with James. She hoped that it might help her to overcome the grief of her father's death. Though he was unexpectedly tender and gentle with her, it did not relieve her pain. Then she started to think about Seth and wanted to be back home. This confession is delivered during a moving breakfast in a sun-filled garden. Harper has laid the table beautifully in rainbow colours. She has also planted some bulbs that will come into flower in the spring. The planting can be interpreted as a metaphor for their future relationship, where love and understanding may bloom after catastrophe. They are joined by Sarah, who, half-asleep looks at them in wonder. This breakfast scene of a united family conveys the sensation of sharing, communion, and cornucopia.

The play ends with Seth's significant speech, where he describes his utopian dream of the future. First he names activities one can do as a species, such as researching fossil history, exploring alternative universes, or philosophy. Then he expresses his wish to live in the country. Though his is a totally romanticized view, it conveys the need to leave his traumatic experiences behind. The following disquieting phrase, in fact, hints at the

anguish he has been subjected to by his arrest: “We can hold a pistol to our heads in the hope that somebody will carefully put a hand there and take it away” (101). It is Harper’s loving hand that removes the pistol from Seth’s head and frees him from further damage by her offer of redemption. (Notably, the biblical Seth, meaning “replaced, appointed”, was born after the slaying of Abel by Cain).

Conclusion

Before writing *Harper Regan* Stephens read fifteen of Euripides’ plays, because, as he stated, “I like to be inspired or infuriated by other people’s work” (Rebellato 2008). Indeed, the author seems to have been inspired by the series of strong women characters in Euripides’ plays, such as Medea, Hecuba, Electra, etc. that reflect strong inner emotions and passion in their struggle with an unjust world. Clapp (469) has rightly observed that “suggestions of cosmic disturbance worthy of Ancient Greece fly around the story”, where Athens becomes Uxbridge, and where an important universal and personal tragedy is dramatised. Christ (Schauspielhaus 26/09/08) has referred to the play as a *Stationendrama* as each encounter on Harper’s personal odyssey can be seen as a turning point in her life. However, at the same time, Stephens offers glimpses of English society that convey the impression of a prejudiced, fractured, frustrated and frightened world, pointing towards an “uneasy underlying social malaise” (Allfree, 467). Nevertheless, the play ends on a hopeful note due to the restoration of Harper’s relationship with her husband, based on truth, love and forgiveness, brought about by her psychological learning process during her odyssey.

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Visions of Power/Powers of Vision

LONDON, THE OCCIDENTALIST 'CITY OF MAN' IN *DIRTY PRETTY THINGS* AND *ISLAND OF HOPE*

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Abstract*: The paper examines the depiction of London in two films, the British Dirty Pretty Things and the Turkish Island of Hope, from an Occidentalist approach. It argues that the metropolis acts as a corrupting influence on the immigrant heroes and heroines, turning them from 'virgins' into 'whores'.*
Keywords*: Orientalism, metropolis, female, prostitution.*

Occidentalism, as proposed by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, is a dehumanised picture of the West as painted through a set of stereotypes and

prejudices by its enemies, who range from Islamist radicals to Romantic poets. These negative images of the West are centred on a perceived lack of spirituality in the Western world, which has been traced variously to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment or the Industrial Revolution. Although the specific prejudices differ, Occidentalism can be seen as the mirror image of Orientalism in that it tends to dehumanise people by turning them into a set of prejudices. Thus, while Orientalism tends to belittle its victims by depicting them as childlike and weak yet oversexed and depraved, Occidentalism achieves the same by diminishing "an entire society or a civilisation to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling parasites" (Buruma and Margalit 2004:5-11).

One of the oldest strands of Occidentalism is the negative image of the city. In this view, a city dedicated to commerce and pleasure rather than religious worship – the City of Man rather than the City of God – is depicted as a symbol of hubris, of a human challenge to the gods which is doomed to failure. Such thinking was not, at first, linked specifically to Western cities – indeed, such thinking arguably predates Western civilisation itself (2004: 16-17). This theme can be noted, for instance, throughout the Old Testament, where it is written that the first city was constructed by Cain who, exiled from the land of Eden (and God's presence) after his murder of Abel, went to live in the land of Nod where he built a city, Enoch. Thus, the city represents isolation from God; it is a world excluded from God and one from which God is excluded, and thus a world doomed to destruction. As Ellul points out, this theme is emphasised throughout the Bible. However, of all the Biblical cities, Babylon is the archetype of the 'City of Man'; she is the city of decadent civilisation *par*

excellence, where everything is for sale, including the bodies and souls of men (1970:21).

Thus, far from being the Promised Land where man can fulfil himself to the utmost, the city merely leads him into slavery and misery;

> The man who disappears into the city becomes merchandise. All the inhabitants of the city are destined sooner or later to become prostitutes and members of the proletariat. And thus man's triumph, this place where he alone is king, where he sets the mark of his absolute power, where there are no traces of God's work because man has set his hand to wiping it out bit by bit, where man thinks he has found all his needs, where his situation separated from Eden becomes tolerable – this place becomes in truth the very place where he is made slave (Ellul 1970:55).

In addition to the place of man's enslavement, the city is also depicted as the social repository of sin, a place that incites its inhabitants to sin. Thus, the prostitute is often used as a metaphor for the Occidentalist city; she is a temptress who leads others into sin. In the Biblical view, the city "holds a golden cup full of the abominations and lewdness of her prostitutions. She makes all to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev.17;18). The idea of the city as whore derives primarily from its dependence on trade – everything (and everyone) is for sale. Prostitution is perhaps the most basic example of this: you can buy a prostitute's body but never her soul. This forms the basis of the Occidentalist view of the capitalist city; 'the soulless whore as a greedy automaton'. The city dweller, thus, literally loses his soul (Buruma and Margalit 2004:19-22). London in particular, as an important hub of capitalism and individualism has long been the target of Occidentalist derision.

As McArthur argues, "films do appropriate and recycle discourses at large in the world outside cinema and ideologies current in specific societies" (1997:40). Thus, Occidentalist views of the city in cinema are nothing new. As Buruma and Margalit point out, the Occidentalist theme of the lonely outsider who goes to the big city in order to seek his fortune or a better life, only to be abused there is a common theme of films around the world. A typical plot is something like this:

> The young man leaves his village, driven by hunger or ambition, his head filled with stories of vast riches and easy women. What he finds instead are the uncaring crowds, and the tricksters and cheats who rob him of his tiny savings. Finally he loses his dignity too, when he learns how to become a robber himself (2004:26-27).

This pattern, as will be argued throughout this paper, can be seen in the case of the young Turkish protagonists of both *Island of Hope* and *Dirty Pretty Things*.

Dirty Pretty Things

The plot of *Dirty Pretty Things* is deceptively simple. At first sight, the audience's reaction may be one of utter saturation when confronted with yet another story of illegal immigrants in a Western metropolis, i.e. London. Barely surviving a quotidian of social and personal terror, while attempting to foster common-place dreams of acceptance and self-fulfilment, the little network of foreigners clustered in dungeon-like sites appear to add their presence on the screen to a long list of 'pure' and 'helpless' individuals, migrating souls trapped in a grotesque citadel. What is visible of London in Frears' film completely eludes the world above the ground. In the film, the Western metropolis resembles a multi-coloured tattoo of underground

tunnels, corridors, cables and wires. Obviously, the director also dwells on the archetypal meaning of the city, since it can be said that the subconscious of London serves as a reflecting mirror for the characters' 'dark' or 'helpless' side, human dilemmas and identity issues. No wonder, then, that this confusing, terrifying labyrinth is the actual matter of interest in the film, and not the sunny places on the surface. In spite of the morbidity of the setting, Frears' film achieves a lot more than elevating the trivial, the ultimately petty informing his characters' lives, to the status of contemporary heroism. The intricate relationship formed between setting and characters argues for a powerful female personification of locus, depicted, at least initially, against the reification of the protagonists themselves.

Sub-stratum London is both the setting and, in the present reading, the protagonist of Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things*. As a terrifying locus, the metropolis is de-constructed in spaces par excellence conveying alienation, dread, despair, and last but not least, prosaic trade. Frears' London means hotels converted into brothels and to a certain extent, mortuaries; a giant marketplace where everything and everyone is for sale. The name of the middle-ranking hotel where the film starts unfolding is *The Baltic.* By resemblance with the most hostile of inland seas, the choice of name clearly implies the dooming silence of the urban purgatory. In this place where identities are disguised and melted in a desperate attempt to live anonymous and safe lives, the audience is first introduced to Okwe, the central figure of the film. He works as a night desk-clerk in *The Baltic*, while also juggling with his day-job, as a mini-cab driver with a fake license. Like the other illegal immigrants in London, Okwe's aim is to obtain a British passport but until this social Eldorado becomes reality, he is forced to lead a humiliating

and hunted life. His degradation is even more painful than the other characters', since his reasons for being in London are of a purely political nature. Once a reputed pathologist in his native Nigeria, Okwe was framed with the murder of his wife and forced to flee his homeland and abandon his little daughter. In order to survive the physical demands of such an exhausting existence, the Nigerian doctor resorts to the chewing of some mysterious narcotic leaves, which keeps him awake. His life becomes strangely intertwined with that of a young Turkish girl, an immigrant herself, who works as a maid at the same hotel. Senay allows Okwe to snatch a few hours of sleep on a couch in her cell-like flat. As she has only a short-term visa, both her working as a maid and her generosity towards Okwe greatly jeopardize her getting the much-desired residence permit. Another friend of the Nigerian doctor is the Chinese Benedict Young, employed at a hospital mortuary, generously providing Okwe with both rather cynical comments on the precariousness of human existence in a place like subterranean London, and medicines for the other immigrants. The hospital mortuary, therefore, is the second most important symbol for the city underworld, along with *The Baltic* hotel.

Although *The Baltic*, like any other middle-ranking hotel, displays its usual array of prostitution and illegal activities, to which Okwe has to turn a blind eye if he is to keep his job, the film's plot slides into nightmarish dimensions when he finds a human heart in the toilet of one of the rooms. The symbolism of this rather macabre discovery stretches well beyond the thriller genre, as the audience is soon to discover. The human heart and the place where it was discovered renders the anatomy of the immigrant's existence, thrown into the garbage of history, yet trying to preserve dignity, compassion, generosity, as means of escaping from the living hell of

underground London. Interestingly, the characters' safety and dreams are blocked by the trickster figure of Frears' film. The Spaniard aptly nicknamed 'Sneaky' controls a gory commerce in human organs, mainly kidneys, removed from the 'desperados' of the metropolis in order to cure the ailing rich. Thus, the world above and the one below are linked by this malefic figure, ruthlessly exploiting immigrants' lives. Sneaky, consistent with his function of buyer and seller of human organs, patronizes the underground world and fulfils his mephistophelic role with a candid aplomb, arguing in a Marlowe-like fashion that 'this is Hell'. The implication is obvious; somebody has to take it upon himself to play Satan. And he does so, most convincingly, attempting to involve Okwe in this gruesome enterprise. The moral dilemma for the Nigerian doctor thus reaches its climax: if he refuses to become a pawn in Sneaky's machinations, he risks the very lives of the innocent victims who would otherwise be butchered by greedy 'amateurs'. Yet, how can he sanction such a soulless transaction, without becoming himself trapped in this labyrinth of literally bloody illegal activities? There seems to be no escape from this urban nightmare. Okwe's character as well as his co-players in this macabre game of life and death fall constant prey to sets of institutional, social, economic or psychological bonds, for no aspect of human existence can be left untouched by this overwhelming underworld, about to install itself in the very hearts of its unwilling inhabitants. Thus, the metaphor of the heart gains momentum when the next victim forced to 'donate' her kidney is the naïve Senay, and Okwe agrees to operate on her. In slow scenes, of painful detail, the audience witnesses a hotel room converted into an incognito surgery. At the very last moment, the would-be patient and doctor, with the help of Juliette, a hotel prostitute, immobilize Sneaky and the petty

underworld schemer falls into his own trap, becoming an unwilling 'supplier' in his own business. The film ends with Senay and Okwe departing towards their respective dreamlands, the Turkish girl to New York (ironically, our contemporary Babylon), and the Nigerian doctor to his own country and his little girl.

As all these gruesome, yet typical of human nature, actions, emotions and decisions are unfolded against the background of London, the metropolis, as the epitome of the cold, modern Western world, Occidentalism as theoretical framework suggests itself as the *clef* to unlock the film's rich symbolism. The theoretical counterpart of Edward Said's Orientalism, Occidentalism places the Western City at its heart, along with 'the rational', 'the bourgeois' and 'the female'. Frears' film adds 'the immigrant' to this list, which is far from being complete. As Occidentalism is only now striving to become a body of thought (the book bearing the eponymous name and being its manifesto was only published in 2005), new categories and concepts arise on an almost daily basis.

Within contemporary human societies, the very idea of City exerts a multiplicity of emotions and feelings, ranging from the ambivalence of fascination and rejection to the:

> […] more ancient hatreds and anxieties, which recur through history in different guises. Whenever men have built great cities, the fear of vengeance, wreaked by God, or King Kong, or Godzilla, or the barbarians at the city gates, has haunted them. (Buruma and Margalit 2004:15-16)

At its limits – more or less overt prostitution, indifference to the Other - the homeless, the immigrant, the physical or psychological cripple, the City does offend many within the Western and Eastern world alike. Frears'

film, interpreted via the lens of Occidentalism poses the problem of whether *his* London is relevant for reinforcing the image of the corrupted West, concentrated in the metropolis, or of the corrupted and corruptible modern man, resident in either the West of the East? Apart from Okwe's character, clearly forced to flee his homeland for political reasons, the stories of the other characters make no reference to the reasons for their somehow naïve belief that the Western metropolis might be the grounds for a better existence. Maybe it all happens because, in Ellul's words:

> As soon as the city exists, she polarizes all activity toward herself. There is something magic about her attractiveness, and it is impossible to explain men's passion for the city, her influence on their activity, the irresistible current flowing in long waves to pull men toward the dead asphalt, without giving a thought for her force, her seductive power. (1970:152)

Therefore, in spite of the millennia accumulated knowledge of mankind, in spite of the biblical myths of cities like Babylon, Sodom and Gomorra, destroyed by the very wicked and godless ways of their inhabitants, people still stream into the city. So do Frears' characters, lured by their own dreams, and willing to play the victims. Their position in the metropolis can only be a marginal one, since homelessness is a destiny for all immigrants alike, be it a literal one or a spiritual one. It is common knowledge that: "the city must, in order to stay alive, have its night shifts, the accumulation of a proletariat, alcohol, prostitution [...], an iron schedule of work hours, the elimination of sun and wind" (Ellul 1970:153). One can argue, therefore, that the urban space, far from being responsible for Frears' characters' underground lives, merely reinforces their existential dilemmas and their inability to fight destiny on their own terms. This is particularly

obvious in Senay's case; the somehow naive Turkish girl, while attempting to gain a legal status in the London underground world, indifferent when not hostile, still nurses dreams about an idyllic New York, where sweet-faced policemen graciously ride their horses in Central Park, presiding over a place of personal self-fulfilment. Thus, she can be said to construct an intermediary London, a purgatory, or in Long's word, an 'unreal city' situated "between the extremes of hope and dread, between distant Utopia and imminent Apocalypse" (Long 1985:7). The fact that this *city of the mind* fails to provide authentic comfort and internal stability is more than obvious, since as an artificial construct, it can collapse with the first obstacle encountered.

Senay's character in the film holds relevance for all the categories that constitute the subject matter of Occidentalism, regarding women. She is a female illegal immigrant in the West, and she is completely outside any form of male protection. Thus, the perfect stereotype for Occidentalism, claiming that:

> The exposed women of the West are the very negation of this idea (flesh and spirit in a constant state of tension), which is why they are regarded by devout Muslims or indeed ultra-Orthodox Jews, as whores and their men as pimps. To put it hyperbolically, Western women (and their 'Westernized' counterparts everywhere) are the temple prostitutes in the service of Western materialism. (Buruma and Margalit 2004:132)

At first sight, Senay's self-imposed exile seems to confirm Lovinescu's suggestion that "exile is one of the rare proofs that there is continuity between the older forms of existence and the situation of modern man" (quoted in Brînzeu 1997:147). Completely crushed by the alien world

that spits her out, with every attempt she makes to adapt, Senay moves in the film as in a nightmare, a big-eyed girl who almost seems to implore abuse and who, one may speculate, would have been a lot better off tending the family sheep in the Anatolian fields. Nevertheless, this mute self-vicitimization mounts up only up to a certain point. Forced to take another illegal job after being fired from *The Baltic*, for a while Senay dutifully performs her tasks as both a worker in a confectionery factory and as a sex slave who has oral sex with her boss, after working hours. One day, though, in an act of self-redemption, Senay bites her boss' sexual organ and flees from her illegal job, in a manner that leaves little doubt about her reclaiming a somehow lost *namus* (honour), the very essence of a Muslim girl's existence. It is a short-lived honourable identity, though and her dismemberment at the hands of the monstrous characters populating London's Underworld will take its final toll. In a sordid room of *The Baltic*, before she is supposed to have the surgery which will remove her kidney, Senay is raped by Sneaky: sacrificial victim, undoubtedly, and one that apparently reconfirms Occidentalist stereotypes regarding women. Senay's emancipation - obviously, as she made it to London without a male companion - can only lead to *decadence*. In Occidentalists' view the only recognized women's role is that of breeding heroic men. More than any other characteristic, misogyny seems to inform the Occidentalist frame of mind, a misogyny stemming from different but powerful perceptions and beliefs, albeit contradictory. On the one hand, women are regarded as weak, therefore accorded little respect in societies that are defined by their masculine (usually warlike) characteristics. On the other hand, women do represent *temptation*, - not only in the sense that they traditionally stand for *domesticity*, and so the retirement from the male sphere of life and conquest,

but also in that they represent 'life' (through child-bearing), whereas Occidentalists see the male ideal as 'death'. Read from these angles, Senay's almost literal dismemberment and loss of virginity may appear to the Occidentalist's eye as a well-deserved punishment, for her gender transgressions. Unwillingly, albeit temporarily, Senay has the 'privilege' of almost embodying the setting - underground London. For, as Buruma and Margalit point out:

> The most symbolic figure of commodified human relations, relations based on flattery, illusion, immorality and cash, is the prostitute. The trade in sex is perhaps the most basic form of human commerce. No wonder, then, that hostile visions of the City of Man always comes back to this. (2004:19)

At the hands of unscrupulous men (not all of them Western, alas! for Senay's sexual master is an Indian), a modest, innocent girl, can only become a victim. It is only through the almost divine intervention of the non-Western man, Okwe, that Senay is saved from a permanent social and moral doom. Thus, one witnesses on the screen the very Occidentalist idea that "[…] the woman is the 'protected jewel in man's crown', and bestows honor on the man by the way he defends her" (Buruma and Margalit 2005:133). Nevertheless, this is a most unconvincing rescue, since Okwe, after this act, decides to return to his native Nigeria, and be with his daughter. Therefore, the ending of the film is rather disappointing for the romantic soul, and re-confirming for the Occidentalist mind:

> Being oblivious to one's role as the guardian of the 'jewel' is to be without honor, or more disturbingly, without even a sense of honor. Western permisiveness, to the

> believers, shows not just a lack of morality, but a lack of the most basic sense of honor. (Buruma and Margalit 2005:134)

Judged from within the frames of Occidentalism, one may wonder whether Okwe has finally become 'Westernized', 'lost his soul', after being exposed to London underground radiations and turned into, albeit unknowingly, yet another fragment of humanity, helping the others, randomly, only on short-terms, a piece in the cold mosaic of the Western metropolis. Likewise, Senay, the Turkish girl, instead of 'learning her lesson' after being forced to prostitute herself in more than one way, chooses to perform a journey towards an even bigger metropolis. Presumably this second voyage can only lead to more social, psychological and financial alienation and destruction. However, it is the ambivalence of interpretations that makes the message contained in Frears' film particularly rich and enriching. Thus, it allows the audience either a critical look, accompanied by Occidentalist tunes, or, quite the opposite, a generous, hopeful glimpse at humanity, which refuses to disintegrate itself even in the interstices of Hellish London.

Island of Hope

The plot of *Island of Hope* is centred around the experiences of three young Turkish people who leave their country for London for different reasons. Yusuf is from an Anatolian village, depicted at the beginning of the film as a kind of rural idyll, its sense of belonging, community and tradition underscored by a village celebration, the scene with which the film opens. Yusuf, however, wishes to 'be someone', and he considers that the best way to do this is by following in the footsteps of Gavur ('Heathen') Mehmet, an

older villager who has 'made it' in London. Despite the older man's warnings, Yusuf sells the land he has inherited from his father and buys a place on a people smuggler's boat to England.

The other two protagonists, Asil and Vildan, are from Istanbul, a city where soulless capitalism and social unrest are already encroaching. Asil, a security guard, is forced to leave the country after he becomes involved in a fight which leads to a shooting incident. He thus leaves his girlfriend and buys a ticket on the same ship as Yusuf, where the two characters meet. The final protagonist, Vildan, is a young woman who lives with her father. Having recently graduated from university, she is delighted when she is accepted on an English course in London, where she will also work as an *au pair*. Thus, Vildan is the only one of the three protagonists to enter the UK legally; she therefore does not have to undertake the awful sea voyage endured by the two male protagonists.

In the film London is represented as a dehumanising metropolis, a colourful beast which attracts and consumes its prey. It is an Occidentalist city, a doomed City of Man, a place whose inhabitants are led into slavery and sin. The young Turkish protagonists of *Island of Hope* are no exception. Despite the differences in their backgrounds and their reasons for leaving Turkey for London all find themselves corrupted and almost destroyed by the big Occidental city. It is, then, depicted as a nightmare city of broken dreams and shattered hopes. In fact even identities disappear in this soulless and impersonal Western city, depicted as a kind of earthly hell. This is symbolised in the scene when, having disembarked in England, the migrants are instructed to burn their identity cards before applying for political asylum. This is a foretaste of their life in the city, where not only their dreams, but their very identities, will count for nothing. Infernal imagery

can already be appreciated during the immigrants' journey to London, foreshadowing the protagonists' 'descent to Hell'. In order to get to England, the male protagonists, all illegal immigrants, are forced to resort to corrupt people-smugglers. Like prospective inhabitants of Hades, they are forced to pay for their grim boat-trip to the underworld. On the boat, as in the city, everything has its price; the travellers can eat well at an extortionate cost, and those who have the cash can be provided with alcohol, drugs or even women. One of the crew attempts to rape one of the female passengers, Sibel. After she is rescued by the other passengers she asks 'What if one day someone asks how much a woman is?', a question which chillingly echoes Vildan's later experience in London. Towards the end of the journey, a young man called Umut drowns before reaching the shores of England. The name Umut means 'Hope' – Hope literally dies. The episode is perhaps reminiscent of Dante's warning to those condemned to Inferno – 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here'.

The decline of Vildan, the female protagonist is particularly visible, despite the fact that, at the beginning of the film she appears to be in a more advantageous position in comparison to the male protagonists due to her legal status. However, a series of events leads to her downfall. The family where she stays appears to be a stereotypically corrupt Occidental family. The children are utterly spoiled, out of control and disrespectful. Finally, after the mother of the family makes lesbian approaches to Vildan, even attempting to enter her room at night, Vildan attempts to leave. However, her father is no longer able to support her, and she is unable to hold down a job as a dishwasher arranged for her by her friend Kader.

Finally, too proud to return to Turkey, she begins to work as a pole dancer in a seedy bar, which leads to her entry into the world of prostitution.

A year later she is unrecognisable as the innocent looking, comparatively conservatively dressed young girl who arrived in London; by the end of the film she is a stereotypical figure, a repulsive, world-weary, drunken whore. The Occidentalist city, based on soulless commerce, is represented as a prostitute; in this sense, then Vildan is not only corrupted by London, she *becomes* it. Her prostitution makes her into a temple priestess of the hellish Occidental city; at the same time it turns her into a symbol of that city. At the end of the film, however, Vildan, like Senay from *Dirty Pretty Things*, appears to be rescued from her hell by a non-Occidental man, again with the mission of protecting the 'jewel in his crown'. In this case, however, the man is Vildan's father, who comes to England after a desperate Kader informs him of his daughter's situation. In this case, however, although the film ends with the reunion of father and daughter, a more definitive rescue can be inferred than in the case of Senay.

Space in the London of *Island of Hope* can be divided into two broad areas. On the one hand, the film depicts a 'Little Turkey', the cafes run by earlier generations of Turkish migrants who have descended into the hell of London and resurfaced with their values and identity intact. The values embodied by the older Turkish migrants in the film, notably Cevdet, can be enumerated as honest hard work, a sense of community and, perhaps most importantly, the conservation of a sense of (Turkish) identity. These places, with their warm lighting, home-cooking and comfortably ageing furniture, represent a sanctuary, a kind of 'home from home' for the new generation of Turkish migrants.

The moment the protagonists leave this world, however, they are confronted with the dehumanised, soulless world of Occidentalist London, a place with no values beyond the pursuit of a quick buck and a quick fix of

drugs and casual sex. This world is predominantly represented by bars, inhospitable, neon-lit places dedicated to the pursuit of temporary oblivion in the form of drugs, alcohol and casual sex. Like the hospital and hotel of *Dirty Pretty Things*, the bars of *Island of Hope* are impersonal, functional places, in contrast to the cosy, constructive, domestic space of the cafes of Little Turkey. This image of London can also be contrasted with Orientalist depictions of London that, as Sardar argues, are becoming increasingly common in American film and television. Such Orientalist views of London portray the city as archaic, traditional and 'exotic'; it is, in effect, 'frozen in time' (1999:115), while an Occidentalist view of London depicts the city as a garishly modern and impersonal place where all tradition has been lost.

The Western characters who belong to the Occidentalist world of *Island of Hope*, like those in *Dirty, Pretty Things* are also corrupted, and corrupting, figures. They are the Occidentalist's Occidentals, caricatures, one-dimensional creatures incapable of compassion or, indeed, any kind of humanity beyond a sharp, calculating mind and the basest of animal instincts. As Buruma and Margalit point out:

> The mind of the West is often portrayed by Occidentalists as a kind of higher idiocy. To be equipped with the mind of the West is like being an idiot savant, mentally defective but with a special gift for making arithmetic calculations. It is a mind without a soul, efficient, like a calculator, but hopeless at doing what is humanly important. The mind of the West is capable of great economic success, to be sure, and of developing and promoting advanced technology, but cannot grasp the higher things in life, for it lacks spirituality and understanding of human suffering (2004:75).

Moreover, the protection that the sanctuary of 'Little Turkey' can provide from this inhuman world is extremely precarious, as is demonstrated when a group of English football hooligans 'invade' the cafe and proceed to defile the Turkish flag. They are portrayed as a gang of mindlessly nationalistic bullies whose nationalism is soulless in comparison with that of the Turkish characters. It is a nationalism based on xenophobia rather than genuine pride in national values. In addition, the son of Cevdet, the Turkish cafe owner, who, unlike his father, was born and brought up in London, also demonstrates the fragility of the wholesome Turkish values when faced with the corruption of the Occidentalised city. Despite the efforts of his father to instil these values in him they make little impression on the boy, perhaps less from a wish to rebel against them as from a complete alienation from them. The boy leads a dissipated life, living with a 'dancer' and just showing his face occasionally at college. He represents the vacuity and meaninglessness of life in a Western city; as he points out to his father 'Isn't life empty?'

In line with the Occidentalist attitude towards women as discussed in the previous section, the female Western characters, like London itself, are flashily dressed temptresses. Emphasising their stereotypical character and lack of humanity, they are nameless. Like the male Westerners, these women appear to be soulless creatures, with no concern beyond making money and their next quick fix of oblivion. Yusuf's 'relationship' with a local prostitute proves to be his undoing. Through her inability to give up prostitution and her cocaine habit, she leads Yusuf into an underworld of humiliation and drug addiction; under the influence of drugs he hallucinates rural scenes, underscoring his increasing desire to escape from this urban hell. Like Vildan, by the end of the film he is almost unrecognizable as the

ambitious, hard-working young man who arrived in London; he has been utterly 'Occidentalised' by the city and its temple priestess to the point where he is a pathetic figure, intoxicated, inarticulate and begging for money for his next fix.

Of all the protagonists of *Island of Hope*, Asil appears to be least damaged by his experiences in London. In contrast to Yusuf he does not suffer from drug addiction, neither does he become involved with a prostitute. However, Asil also becomes corrupted by London; in his attempt to part-own a company he becomes a worshipper of Mammon, the god of all Occidentalist cities. Moreover, a seductive Western woman tempts him away from Ceren, his loving Oriental partner who awaits him in Istanbul. Both Asil and Yusuf, however, also return from this Occidentalist hell. Finally, Asil casts a photograph of his English girlfriend into the Thames, thus presumably indicating his decision to return to Turkey. The film closes with an image of Yusuf getting off a bus in rural Turkey and happily skipping towards his village.

Conclusions

In conclusion, both films depict London as the quintessential Occidentalist 'City of Man'. It is a world where money rules and everything is for sale, yet where the struggle to survive, especially for a poor immigrant, is acute. It is a world of gross capitalism and corruption where the rich exploit the poor and desperate. It is also a world dominated by the pursuit of soulless pleasure, a quick fix in the form of drink, drugs and casual sex. The 'Western' characters in the films embody these features. They are, almost without exception, one-dimensional creatures incapable of compassion or, in fact, any kind of humanity beyond a sharp, calculating

mind and the basest of animal instincts. For the Turkish protagonists of these films, then, London is a nightmare city of broken dreams. There they endure a kind of 'descent to Hell', in which not only their hopes and dreams but their values and very identities are destroyed. Thus, the plot of both films closely follows Margalit and Buruma's archetypal plot of the lonely outsider who goes to the big city to seek a better life only to be abused and humiliated there (2004:26-27). Using the metaphor of the Occidentalist city as a whore, the male protagonists are seduced by her into a world where money and oblivion replace moral and spiritual values while both female protagonists are forced or tempted into selling their bodies. Thus they are reformed in her image; they *become* the Occidentalist city. However, the female protagonists, like modern-day Persephones, are eventually rescued. In both cases, however, their saviours are non-Occidental men, reflecting the Occidentalist concept that women are weak and prone to corruption, and are doomed to decadence without male protection.

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AUTHENTICITY vs SIMULATION IN PEDRO ALMODÓVAR'S *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER*

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Abstract: *In an era in which flesh harmonises with silicone, the masculine turns into feminine, the families consists of two women or two men, and life mingles with performance, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the original, the real from the created or the counterfeit. In this context, the aim of this paper is to analyse the intricate nature of the authentic in Pedro Almodóvar's film All about My Mother.*

Keywords: *authenticity, simulation, performance, identity.*

Introduction

When one thinks of Pedro Almodóvar, one associates him with unconventional, and at times utterly shocking, films and scripts. The question is: what makes his movies so surprising and ultimately memorable? Perhaps it is their secret power to make the extraordinary seem commonplace and believable, the naturalness with which the outlandish is turned into ordinary existence. The force which drives these mutations is definitely brought on stage by 'authentic' characters with tremendous amounts of energy to live even the most extreme situations. As Almodóvar said in an interview, life, be it real or fictional,

> gives us opportunities, although it usually gives more to those who are adventurous—to the crazy people who play with their lives, who place bets on their decisions—than to those who carry out an organized and ordinary existence. (Montano 2004:136)

In *All about My Mother/Todo sobre mi madre* (1999), Almodóvar's prize winning film, these characters are all women who spend their lives struggling, recalling the director's obsession with female characters, particularly those who act. *All about My Mother* is not only concerned with acting, but is also meant as homage to professional actresses and women, who spend their life playing the role of femininity, as the director underlines in the formal dedication with which the film ends:

> To Bette Davis, Gina Rowlands, Romy Schneider. To all actresses who have played actresses, to all women who act, to men who act and become women, to all the people who want to be mothers, to my mother.

The movie is all about women, women in various disguises:

mothers, daughters, actresses, lesbians, whores, nuns, transsexuals who form a female cast of culturally marginalised, but 'authentic', beings. In what follows, I intend to analyse Almodóvar's preoccupation with authenticity with reference to performance, identity and living.

Theoretical Perspectives on *Authenticity* and *Simulation*

In order to map the territory, we should first settle the premises of our discussion by clarifying the implications of the notions under focus. Thus, 'authenticity' refers to the truthfulness of origin, to the first, the real, from which copies are derived. Understood in these terms, 'authenticity' appears as the opposite of the false, the fake, the counterfeit. In psychology, the term refers to one's attempt to live according to the drives and needs of one's inner being, oblivious to the demands of society or one's initial conditioning. From here, the existentialists, such as Heidegger, Kierkegaard and Sartre, discuss authenticity in terms of the conscious self who comes to terms with living in a material world and among exterior pressures quite different from its own. From here, to be authentic means to remain true to your own personality, dreams and wishes, irrespective of external circumstances. It may also imply the authentic response that the being finds in order to adapt to these circumstances.

These abstract considerations, however, are not entirely tenable if we take into consideration that what we dream and desire to be or to achieve, and our very personality, are informed by external forces, which are culturally and socially bound. In this light, 'authenticity' may seem either deceptive or oxymoronic, since it is founded on imitating or copying a certain model. It can be argued that there is no objective authenticity, since

it is largely constructed by a society based on points of view, beliefs, perspectives, interpretations or powers.

The idea that there is no objective 'authenticity' points towards 'simulation', in Baudrillard's understanding of the word, as the order which threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false', 'real' and 'unreal'. According to Baudrillard, simulation represents "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (2002:91). The annihilation of all referentials outlines the era of the simulacrum, which is no longer based on imitation or duplication, but on "substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard 2002:92). In other words, imitations not only reproduce reality, but try to improve upon it, to such an extent that they may be taken for the real. The consequence is outlined by Baudrillard, who emphasizes that:

> When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality – a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. (2002:95)

Reality and Performance

Returning to *All about My Mother*, the film opens with the image of a drip-bag and a heart monitor at an organ transplant centre in Madrid. We are thus introduced to the main character, Manuela (Cecilia Roth), a single mother and nurse, who witnesses a patient's death and hurries to her office to co-ordinate the transplant of the man's organs. In the next scene, we see her acting the role of a distraught mother in a training simulation for hospital employees, who need to learn how to persuade relatives to consider organ donation. Manuela's performance unfolds before the eyes of her son, Esteban, whom she had allowed to come to watch her act, as a present for

his birthday. Thus the protagonist introduces the idea of improved reality and simulated authenticity, which do not apply only to her working environment, but also to her private life. Manuela is hiding from Esteban any details about his father, in an attempt to improve a reality revealed later in the film.

The simulation scene, coupled with the idea of organ donation, establishes from the beginning the prominence of performance and the body, as two major themes in the whole edifice of Almodóvar's film. First, in *All about My Mother* most conflicts take place on or around the stage, through the characters who act in theatre plays or real life, as well as through a variety of cinematic and theatrical intertexts, most notably Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Mankiewicz's *All about Eve*. The title of Almodóvar's film derives from *All about Eve* that Manuela and Esteban watch on the night before the boy's seventeenth birthday. Secondly, Manuela's first performance in the cinematographic simulation reinforces the idea that the human body is a site of negotiations and exchanges. From the point of view of authenticity, the body ceases to be truthful to its origin, and becomes instead highly malleable and marketable, being transformed, reinvented through technical intervention (Murphet 2004:117). The original therefore is affected, altered by new constructions.

As another present for his birthday, Manuela offers her son two tickets for the theatrical performance of his favourite actress, Huma Rojo, (Marisa Paredes) in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. After the show, the boy insists that they should ask Huma for an autograph and, while waiting, Manuela reveals that she had once played Stella Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* together with Esteban's father. She promises to tell her son all about his missing father once they get back home, but suddenly Huma comes out of

the theatre with her partner on and off stage, Nina Cruz (Candela Peña), and quickly gets on a taxi. Esteban runs after them and is struck down by a car. From playing the role of a grieving mother for the hospital seminars, Manuela ends up being a grieving mother who consents to donate her deceased son's heart. Once again, reality mirrors performance rather than the other way round, which gives the impression that reality itself is nothing but a fake. It is nevertheless a reality that Manuela has to come to terms with. As Almodóvar points out in an interview with Frédéric Strauss, "The story moves continually back and forth between women who act in life and those who act on stage, but who all in the end are confronted with reality" (2006:192)

It is reality not simulation which brings Manuela back to the hospital to hear the request for her son's organs, this time without "the mediation of acting and television" (Acevedo-Muñoz 2007:221-222). Performance implies the existence of mediation through which reality can be reached, whereas authenticity implies total transparency, immediacy, the lack of any veils, screens or distance in the filtration of reality. In this sense, Manuela's screams in the hospital waiting room are an unmediated reaction, which delivers a moment of authenticity, of immediate access to the protagonist's feelings.

The pain of losing a child becomes for Manuela a cathartic stage, obligatory in the process of rediscovering life. Her journey of reconstruction begins when she decides to travel from Madrid to Barcelona in search for Esteban's father, the man she had abandoned eighteen years earlier. Barcelona in the evening, that is, at the magical hour of the cinema, reveals from the beginning its best known landmark: the Temple of the Holy Family, that Manuela briefly contemplates from the taxi she took at the

railway station. The choice of this celebrated construction built by Antonio Gaudi is by no means accidental in the overall logic of Manuela's journey. Commenting on its significance, Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz points out that the unified family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus becomes a symbol for Manuela's search for Esteban Sr., a gesture similar to an "act of reconcilement for her fragmented family" (2007:225). Gaudi's style imposes itself through the organic harmony of different, incongruous shapes, discordant spaces and mismatching materials (Acevedo–Muñoz 2007:225). In a similar way, Manuela is gathering the scattered fragments of her unusual past in order to find a more homogeneous and less traumatic sense of her self and her family.

If Gaudi's cathedral features as an authentic landmark of Barcelona, Almodóvar masterfully counterbalances it with the other landmark, no less authentic, 'el campo' or the prostitute market. In the middle of transvestites and transsexuals, who aggressively offer to the camera's gaze the spectacle of their surgically transformed bodies, Manuela encounters an old friend, Agrado (Antonia San Juan), a transgender prostitute. It is Agrado who reveals that Esteban Sr., now known as Lola (Toni Cantó), has become a transsexual and drug addict, which explains Manuela's desire to conceal his identity from her son.

Agrado takes Manuela to a convent where nuns do charitable work for the prostitutes of Barcelona. Sister Rosa (Penélope Cruz) is pregnant with Lola's baby, and soon finds out that she is also infected with HIV. Manuela will become a surrogate mother to Rosa, since the nun has a tense relationship with her family, especially with her mother, Doña Rosa, who introduces a new dimension of 'authenticity' as opposed to 'forgery'. She is

an art forger, a specialist in faking paintings by Chagall. Referring to her role, Almodóvar mentions that the character:

> leapt out from real life, as in Barcelona there is an excellent school for forgers. The Chagalls they produce there are exact replicas of real Chagalls. The paintings are sold as imitations, but they'd qualify as fakes. (Strauss 2006:192)

To pass something false for authentic is therefore a common practice, although Doña Rosa is afraid that she might be exposed as a fraud. On a different level, her choice of profession indicates a troubled identity, since Doña Rosa is an artist, whose identity must remain unknown for fear of disclosure.

At the time when Sister Rosa confesses that her child belongs to Lola, Huma Rojo's production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* moves to Barcelona. It is the same production that Manuela and Esteban had been to see the night he died. The theatre seems intimately connected to Manuela, since her destiny is bound to acting in general and to Williams's play in particular. She soon revisits the performance in order to relieve the pain of her son's death. The dramatic reality of her feelings turns the theatrical space into a place of authenticity rather than simulation. Similarly, the dressing room where Manuela goes to meet Huma features another authentic space where reality occurs. Here, Manuela confesses her life's link to *A Streetcar Named Desire* and to Huma.

Commenting on the theatrical-related settings as the locus of authentic disclosures in *All about My Mother*, Acevedo–Muñoz draws upon Gilles Deleuze's discussion in *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, to argue that, in para-theatrical situations, characters display feelings only partly independent of their roles, as they are permanently influenced both by their acting and by

the reality they live (2007:230–231). Thus, it is difficult to separate Huma from her theatrical *personae*. Even in real life she relies on famous lines from the play, as when she befriends Manuela telling her that: "Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers". Moreover, Huma seems 'authentic' in her roles and performances, and rather grotesque when she is off-stage. From this perspective, theatre as the place of simulated feelings becomes the stage of authenticity.

The confusion of the theatre with the authentic is also revealed when Manuela substitutes Nina (Huma's partner) in the role of Stella that she had once played. This is Manuela's 'real' moment, as she does not simulate feelings but live them:

> She grants the performance a transcendence that removes it from the inherent artificiality of the theatre and from the burden of performance itself, of being an actor, a professional phony. The setting is artificial, the "feelings are real" […] (Acevedo–Muñoz 2007:232)

We thus witness a process of dissolution of play in life and a dissolution of life in play, which leads to what Baudrillard identifies as "the confusion of the medium and the message" (2002:106).

The Transsexual's *Authentic* Body

In *All about My Mother* the idea of originality or authenticity as opposed to fakes and copies is ironically stressed several times by Agrado whose 'authentic' body is paradoxically marked by reinvention. When Manuela compliments her on a knock-off Chanel suit that she is wearing on their way to Sister Rosa's, Agrado replies laughing: "How could I buy a real Chanel with all the hunger in the world! All I have that's real are my

feelings and the pints of silicone that weigh a ton". In other words, the reconstruction of the body does not create a fake of femininity, since Agrado's feelings are real. As critics point out, male-to-female transsexuals "go from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women. There is no territory between" (Stone 1992:286). Agrado feels and thinks like a woman, and at no point does she hold onto her previous sexuality as a part of her current self. Her performance in the gender of her choice is faultless, since she organically identifies with the script of femininity, thus reinforcing Janice Raymond's idea that surgically constructed transsexuals "are not simply acting, nor are they text, or genre […].They purport to be the real thing" (1994:xxiii). In this light, the transsexual plays a double role: on the one hand, her body is a battlefield where conventional gender discourse is contested through the fragmentation and reconstruction of gender elements; on the other hand, it provides an instance of Baudrillard's simulacrum, where the difference between the original and the copy is effaced. This is particularly emphasised by the fact that Agrado does not refer back to her former sexuality; in other words she becomes what she has chosen to be.

Agrado, as an 'authentic' woman, confronts both the cultural misrepresentations of femininity and the violence directed against women. When Manuela encounters her in the prostitute market, she is struggling to get rid of a man who has almost killed her. The next day, in front of Sister Rosa, who offers the two women some work alternatives to prostitution, Agrado voices her apprehension of the drags, who disruptively affect the once fair competition in 'el campo':

> The whores were bad enough, but the drags are wiping us out. I can't stand the drags. They're sleazebags. They confuse transvestism with a circus. Worse, with mime! A woman is her hair, her nails, lips for sucking or bitching. I mean, have you ever seen a bald woman? I can't stand them. They're all sleazebags.

A difference is therefore made between whores (women), drags (men dressed in women's clothes) and operated transsexuals. Although a woman by feeling and appearance, Agrado differentiates herself from whores/women, pointing towards a third gender, which grounds its history in "the gaps and interstices between gender categories" (Gamble 2002:43). The transsexual can create an identity, which eludes the ideological expectations concerning masculinity and femininity. This seems the most viable possibility available to male-to-female transsexuals in their attempt to avoid the pitfalls of being regarded on a par with women, in itself a disadvantaged gender category.

Agrado's discontent with the drags does not concern cross-dressing, but rather 'the deceptive nature of their identity' based on a masquerade of femininity (Acevedo–Muñoz 2007:227). By contrast, Agrado shows no signs of split consciousness, no crisis of identity, but an unexpected sense of ego stability. The authenticity she proclaims is not related to her gender or sex, but to her genuine feelings, an idea which outlines the artificiality of core masculinity or femininity, and the importance of one's soul in defining identity. Sarah Gamble points out that:

> If no appeal can be made, therefore, to a 'true' or 'authentic' identity based on gender or on sex, heterosexual binarism gives way to an infinite range of gendered identities and practices: and it is from this line of reasoning that transgender theory springs. (2002:41)

Later in the movie, Agrado delivers a speech on the stage when a theatrical performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been cancelled. The shot starts with a close-up image of Agrado in profile. Discussing the significance of the camera angle in the context of a specific X-ray of the character, Acevedo–Muñoz explains: "While the close-up is customarily used to gain access to a character's subtleties and 'real' value, the close-up in profile further emphasises knowledge of his/her personality" (2007:235). In front of an enthusiastic audience, the in-transit transsexual Agrado presents all the surgical procedures she has undertaken in order to change her body into a female one:

> They call me La Agrado because I've always tried to make people's lives agreeable. As well as being agreeable, I'm very authentic! Look at this body! All made to measure. Almond-shaped eyes, 80,000 [pesetas]. Nose 200,000. A waste of money. The next year another beating left it like this […] Tits, two, because I'm no monster. 70.000 each, but I've more than earned that back. Silicone in […] lips, forehead, cheekbones, hips and arse. A pint costs about 100,000, so work it out because I lost count […] Complete laser depilation because women, like men, also come from the ape. 60,000 a session […] Well, as I was saying, it costs a lot to be authentic, madam.

If the scene is considered as conveying a final knowledge of Agrado's personality, then the speech reveals the character's identification with her body which carries a double-folded signification. First, Agrado gives voice to the feminist belief that the spectacle of femininity is enacted through the body, as the locus of complex ideological connotations. A woman is equated with her body, hence Agrado's speech interrogates the border between the acceptable and the unacceptable by displaying a body, which blows up all

established conventions of 'normal' femininity. Rather than concealing or keeping silence over the surgical processes of her becoming, the protagonist celebrates her marginality and difference by openly asserting the 'authenticity' of her constructed body. In this way, the real as referent is radically effaced, clearing the space for simulation as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard 2002:91). Notably, Agrado's conclusion is that: "you are more authentic the more you resemble what you've dreamed you are". Her authentic identity is therefore based on reinvention. Again, the traditional understanding of 'authenticity' is brought into question, since the copy rivals the original. Not accidentally, Agrado's model was provided by the magazines of the 70s.

Agrado's performance, perhaps because it lacks the *mise en scène* specific to a proper show, denotes "neither crisis nor the making of counterfeit identities" (Acevedo–Muñoz 2007:237). Under the spotlight, but with the curtains shut behind, Agrado's body is under focus, and what it conveys is a sense of reconstruction and restoration, which comes from the physical harmonisation of flesh with silicone, the psychological reconciliation of masculinity with femininity and the existentialist belief in an authentic living amidst external pressures and social conditioning. On the other hand, the curtains which remain closed annihilate the stage as medium; hence, we have an instance of transparency, which is the attribute of authenticity. For Agrado, as for Manuela, the theatrical space represents less the place of performance and identity crisis (as in the case of Williams's characters), and more the locus of freely unleashed authentic feelings.

The other transsexual in *All about My Mother*, Lola, is largely absent from the scene. This man-turned woman and woman-turned father of two sons, Manuela's and Rosa's, makes a melodramatic appearance at Rosa's

funeral. Rosa dies giving birth to the third Esteban, a child infected with HIV, whom Manuela will bring up as her own son. Lola's role is to bring forth the idea of an atypical family made of two women. Commenting on the connotations of mother and fatherhood, Almodóvar explains to Strauss that:

> I hardly dare use either of these two words for Lola. The film also says that irrespective of personal circumstances, there exists an animal instinct in you inciting you to procreate and to defend your progeny, and to exercise your rights over that being. It's what Lola represents, and is perhaps what is most scandalous about the film […] Lola changes her whole way of being, her entire body, yet something inside her remains intact. (2006:185)

Whereas Agrado does not connect to her previous masculine identity, Lola is seen as a split subjectivity, torn between the identity that his physical appearance grants and the desire to be a father, which belongs to his masculine self. This could explain the melodramatic light in which the director chooses to present the character. Agrado seems natural, therefore authentic; Lola, by contrast, is a man with the appendage of a woman. If authenticity is understood as an equivalent of naturalness, then Lola lives an unauthentic life. Yet, the character is quite unique, and his decision to live according to his inner drives lends him the mark of authenticity. Moreover, as Almodóvar emphasises, he is the one who makes possible an unconventional family united, in spite of all social prejudices, by its members' reality of feelings.

> Manuela has understood that nothing could be more natural than for a father and son to know each other, and that it does no good to resist this. I wanted the audience to see this trio as natural. Not for the audience to tolerate it but to see it as something

> natural. Lola, Manuela and the second Esteban make up a new family, one that attaches importance only to essentials, one for whom external circumstances are of no importance […] (Strauss 2006:186)

In a second and final meeting, Manuela allows Lola, a 'monster', an 'epidemic' as she has referred to him, to make peace with his two sons. They meet in a café near the Plaza of Medinaceli, where Rosa made peace with her own disabled father before her death. Dressed as a woman, Lola apologises to the child: "I'm sorry to leave you such an awful inheritance" and asks Manuela's permission to kiss Esteban. "Of course you can, girl", replies Manuela, addressing Lola in the feminine, with the same naturalness that she would address Agrado. She shows Lola a picture of their son and his notebook in which he had stated his desire to know his father "no matter who he is, nor how he is, or how he behaved". The shot presents a close-up of Esteban's eyes looking from the photograph directly to the camera, while Lola reads in his voice the boy's last words on paper. The cinematic composition of the scene marks a reconciliation between father and son, suggesting a circular conclusion "since the film begins with Esteban's interest in knowing 'all about his mother', but ends in an encounter with the father" (Acevedo–Muñoz 2007:238). Faced with the new child, Manuela and Lola understand each other perfectly, behaving like old friends, who had come to terms with all their past conflicts. The naturalness of their encounter underlines the naturalness of their unusual family, a feature which becomes the most striking and appealing aspect of *All about My Mother*.

Conclusion

The end of this film reiterates this idea by presenting Esteban's miraculous cure from HIV as a natural fact, given Agrado's intense prayers. The epilogue offers symbolic conclusions to the issue of authenticity with Huma leaving Manuela, Agrado and little Esteban in her dressing room to go on stage. But the theatre curtain is closed, suggesting not an anticlimax of Huma's performance, but an emphasis of authenticity as transparency in the absence of mediation.

The reconciliation which concludes the movie serves as an allegory of settled identities which, no matter how distraught, split, invented, reconstructed or simulated, preserve their authenticity granted by their real, unmediated feelings and the truthfulness of their living.

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Gender, Culture, Society

JACQUELINE AND MICHELLE: WHITE HOUSE WIVES

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Abstract: *The paper sets out to discuss the ways in which these two First Ladies have been represented in the American press. The focus is on style, formal roles, as well as on their carefully crafted public image as mothers and wives.*
Key words: *First Lady, housewife, media icon*

1. Introduction

The idea of writing a paper on Jacqueline Kennedy and Michelle Obama came to us as we were doing research for an article on Barack

Obama's discourse. John Fitzgerald Kennedy is one of Obama's political role models, thus their speeches and actions are frequently compared by analysts. Similarly, their wives are constantly being paralleled by the press, at least as far as their style is concerned. Hence, we decided to look deeper into this matter and see if the two First Ladies do in fact have many things in common, or this perception is just another media construct.

One thing they definitely share is the position of First Lady, which entails duties and responsibilities that are not clearly defined. Nonetheless, we will try to pinpoint what these prerogatives are, at least in broad outline. Another thing the two women have in common is their status as media icons. This could actually be the reason that has led to their comparison.

2. Duties of a First Lady

She is the President's wife, so she carries out a job she did not choose; rather, she was chosen by her husband. But how can this job be defined? Margaret Truman, daughter of former American President Harry Truman, points to a paradox in her book *First Ladies: An Intimate Group Portrait of White House Wives,* namely that the Constitution stipulates what the President's roles are, while "about the First Lady, the Constitution is silent. No trumpets blare when she enters the State Dining Room or any other room, unless she is with the President." (1996:4) However, the President's wife is an important public figure, who is expected to stand by her husband, be the mother of his children, host various events at the White House, and thus be a perfect housewife. Moreover, she should dedicate herself to noncontroversial good causes and address stringent social issues. Lady Bird Johnson has described her initial days 'in office' as follows:

I feel like I am on stage for a part I never rehearsed. (Truman 1996:170)

Americans also perceive the First Lady as a symbol of womanhood, which very often leads to 'unrealistic expectations of her role.' (Truman 1996:11) In fact, one often feels they are required to fit the description of Wonder Woman. On the other hand, when a First Lady also overtly assumes the role of political partner, this collides with a woman's traditional domestic roles. According to Margaret Truman, the American people have always wanted a First Lady to be a traditional wife and mother first. (1996:12) So, she concludes that no matter how political she becomes, the First Lady will always be a woman, married to a specific man. (Truman 1996:14) And this man is elected to perhaps the world's greatest political office. At least until we will have a woman President.

On top of all these unwritten prerogatives and public expectations, First Ladies (and the First Family as a whole) are often viewed as public property, like the White House itself. While being a symbol, a wife and a mother, as well as a flawless hostess, how much can a First Lady still be herself? It is difficult to provide a clear-cut answer to this question, however, all First Ladies assume the same duties but they shape and mould their 'office' according to their personality and inclinations. This is what Jackie Kennedy tried to do in her often controversial manner, as we shall see below. And this is, of course, what Michelle Obama is poised to do, as she takes on America's toughest unpaid job.

3. Background: Family and Education

It is difficult to get a hold on the truth about Jacqueline Kennedy's personality since she has been portrayed as mysterious and moody, as a

woman who wore many masks and was impossible to decipher. However, despite the numerous myths and hearsay surrounding her, there are things we know about her background and which certainly influenced her development. Jacqueline Bouvier was born into the American aristocracy; hence she was part of the privileged elite. This status allowed her to enter a restricted social circle and to be dubbed debutante of the year. It also allowed her to attend the best colleges in Europe and the USA. Her childhood was marred, however, by the divorce of her parents when she was eleven. Her father was a compulsive womanizer and an alcoholic who, psychologists claim, affected Jackie and determined her to look for security and for father figures in the men she was later involved with.

A very intelligent woman, Jacqueline trained to become a journalist and claimed after graduation that her ambition was 'never to be a housewife' (Posener 2005:41). She even worked as a photographer for *The Washington Times-Herald.* Ironically, her education and manners, as well as her beauty and charm, played an essential role in her becoming the wife of America's most eligible bachelor.

The story could not have been more different for Michelle LeVaughn Robinson. While Jackie belonged to the privileged stratum of American society, Michelle was born in Chicago's South Side into a poor, African-American family. Her formative years were marked by her father's degenerative disease - he suffered from multiple sclerosis - but in various articles she speaks about him as a true father figure, inspiring her to work hard and further her education. Apparently, the most severe remonstrance she and her brother could receive from their father came in the shape of two words: 'I'm disappointed'. And, she admits those were two words she did not want to hear.

Other articles tout her as the 'smart girl', as opposed to Jackie's glamorous image 'I liked to get A's' she admits (Cooke 2009, *The Guardian*). During a visit to a school in England in 2009, Michelle was quoted as saying that being smart is cooler that anything in the world (Greer 2009, *The Telegraph*). After graduating from Princeton and then Harvard, she went on to work in corporate law. She appears to have been the family provider.

Despite the fact that all these achievements are acknowledged by the media, she is still expected to conform to her ascribed duties as First Lady, the most important of which are wife and mother (Wildman 2008, online).

Speaking about Michelle and her family roots, Barack Obama says:

> All my life, I have been stitching together a family, through stories or memories or friends or ideas. Michelle has had a very different background—very stable, two-parent family, mother at home, brother and dog, living in the same house all their lives. We represent two strands of family life in this country.

It is easily noticeable how he uses his wife's story to blend it with

his own political discourse about the diversity of the American heritage as an advantage rather than a liability. Moreover, Barack Obama has referred to Michelle as 'my rock' (Wolffe 2008, *Newsweek*) for bringing stability where his early life seemed not to have any.

4. Wives and mothers

As we have already emphasized, the main duties of a First Lady are those of wife and mother.

4.1 Jackie

In this respect, Jacqueline Kennedy proved paradoxical yet again. She married JFK and seemed willing to assume this public role, still she stated that she 'dreaded the job' (Truman 1996:30). What is more, she added that she did not want to be addressed as First Lady, since it 'sounds like a saddle horse'. Instead, she preferred to be called Mrs. Kennedy which emphatically identified her as the wife. Jackie is also famous for having said:

> People have told me 99 things that I had to do as the first lady, and I haven't done one of them (Watson 2001:130).

Nonetheless, she did not want to go unnoticed and she had a huge restoration project for the White House.

She and Jack formed a young and beautiful couple, who posed as a happy family. According to Posener, Jacqueline did try in the first years of her marriage to JFK to be a 'good' politician's wife. She tried to cook and she wrote a column, "Campaign Wife", while her husband was running for the presidency. She had five pregnancies in ten years, and dramatically only two of her children lived. She stood by Jack during his terrible surgery in 1955, proving strong while he was weak, proving his partner in the fullest sense of the word. She seemed not to mind his numerous and notorious infidelities, as she did not believe there were any men who were faithful to their wives. What she wanted and asked from him in return was respect for her wit and judgement, and support for her projects. However, she had married someone who was, like the rest of the Kennedy men, a chauvinist. Truman asserts that they

> made no attempt to tout Jackie's intelligence, mostly because they did not believe it existed. In their eyes, she was, like all the other women in their lives, strictly

for relaxation. (1996:32)

As a White House wife, Jackie undertook a huge project: she wanted to make it the most impressive house in the United States, as well as a museum that reflected the nation's cultural history. The President and the Congress strongly opposed the redecoration. In order to get the money necessary to achieve this goal, she had a brilliant fund-raising idea: she edited a full-colour guidebook of the White House which sold 8 million copies. So Jackie, also called by some 'Queen of America', managed a spectacular make-over of the presidential home. She achieved her grand ambition and transformed it into an 'American Versailles.' (Posener 2005:116)

Her bold attempt represents the "changing attitudes about the public and private roles of American women," according to Professor Curtin of the University of Wisconsin – Madison (1960s handbook, online). He also noted that the First Lady came across as an authoritatively modern woman with a keen sense of history and an appreciation of the arts, even as she was presented as wife and mother. Jackie invited the cream of American writers, dancers, actors, and musicians to the White House, and she significantly improved the art collections there. Consequently, she might be seen as "symbolic of female aspirations to re-enter the public sphere," a portrayal that resonated with female viewers of that decade (1960s handbook, online). By bringing culture to the White House she probably also meant to bring change to the whole American nation.

On Valentine's Day 1962, a televised tour of the newly restored White House drew 56 million viewers, and earned America's Queen an honorary Emmy Award. The one-hour show *A Tour of the White House with Mrs.*

John F. Kennedy aired on all three major networks and was the "first primetime documentary to explicitly court a female audience," according to Professor Michael Curtin (1960s handbook, online).

Behind this public facade of success, the 'royal' couple showed glimpses of unhappiness and estrangement. In the summer of 1962 JFK had an affair with Marilyn Monroe, whilst Jackie frequently escaped from the White House. She travelled with her daughter to Europe where they spent a few weeks. She was photographed on Gianni Agnelli's yacht and then, the next summer, on Greek magnate Aristotle Onassis's boat. This upset JFK, but only because it damaged his image - it was all right for him to bring women to the White House, but evidently not for her to behave in a comparable way. In 1963, the death of their son Patrick, three days after birth, seemed to bring the couple closer. They embraced in public, something they had never done, and Jack became more considerate.

4.2 Michelle

Sixty years later, the focus of the media still has not changed when it comes to the First Family. Sometimes the attention can border on the ridiculous, as was the case with the countless articles mushrooming on the Internet about the dog breed that the Obamas would take with them to the White House. What they are trying to point out, though, by insisting on these details, is probably the normalcy of non-whiteness, since they evidently represent the first African-American family at the White House. Within the family, Michelle has been portrayed as the 'non-Stepford wife' type; she does not smile vacantly at her husband, nor does she get involved into running his campaign for him (Wolffe 2008, *Newsweek*).

After her husband's election, the media has bestowed on her the moniker of 'mom-in-chief' (Cooke et al. 2009, *The Guardian*), as counterpart to the President's title of 'commander-in-chief'. 'Mom-in-chief' is quite explanatory when it comes to the expectations that the press and the larger American public have from Michelle. Unlike Jackie, she has a career that she will have to postpone for the four years, or more, that her husband will be in office. An article in *The Guardian* (Cooke et al. 2009) reminds us that Americans do not want their First Ladies to involve themselves politically so, what the media is doing in effect, is making sure to tell the new First Lady not to exceed the bounds of her role: she is to be a mother, a wife and an American.

She is to become involved in respectable causes such as fighting ovarian cancer, supporting stem cell research, defending abortion rights, strengthening domestic violence laws, etc. (Wood 2008, *The Guardian*)

"She has no secret dreams of seeking office herself" (Wolffe 2008) *Newsweek* reassures its readers in probably a not so subtle reference to Hilary Clinton, wife of former US President, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama's rival for the nomination as the Democratic candidate in the presidential election. The same article points out how Michelle's straightforwardness *complements* her husband's more grandiose style [our italics]. The reality of this message is not so subtle; it is one that, one way or another, represents the coping stone for the undefined role of First Lady, namely the first lady cannot come across as more powerful than her husband, no matter if, underneath the wife and mom, she has already made a name for herself.

5. Media icons

It is the media that makes or breaks the image of the First Lady, vilifying, or in our case, extolling the woman behind the role.

Much of what we know today about both Jacqueline Kennedy and Michelle Obama has been filtered through the media. Unfortunately when it comes to associating Jackie and Michelle, what the media focuses on is mostly their fashion ensembles, suggestive again of the standards it tries to set for the American public as well as the First Lady. Jackie is an icon and a trend-setter (we still refer to her style as the 'Jackie look') and Michelle is well on her way there. In fact, the media is trying to project this legacy onto Michelle.

5.1 Jackie

She is remembered for her beauty and elegance, however she told Carl Sferrazza Anthony after the publication of his book *First Ladies* that she hoped people would realize "there was something under that pillbox hat." (Hill 2001, *The Guardian*). The pillbox hat is, indeed, her trademark. She also told Oleg Cassini, her stylist, that she needed exclusive and original creations, because "there is a dignity to the office [of First Lady] which suddenly hits you." (Truman 1996:33) Furthermore, she asked him for dresses she would wear "if Jack were President of France" (idem). Even though she was reckless in expenditure, the media loved her, including the English press (normally so difficult to win over). Thus, the *Evening Standard* wrote that Jackie "has given the American people one thing they had always lacked – majesty." (quoted in Truman 1996:38)

The 1962 Valentine's Day TV tour of the completed public rooms was broadcast worldwide and it zoomed Jackie into supercelebrity. Thus, she was also immensely popular abroad. The French, for instance, were

charmed by her chic, her French heritage and her command of their language. Even President Kennedy joked,

> I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris – and I have enjoyed it! (Wikipedia)

This overwhelming public success is partly due to the boom of Hollywood and of television in the era, and partly to her amazing ability to project a personality that combined mystery and sincerity. She embraced fame, but then shunned it; people saw her beautiful, while apparently she did not see herself as such. Always glamorous and whimsical, Jackie looked like a movie star and, as we have seen, occasionally acted like one.

After JFK's assassination in Dallas, she handled the funeral and the whole situation with dignity, which only added to her complex persona. Lady Bird Johnson, President Lyndon Johnson's wife, has stated that

> Jackie's courage held the Kennedy family and the nation together during a time of almost unbearable tragedy. (Truman 1996:8)

Immediately after these dramatic events, Jackie refused to take off the pink suit smeared with her husband's blood. The media reflected this image and turned her into a symbol of loss and grief. Soon afterward, she became a tourist attraction. She was harassed by people who ogled at the house she lived in and tried to touch her and the kids. Later on she remained under the scrutiny of the press and she was judged by many for marrying Onassis and keeping up the rich lifestyle she was used to.

5.2 Michelle

Michelle Obama's image, on the other hand, has undergone quite a change since the beginning of her husband's bid for the presidency. Where initially her strong personality was considered a liability for Barack, now she is swiftly becoming the media darling. However, what the media is focusing on is her appearance and her fashion choices, yet another sign of what expectations she has to look forward to as wife of the President.

As a tall, athletic woman, she was thought of as not sufficiently feminine. Fastforward two months after the elections and the magazines and newspapers are obsessed with her arms, her skin, her hair, her rear (Harris 2009, *The Guardian*).

Her clothes and designer choices are subjected to scrutiny with a sustained undercurrent attempting to feminize her. Where, in the beginning she might have fallen under the stereotype of the 'angry, black woman' (Kettle 2008, online), now articles comment on her fashion choices conveying messages such as "Look at me - it's such fun to be a woman" (Cooke 2009, *The Guardian*). There is also a website specifically aimed at following what clothes Michelle Obama wears, event by event, called Mrs. O.

As the First Lady, Michelle Obama is poised to become one of the most photographed black women anywhere (Greer 2009, *The Telegraph*). In a country where the appearance of black personalities on the cover of *Vogue* still causes waves of discussion, it is perhaps easy to understand the furore surrounding the image of the First Lady.

Her comments - such as the ones she made about Barack, "You're a good man but you are still a man" (Stephens 2009:207), "just don't screw up buddy" (Cooke et al. 2009, *The Guardian*), and "For the first time in my adult lifetime, I am proud of my country" (Cooke 2009, *The Guardian*),

uttered after a rally in Wisconsin in 2008 - have made her come across as direct and blunt. A year ago her words might have been construed as controversial and detrimental to her husband's image and, ultimately, his career. However, now they are glossed over as the words of someone who is still refreshingly unpolished, who is unaccustomed to being in the spotlight and, thus, having her words dissected.

Another event that has solidified Michelle's status as a media icon has been the Obamas' visit to Europe at the beginning of 2009. Much like Jackie before her, Michelle took Europe by storm. Besides the hype surrounding her clothes, which went far enough for a *Guardian* reporter to finally point out that the obsession over Michelle Obama's clothes has gotten out of hand (McCauley 2009, *The Guardian*), an incident which could have been considered a faux pas cemented Michelle's success with the European media. During their visit in the UK and their meeting with Queen Elizabeth, Michelle Obama breached etiquette, whether deliberately or not, and embraced the Queen.

As opposed to Jackie, Michelle seems to be a very tactile person. There are many pictures of her high-fiving or hugging her husband, her children, or other people she has talked to. It is not surprising that she adopted this penchant as her trademark. "I do hugs" she later seemed to excuse her outburst (Greer 2009, *The Telegraph*), nevertheless, by then, it had already become a catchphrase.

Of course, by way of a reverse analysis, the positive image built around Michelle Obama ultimately reflects back on her husband, reinforcing his own status. In much the same way, Jackie's glamour and sophistication augmented JFK's own dashing image.

6. Conclusions

The way in which the media approaches the First Ladies is still indicative of the double standards that women in public are subjected to. An article in the *Guardian*, written four years before the razzmatazz surrounding Michelle Obama, focuses on the core of the problem, namely that there is no grey area when it comes to the wives of men in power, just extremes (Freeman 2005, *The Guardian*). If a First Lady is quiet, she is considered uninteresting and old-fashioned, if they have a career and strong opinions, they emasculate their husbands.

There are nearly fifty years between Jackie and Michelle, the differences between them as far as social background and personalities are concerned set them irreconcilably apart.

Yet, they share a common role. Both Jackie and Michelle are shoehorned into the constraints of being the President's wife, but neither acts like a typical glorified housewife. Jackie invited cameras in the White House whereas Michelle speaks about being smart and studying and never cutting class. At the same time, both Jackie and Michelle were part of a famous, groundbreaking, charismatic couple, both labelled at the time as reformers of presidency, which certainly added to the media's fascination with them.

Another aspect that has burdened both First Ladies, have been the expectations that people and the media have of them. Americans have certain demands and impose certain restrictions on their First Ladies in as far as what they can and cannot do. And they have grown even more straitjacketing, in spite of feminist advances and the five decades separating Jackie and Michelle.

The more powerful the woman who fills the First Lady's shoes, the more eager is the press to delineate the duties that the role entails: being a wife, a mother, a host, or a humanizing version of the image of the President.

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WOMEN'S WORK- A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

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Abstract*: The paper deals with the description of two main concepts – the public and the private sphere. I shall also focus on work and education as links between the two areas. The binary tradition/nontradition is also taken into account so as to exemplify specific features of the issues under discussion.*
Keywords*: public, private, education, work*

The binary public/private is a subject of interest for feminist studies on account of its consequences in terms of defining women's roles and establishing their values. Traditionally, the two concepts are ascribed to women and men exclusively, without their being intermingled.

According to liberal theorists, the private sphere is defined as a means of delimitating the power of the state. For liberals, the freedom and rights of

individuals are vital. The private includes everything that is not political. Friendship, domestic and familial relations are not circumscribed by power. As women are associated with the private sphere, their reproductive life is seen as a natural given. As women's work and life coincide with the private or familial realm, their access to the civil society is limited. (Dascăl, 2001:147-148).

The private area is not of lesser importance when compared to the public one. As Reghina Dascăl states:

> the house is more than a protective roof, it is the moral synthesis of moral laws that make the idea of any society possible; the habitat points to a distinct way of life and behaviour. By living in a house the individual comes to inhabit the world of the mores. (2001:85).

Up to the 19th century the two concepts of public and private were seen as overlapping. The rural community, the town or headquarters were seen as familial milieu where everybody knew everybody else. From this time on, the work and free time spent within the family are made distinct from the outer world. Individuals craved for privacy and this was attainable in the following way: the right to choose freely her/his condition, life style by withdrawing within the family, which becomes a refuge, the centre of the private space (Ariès, Duby 1995:5-7).

Even if a clear demarcation line can be drawn between the two realms as regards work and activities, the barriers are quite porous. Although the media conveys the image of women's unlimited opportunities, the reality of the workplace is discouraging. It is true that women have made progress in a few fields, but the majority of them face a sex-segregated labour market that undervalues the work that most of them do.

What they do in the home, from housework to nurturing, is work that is demanding in energy, time and, indeed, skill. Women still do most domestic chores, in spite of their participation in the labor force. Housework is belittled and disparaged because of it being done by women. When they become mothers their reward is professional marginalisation, a loss of status, income and benefits (Kesselman, McNair, Schniedewind 2003:179-180).

All over the world females are lower in status compared to males; this is known as gender stratification. Feminists deem that men's greater economic power and women's dependence on them, in this respect, lie at the root of women's lower status and power. As societies based on money evolved, men's labor became of greater value on account of the fact that it was done for money or the exchange of goods. Worldwide, men have control over the economy and resources, own more property, and hold more positions of power in the public sphere. Because of the fact that nowadays there are still a great many women who do most of the housework, which is not paid, or have jobs that are underpaid, their economic power is less than men's.

Job prestige is one example of women's lower status. They are in less prestigious and lower paid jobs than men. It is not only that male activities are valued over the female ones, but in many countries male children are valued over the female ones. This is known as son preference. It is met in South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan), the Middle East, and parts of Africa. Though this phenomenon is not that frequently met with in the West, great value is still placed on producing a male heir to carry on the family name. Sons are seen as family pillars, ensuring continuity of family property. They hold political power positions and high status jobs.

On the other hand, daughters are expected to marry, leave the family and have children. Consequently, they do not have the chance to enhance the family's economic or social positions the way sons do. As an Indian saw says: "Raising a daughter is like watering a shady tree in someone else's courtyard". In India, for example, when a girl wants to marry, her parents are expected to pay a dowry to the groom's family. This comes to be quite difficult, as it is harder and harder for poor families to provide the groom's family with a dowry (Burn 2000:17-22).

The 19th century was a time when the traditional view of women's roles underwent a number of changes. Girls were encouraged to be educated, their horizons became broader. They were urged to be, besides wives and mothers, active in civil society. Education and school are seen as solid bridges that make the link between the home and society. Great female authors such as Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, not to mention Kate Chopin, have produced important literary works that point out women's desire to do more than domestic chores.

Still, these achievements are not new as, if we look back to history, at the beginning of the 15th century, we discover the great Christine de Pizan, who as an intellectual, crossed with great boldness the boundaries set between the public and the private areas. She was a defender of women's education. According to Reghina Dascăl:

> We can clearly detect in Christine what we would call today a feminist consciousness, embryonic feminist gestures, attitudes and mental frameworks that would enable us to call her a precursor of feminists. Here was a woman who pained and outraged to read and hear that women were inferior and evil, refused to suffer in silence. She did not defend herself as an individual, but made common cause with women. She thought about women's lives and how they might be improved. Alas,

> there is no mention in her writings of Christine's ever having discussed such matters with other women, there are no hints of what women might have said to one another. It is tempting to think, though, that she did discuss them even that women had been saying such things to one another for a long time. There are certainly no explicit demands for equal rights or political power, no explicit claim for women's solidarity nor even a modest proposal for some organized, regular schooling for women, but Christine's refusal to accept insults and contempt in silence, her staunch belief in women's capacity for learning, her striving towards creating an alternative canon, a feminine tradition in writing, make up a plausible kind of feminism" (2008:44).

Talking about the 15th century, I would also like to mention the teacher Lauro Quirini, who addressed a letter of advice to the humanist Issota Nogarola of Verona. He responded to her brother's request for guidance on appropriate reading for Issota. His suggestions for her include Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Cicero. Though the advice he gives seems to us natural, even standard, the circumstances are unusual as it was not customary for a woman to learn humanistic studies. To exemplify the mentality of the time, in this respect, I shall mention Leonardo Bruni's letter to Battista Malatesta, which points out that, for a woman, public proficiency in advanced studies was indecorous:

> There are certain disciplines which while it is not altogether seemly to be entirely ignorant of, nevertheless to ascend to the utmost heights of them is not at all admirable. Such are geometry and arithmetic, on which if too much time and energy is expended, and every subtlety and obscurity pursued to the utmost, I shall restrain you by force. And I shall do the same in the case of Astronomy, and perhaps in the case of Rhetoric. I have said this more reluctantly in the case of this last, since if ever there was anyone who has bestowed labour on that study I profess myself to be of their number. But I am obliged to consider many aspects of the matter, and above

> all I have to bear in mind who it is I am addressing here. For why exhaust a woman with the concerns of *status* and *epichiremata* and with what they call *crinomena* and a thousand difficulties of rhetorical art, when she will never see the forum? And indeed that artificial performance which the Greeks call *hypocrisies* and we call *pronuntiatio*, as it is essential to performers, so it ought not to be pursued by women at all. For if a woman throws her arms around while speaking, or if she increases the volume of her speech with greater forcefulness, she will appear threateningly insane and requiring restraint. These matters belong to men; as war, or battles, and also contests and public controversies. A woman will not study any further what to speak either for or against witnesses nor will she busy herself with *loci communes,* or devote her attention to dilemmatic questions or to cunning answers, she will leave finally all public severity to men (quoted in Hudson, 1999:50).

It is clear enough that *bonae artes* were considered to be the appropriate occupation for noble women at that time in history, and not intellectual activities or anything that belonged to the public realm. That is why even Quirini who, though he admires Issota for her interest in humanistic education, stated that he had given her advice as regards reading at the request of her brother, otherwise there would not have been any reference to advanced studies. Issota Nogarola's *Opera* and her sister's compositions were highly praised. They were considered to have brought glory to their city, Verona. Guarino Guarini expresses his admiration for the two sisters who, he considered, deserved to be always remembered for their scholarly achievement and their manifest virtuousness.

> On this above all I bestow my admiration: such is the likeness of each sister's expression, such the similarity of style, such the sisterhood of writing and indeed the splendour of both their parts, that if you were to remove the names Ginevra and Issota you would not easily be able to judge which name you should place before which, so that anyone who is acquainted with either knows both together. Thus, they

> are not simply sisters in birth and nobility of stock but also in style and readiness of speech. Oh, the glory indeed of our State and our Age! Oh, what rare a bird on earth, like nothing so much as a black swan! If earlier ages had borne these proven virgins, with how many verses would their praises have been sung […]. We see Penelope consecrated in the verses of the poets because she wove so well, Arachne because she spun a most fine thread, Camilla and Penthesilea because they were female warriors. Would they not have honoured these modest, noble erudite, eloquent women, would they not sing their praises to the skies, would they not rescue them from the clutches of oblivion by whatever means they please and preserve them for posterity? (quoted in Hudson, 1999:52).

Issota and Ginevra were presented as sisters in spirit to different great women of classical Antiquity. Together with Sappho, Cornelia, Aspasia and Portia, Issota and Ginevra defended women's education. Even if the mentality of the time did not accept women deploying intellectual activities, the two sisters crossed the traditional line.

> These two women are among the most characteristic products of the Renaissance. In them for the first time, humanism was married with feminine gentility, especially in the case of Issota, who remained in this respect unsurpassed. With the Nogarola sisters the Guarinian strain of feminist pedagogy reached its culmination (quoted in Hudson, 1999:54).

Women and men were created with equal capacities, consequently, they should have equal opportunities to be educated for different fields of activity. Gender distinction does not represent any kind of a hindrance when it comes to education (the public realm) or domestic duties (the private realm).

> She mixes the cowdung with her fingers. It is gooey, smelly; she deftly mixes it with hay, and some bran, then she tries to stand up on the slippery floor of the cowshed and skids; slowly she regains her balance, goes outside with her basket and deftly pats cowdung cakes on the walls, on tree trunks. When dry, her mother uses them for cooking. She does a myriad other kaleidoscopic activities. The economy would not survive without her – at least not the economy of the poor: the girl child. While she is doing all these, what is her brother doing? Studying and getting his books ready for school. The girl child thus remains without education'' (Viji Srinivasan in Friedman 2005:188).

According to the Human Development Resources there are still countries where the number of literate men is greater in comparison to women (India, Syria, Pakistan, Sudan, Turkey). Relative male-female equality, as regards the issue under discussion, is met in Romania, Russia, Thailand, Columbia, South Africa. In the developed countries women do not have to struggle to become educated, they simply must be literate.

On the other hand, in the developing countries it is not that easy for women to get trained for a career. As illiteracy drives women and men towards low-skilled types of employment, these ones really have to struggle to become literate. If one's level of education is limited, then job opportunities are too. By means of education women can trespass with confidence across the line demarcating the public and the private areas. In this way they are no longer dependent on anyone else. She has the chance to move outside her house (Nussbaum in Friedman 2005:192-194).

Education is also connected to the political process. Female politicians stand up for women's needs. Even if women are under-represented politically, it is still important that they are there. Though in Romania after the year 1989 there has been a decrease of the numbers of women in

politics, in 1992 they amounted to 4% of the members of Parliament; in 1996 the proportion increased to 6% and in 2000 to10.3%. There were 50 women out of a total of 485 members. In the year 2004 the number remained constant but out of a total of 469 members, this time (Tănase, Moşneag in Băluţă 2006:176).

Women are evermore successful and the new feminism celebrates their success; women are presidents, ambassadors (e.g. the first female ambassador to Ireland, Veronica Sutherland, the first female president of Ireland, Mary Robinson). Compared to any other age, women now have more power in culture, media, politics than ever before. The greatest achievement of women's movements in the 19th century was to get women out of their homes in important public places where their voices could be heard. Women have always worked, but it was not until the 19th century women's movement that work could get them out of poverty; until then their work could not offer them a decent living.

A woman does not have to become masculine to get power. If she is successful as a politician or in any other important job, it does not mean that she thinks like a man. Women have broken through the walls that closed them off from public life. There are no legal hindrances to prevent women from having their place in society and being powerful. In the UK women first attended the TUC (Trades Union Congress) in 1875, were first accepted for medical degrees in 1877, were first allowed to own property on the same terms as men in 1882, first entered the House of Commons in 1919. Women were changing society.

Margaret Thatcher is the greatest example of female success. No British woman has yet come close to her political achievements. She made pointed references to Victorian values and, at a meeting before the 1983

election, she spoke about the new Renaissance that was about to envelop Britain which she made analogous to the Elizabethan era. Margaret Thatcher liked to use examples of other ages when Britain was ruled by women. She was proud of her escape from the traditional feminine role; she showed that although feminine and masculine power may have different languages, metaphors, appearances, gestures, traditions, a different way of being glamorous or nasty, they are equally strong, equally valid. "She is the great unsung heroine of British feminism" (Walter 1998:175).

Now that women are streaming into all areas from the law and public service to publishing and television, to medicine and business, they are more confident that they can shape those areas in their way. The new feminism's most important aspect is that worldly power is valuable and we should build on the power that we have, rather than disown it. In the 19th century feminism was defined by its outsider status (feminists were forced to speak from the edges of society); feminism at the beginning of the 21st century is defined by its insider status.

Equal access to the public realm is important for each and every citizen. Women will be equal when they feel they have the same opportunities and access to training and promotion as men have, when every woman who joins a union feels that she can become a national officer, if she wants; when every woman who trains as a barrister feels that she can say "I want to be a judge" without being mocked, when every woman who goes into journalism feels she need not work on the fashion page and can become a news editor if she wants to.

Women want power because they are tired of having less money, less influence on decision making at home, at work, in offices and Parliament. They want to be everywhere, in every office where decisions that affect

their lives are taken. Women want all kinds of power. They want to have control over their bodies, they should not be threatened and harassed, they should live their lives undisturbed. Women want the power to move freely in their society. They still work and live in unequal conditions, but their lives are, nevertheless, better than women's lives have ever been before and this is due to the feminist movement. Women's attraction to power can be seen in everyday life, they want more from life; women want to have a place in society equal to that of men's, but this will not happen until they are fully represented in decision making everywhere (Walter 1998:168-178).

According to Natasha Walter, feminism can no longer be associated with the voice of the outsider and the downtrodden. The new feminism is the movement that celebrates women's growing success. As women break into every corridor of power, we can see that we are in the final stretch of a long feminist revolution that is taking women from the outside of the society to the inside, from silence to speech. Compared to any other age, women now have more power measured by any gauge: by influence, by representation in culture, media and politics. Women want power for their own security and freedom, because, unless women are more accepted and less exceptional in powerful positions, every individual career will always be more vulnerable, every individual woman's presence always an anomaly that might be smoothed out. In an equal society all inequalities bolster and mirror one another. More women in power will mean a better deal for women throughout society. So, the battle for greater equality in the corridors of power is a battle worth fighting, partly for the individual woman facing up to her future, partly for the interest of women more generally and partly for society at large. It is a battle that this new generation of young women is ready to fight.

Literacy gives women many opportunities; it has an intrinsic value as the cultivation of the mind. Active participation in the civil society and politics requires a high level of education. Basic education is attained by most girls and boys. Secondary education already becomes problematic for some girls especially in the rural areas where they are taken out of school to do the housework or they get married at an early age, a phenomenon which is rampant in poor countries. University education is the most difficult to achieve as it implies moving from home, in some cases, which means that the family has to cover the high expenses entailed.

The right to education is the right that all human beings must have, irrespective of gender, race, nationality. It is by means of education that each and every citizen can find her/his place in the civil society. The more literate people are, the more developed the country they belong to becomes.

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WE MUST BE DISPLACED TO BE REPLACED: ISSUES OF GEOGRAPHICAL DISPLACEMENT AND INTERIOR EXILE

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Abstract: *The notion of displacement, be it conceived psychologically, culturally or geographically, places individuals in general and women in particular in a position of exteriority, outside the main discourse of the centre. Considering the close link between gender and space, the paper discusses issues of gender and geographical marginality/exile in Kiran Desai's novel The Inheritance of Loss.*
Keywords: *displacement, exile, marginality, space.*

Introduction

This article takes as a starting point a possible interpretation of 'displacement' in terms of 'place' or 'space' as a notion which interweaves physical, social and political territories. The discourse of space becomes central to postcolonial writing, where the imaginative recovery of a local place has the aim of liberating the colonised self. In this light, much of the literature produced by what is conventionally called the 'Third World' brings to the fore the concept of local identity, in an attempt to resist the discourses of marginality and otherness, which are inscribed in the representation of geographical place. Moreover, since women culturally

figure as traditional embodiments of otherness, women writers often discuss issues of nationalism and imperialism in connection with gender specificity.

The Symbolic Gendering of Space

Geography and gender are closely interrelated, for the Orient, as Said has argued in his seminal work *Orientalism*, functions as one of Europe's 'deepest and most recurring images of the Other' (2004:1). Therefore, the Orient is gendered as female and helps define Europe or the West as its 'positive' counterpart. The Oriental must be 'irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"' in order to uphold the image of the European as 'rational, virtuous, mature, "normal"' (Said 2004:40).

In such discursive economies women appear as doubly displaced since, as Karamcheti points out, 'women are colonized equally by geography and by gender' (1994:127), and are conceived in binary terms, as the other to maleness and geocentriciy. As a result, postcolonial women writers attempt to recover local geography as a means of contesting colonial and gender domination. As in the case of colonial space, the women of the conquered territories are usually referred to in terms of remoteness and lack of movement. The native woman's stasis, as representative for the Orient, foregrounds Western mobility and progress. Moreover, as Karamcheti argues, the colonial and postcolonial woman 'is often physically confined to limited spaces: not only the national landscape as opposed to the international metropole, but the countryside as opposed to urban center, domestic place as opposed to public space' (1994:128).

In this light, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* features Kalimpong as a remote place, high in the northeast Himalayas. After the death of her parents in a car accident somewhere in Russia, Sai is sent from

the convent, where she had been studying, to her only relative, Jemubhai Patel, her maternal grandfather. Kalimpong's vast, deserted space contrasts with Cho Oyu, the decaying house in which Sai begins her new life together with the Judge and his cook. The solitude of Cho Oyu parallels the tranquillity of all Kalimpong, where life passes slowly, uneventfully. 'Now and again, I wish I lived by the sea […] At least the waves are never still' (Desai 2006:69), ponders Noni, Sai's new tutor. Noni sees herself in the young Sai, in her shyness and quietness, the immediate consequences of the girl's education in a Christian convent:

> Noni, too, had been sent to such a school – you could only remain ensnared by going underground, remaining quiet when asked questions, expressing no opinion, hoping to be invisible – or they got you, ruined you. (Desai 2006:68)

In Noni's opinion, this "mean-spirited educational system" (Desai 2006:68) works to suppress the self-confidence of a "sensitive creature" such as Sai. Life had passed Noni by and now she lives with the bitter awareness of her failure to love, to have a family, to become an archaeologist as she once desired. She therefore encourages Sai to leave behind the constraints of her Christian upbringing, to go out of Kalimpong and live on her own terms.

Noni came to Kalimpong from Calcutta when her sister Lola moved here with her husband, animated by false romantic ideas of countryside living. After the man's death, the two sisters remained in Kalimpong and turned their rose-covered cottage, Mon Ami, into a shrine of exclusive and exquisite 'beauties', from the broccoli, grown from seeds procured in England, to all of Jane Austen and a jam jar 'saved for its prettiness. "By

appointment to Her Majesty the queen jam and marmalade manufacturers" it read in gold under a coat of arms, supported by a crowned lion and unicorn' (Desai 2006:44). Whenever Lola goes to England to visit her daughter, she returns with exhilarating stories about strawberries and cream, and suitcases stuffed with the 'essence, quintessence of Englishness as she understood it', that is 'Marmite, Knorr soup packets, After Eights, daffodil bulbs, and renewed supplies of Boots cucumber lotion and Marks and Spencer underwear' (Desai 2006:46–47).

Despite the underlying irony implied in the presentation of these trifles of English quintessence, Kiran Desai conveys an acute sense of longing that Lola experiences. Isolated in the margin of her country, as well as the margin of the former British Empire, Lola dreams of a centre for ever denied to her. According to Linda Hutcheon, the process of decentring entailed by much postcolonial writing 'always relies on the centers it contests for its very definition' (1992:59). The luxury items purchased in England provide Lola with the means of displacing the frustrations emerging from the historical and geographical marginality of herself as a woman, and of India as a former colony.

Imaginary Spaces, Arbitrary Borders

Lola's English purchases open still another possibility of reading the text, as a reiteration of the global effects of consumer culture. In *Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition* David Harvey argues that the volatility and ephemerality of fashions, products, ideas, values and established practices has encouraged 'the dynamics of a "throwaway" society', and has led to a disorienting sense of time-space compression (2002:42–43). Due to mass media and satellite communication, it is now

possible to experience the world's spaces simultaneously, through a rush of information and images, which render places and spaces 'as open to production and ephemeral use as any other' image (Harvey 2002:48).

In Kiran Desai's novel, the copies of *National Geographic* provide a case in point. A regular reader of the magazine, Sai enters the narrative with the curiosity and excitement of an explorer. Pictures of the Amazon, Patagonia, of a butterfly snail or an old Japanese house 'affected her so much she could often hardly read the accompanying words – the feeling they created was so exquisite, the desire so painful' (Desai 2006:69). She constructs imaginary travels to all the places that keep collapsing upon each other in the pages of the *National Geographic,* travels that could take her away from the isolated Kalimpong and the fate of women like Noni. She discovers within her 'the same urge for something beyond the ordinary' (Desai 2006:69) that had once fuelled her father's hope of space travel. During the Indo-USSR romance, Mr. Mistry, Sai's father, was selected to become the first Indian to make a journey into space, an event similar to a symbolic escape from the laws of gravity and the pressure of earthly geography. Yet, fate decided otherwise, and 'instead of blasting through the stratosphere, in this life, in this skin, to see the world as the gods might, he was delivered to another vision of the beyond when he and his will were crushed by local bus wheels' (Desai 2006:27).

Sai's imaginary journeys also provide an instance of Said's notion of 'imaginative geography', which refers to a process of assigning meaning to the distant Other. In this way, 'space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here' (Said 2004:55). The whole issue of space and geographical demarcations thus becomes entirely

arbitrary, hence all kinds of suppositions and fictions appear to populate the unfamiliar space of far away. As a result, writers of both the dominant West and the marginalised East use imaginative geography to construct assumptions about unknown worlds, and then invest them with meaning.

The thought of her father and the space program, of all the issues of the *National Geographic* that she has read, build Sai's determination to leave Kalimpong and set out on her own journey. The novel ends for her with a demand and a promise at the same time: 'She must leave' (Desai 2006:323). She must escape her imposed stasis and find the freedom to travel, but it all remains in the future, a reality in potentia.

Kiran Desai chooses, as the setting of her novel, a remote place in which initially nothing seems to happen. Kalimpong has the mountain starkness of Indian hill stations, but its geographical position in the far northeast of India proves more than problematic, for here the region blurs into Bhutan and Sikkim, constantly alert in case the Chinese might grow 'hungry for more territory than Tibet' (Desai 2006:9). Kalimpong has therefore been the centre of a messy map, fraught with numerous, irresolvable conflicts and barters between Nepal, India, England, Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan. The borders are constantly redrawn, done and undone, made to look ridiculous, to the extent that even the locals have lost track of the multiple divisions and annexations of territories. The issue is now and then treated with humour, as when Noni blames the British for all the geographical and political instability of the area: 'Very unskilled at drawing borders, those bloody Brits' (Desai 2006:129) which seems natural to Mrs. Sen, since the Brits are surrounded by water.

The hill station is firmly placed in its historical context, and the novel presents a series of revolts and processions of the young Nepali who reclaim

their territories, including Kalimpong as once torn from the vivisected Nepal. For them, geography is destiny, and the perpetual redrawing of the map hints at the artificiality of borders and nations alike. Lola reflects:

> What was a country but the idea of it? She thought of India as a concept, a hope or a desire. How often could you attack it before it crumbled? To undo something took practice; it was a dark art and they were perfecting it. (Desai 2006:236)

The incidents of horror grow day by day, taking the inhabitants of Kalimpong by surprise. Nevertheless, the solitude and marginality of the place increase as 'Kalimpong was trapped in its own madness. You couldn't leave the hillsides; nobody even left their houses if they could help it but stayed locked in and barricaded' (Desai 2006:279). The isolation is further intensified by the coming monsoon, which renders communication impossible:

> […] all over Kalimpong modernity began to fail. Phones emitted a death rattle, televisions turned into yet another view of the downpour. And in this wet diarrheal season floated the feeling, loose and light, of life being a moving, dissipating thing, chilly and solitary – not anything you could grasp. (Desai 2006:107)

The Exile Experience

The atmosphere of Kalimpong reaches Biju through the phone all the way to New York. Biju, the cook's son, provides another instance of geographical displacement, that is, migrancy. Being educated in India, England and the United States, Kiran Desai manages to illuminate the complex implications of exile with much accuracy and wisdom. In *The Inheritance of Loss* two types of immigration are brought into focus. One

dates back to the time before Independence, when Jemubhai goes to England to acquire the proper education that would later enable him to get a profitable job and a high social position in India. The other refers to present-day immigration when Indians go abroad in search for a better life in 'the best country in the world', namely the United States.

Having left the country, the migrant upholds the pride and prestige of the relatives back home, but what happens to Indians abroad is close to horror, and 'nobody knew but other Indians abroad. It was a dirty little rodent secret' (Desai 2006:138) which smelled of fear. Whereas other Indian writers, like Salman Rushdie, depict the monstrosities of the repressive apparatus directed against immigrants in their new countries, Kiran Desai is concerned less with physical violence and more with the psychological pressure exerted upon the migrant. Fear becomes the epitome of the immigrants' experiences: fear of being humiliated, despised, rejected, marginalised. In Jemubhai's case, his deep restlessness and anxiety surface in his horror of smelling bad. The disappointment he feels in a society which constantly rejects him is displaced in rage against his own body, which he masochistically identifies as the cause of his exclusion. Therefore the future judge embarks upon ritual, obsessive daily baths, meant to shed his Indianness and make him resemble an Englishman. He carefully hides his 'guilty' body in clothes and shadow:

> To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly. (Desai 2006:40)

Exile, as a form of home displacement and re-location in space, becomes for Jemubhai exile from himself, exile from the cultural roots of

his own identity. ‘Exilum’ in Latin means ‘to walk’, ‘to go’, therefore implying a journey and a quest, but the judge soon abandons his quest, moves out of society and away from his fellow men, and seeks isolation in a self-imposed solitude that grows day by day. What is perhaps worse in the case of the migrant is the feeling of estrangement: the process whereby what was once intimate becomes foreign. Jemubhai’s former ties with his past can neither be retrieved, nor reconstructed. They are simply lost. The consequence of his struggle to become British is that ‘he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both’ (Desai 2006:119). He himself despises Indians, and is much irritated when something as natural as the coming monsoon reminds him of his nationality.

Fear links the Judge’s experience in exile to Biju’s. A generation later, Biju leaves India and begins his American journey in a state of confusion and bewilderment. His fears have no connection with smell, which means he is not troubled by his origin, but by his illegal status in the United States which turns him into a fugitive on the run. Lacking the miraculous green card that would grant him the right to work and settle in America, Biju cannot fulfil his father’s dreams of modernity: sofas, TV, bank accounts. The cook carefully keeps his son’s letters as a precious record of Biju’s wanderings along a string of temporary jobs. Each time the story is the same, only the name of the establishment the boy works for changes. In a postcolonial world, Biju’s experiences are purely colonial: whatever their name, the restaurants have the same hierarchical organisation — first-world on top, third world, below — and Kiran Desai mentions these places in the brief style of newspapers, thus reducing them to triviality and rapidly discarding them into oblivion. This makes forgetting quick and easy, like the fast food that Biju prepares.

The basements of New York cafés and restaurants are crammed with a whole lot of expatriates, gathered in an awareness of their marginality and growing irrelevance. Biju cannot relate to any of them, and does not know how to behave until a Pakistani arrives. In America, where 'every nationality confirmed its stereotype' (Desai 2006:23), Biju and the Paki enact the cold war, fighting 'with an ease that came from centuries of practice' (Desai 2006:23). Biju feels that hate comes easily, and he hates out of historical habit and duty: 'How else would the spirit of your father, your grandfather rise from the dead?' (Desai 2006:23). Yet soon the war feels cold, unsatisfying.

Later on he meets Saeed Saeed from Zanzibar and Biju's inherited system of values begins to crumble. He encounters an unsettling dilemma: how can he like Saeed, and he does, when the man is Muslim?

> Saeed was kind and he was not a Paki. Therefore he was OK?
> The cow was not an Indian cow; therefore it was not holy?
> Therefore he liked Muslims and hated only Pakis?
> Therefore he liked Muslims and Pakis and India should see it was all wrong and hand over Kashmir? (Desai 2006:76)

The contradiction posed by religion is enhanced by the issue of race. How can Biju be overcome by the desire to be Saeed's friend when people at home disregard the blacks and consider them sub-human?

> Therefore he hated all black people but liked Saeed?
> Therefore there was nothing wrong with black people and Saeed?
> Or Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, or anyone else? (Desai 2006:76)

The questions that Biju asks himself subvert and deconstruct cultural stereotypes and old patterns of binary thought. Significantly, the process of

deconstruction is operated from Biju's position of the ex-centric and the dispossessed. Linda Hutcheon remarks that, while some French poststructuralist critics have argued that the margin provides an ideal place of subversion and transgression due to the mobility and freedom that it entails, other critics, like Michel Foucault, have shown that 'The margin is both created by and part of the centre', that the 'different' can be made into the 'other' (Hutcheon 1992:195–196). Along a similar line of thought, Vijay Mishra discusses Salman Rushdie's fiction and comes to the conclusion that: 'Terms such as cultural minorities, ethnics, blacks, New Commonwealth immigrants, multiculturalism, are all used by a hysterical centre that no longer knows how to normalize the other in the nation within' (1999:436). This echoes Spivak's argument that the margin is mainly constituted 'to suit the institutional convenience of the colonizer' (1990:223), much like Orientalism on the whole is an '*elaboration'* of various Western interests (Said 2004:12).

The Discourse of the Sacred

Biju's unsettling dilemmas concerning others' race, nationality, religion seem to come to a rest with his new job in the Gandhi café, an all-Hindu establishment run by a Hindu family who make a business out of exploiting Indian cooks, traditional dishes and Gandhi's favourite music. Harish-Harry reveals to the reader the Indian community of New York, a diaspora which reverts to homeland norms and practices. Harish-Harry succeeds because he understands the mechanisms of the global market:

> Demand–supply. Indian–American point of agreement. This is why we make good immigrants. Perfect match. (In fact, dear sirs, madams, we were practicing a highly evolved form of capitalism long before America was America; yes, you may think it is your success, but all civilization comes from India, yes). (Desai 2006:145)

Harish-Harry has two names, therefore a double identity, pointing to a deep rift between his selves, which is a general characteristic of the migrant's condition. Money may well bridge the gap between material cultures, but it does not help Harish-Harry sort out his confusing loyalty to Hindu gods and American clients.

Biju comes to the Gandhi café in search for some clarity of vision, but encounters a disquieting duality of principles instead. Harish-Harry donates money to a cow shelter just in case 'the Hindu version of the after life turned out to be true' (Desai 2006:147), and receives in exchange gifts, such as a painting of Krishna or a CD of devotional music. The sacred is exchanged like any other commodity on an already saturated market. The idea of a fragmented self and the accompanying sense of non-belonging do not push the experience of loss in a celebratory direction, as it happens in Salman Rushdie's fiction. For Kiran Desai migrancy does not feature as a utopian possibility for renewal but as a rather crude reflection of the emergence of new types of human being lost somewhere in the gap between what they were and what they find themselves to be.

Perhaps the worst kind of confusion in *The Inheritance of Loss* is posed by the rich Indians, who eat beef in expensive restaurants with practised nonchalance. When you learn to make the difference between holy cow and unholy cow, then you can adapt and succeed. Those unable to see the difference, like Biju, fail. When Biju understands this simple logic, he finds his way out of confusion and becomes aware of the fact that

> One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what.

> You had to live according to something. You had to find your dignity. (Desai 2006:136)

Kiran Desai reads the sacred as a unified discourse that can be used by the diaspora to defend a lost purity from within the hybrid and the hyphen. Vijay Mishra considers the sacred as 'a function of narratives that the almost self-contained diasporic communities constructed out of a finite set of memories' (1999:434). The sacred can thus provide a fixed point, stable ground in the midst of the volatility and ephemerality of contemporary times. However the Indian community that populates the Gandhi café has abandoned the sacred and the centre altogether, and the novel introduces Indian immigrants who even refuse to acknowledge their Indian origin. In other words, the past as referent is gradually effaced.

All through his journey, Biju struggles to remember, to fight the growing reality of forgetfulness, under the pressure of his new environment. When speaking to his father, Biju reconnects himself to the atmosphere of Kalimpong, and what he perceives are not the echoes of the current Nepali riots, but the pulse of the forest, the different textures of the plants, the heaviness of the humid air, the familiar geography of his land. If he were to continue living in New York, he would manufacture a false version of himself, like Harish-Harry, and discover one day that even family love has gone, for 'affection was only a habit after all, and people, they forget, or they become accustomed to its absence' (Desai 2006:233). The decision to return to India comes when Biju notices the first signs of mutual coldness, when he and his father grow highly irrelevant to each other's lives. In this way, the newly discovered sense of the sacred works as a means of growing self-empowerment. No, Biju reaches home at precisely the time when his

father is thinking that 'Biju was just a habit of thought. He didn't exist. Could he?' (Desai 2006:278).

Before leaving New York, Biju goes shopping and makes sure he buys all the necessary items to satisfy his father's passion for modernity. Back home, in the midst of riots, the Gorkhas take all his goods, including his money and clothes, and he arrives home stripped naked of all material signs, 'without name or knowledge of the American president, without the name of the river on whose bank he had lingered, without even hearing about any of the tourist sights' (Desai 2006:286). As long as he fails to relate himself to the geography of the new place, Biju casts himself willingly into the role of the ex-centric and the outsider, hence his impossibility of understanding the logic of the centre.

When reaching Kalimpong, for the first time in many years, Biju finds that he can already see, that his vision is no longer blurred. His gesture however does not reiterate the archetype of the man who returned home triumphantly at the end of his exile; he is no modern Odysseus. He could be a modern Dorothy who, after having travelled the world in search of Oz, returns home with the feeling that she need not really have made a journey at all.

Like a Bollywood movie, the novel ends with the embrace between father and son, which makes the mountains turn gold with luminous, pure light. The ending that Desai chooses comes to undo the pressure that the centre, with all its implications, exerts upon Indian (post)colonial society and her story alike. It offers an optimistic alternative to contemporary postmodern laments that the human being is in the process of forgetting itself in a world suffused with technology. At the same time, it invites the rethinking of the migrant's script from a perspective other than Harish-

Harry's slogan: '*Chalo, chalo,* another day, another dollar' (Desai 2006:147).

Conclusion

Kiran Desai's novel emerges as a work written from the perspective of the colonial margins, in an attempt to recuperate the local places that have been largely veiled by geographical hierarchies. As in the case of other Indian writers, she chooses to present the issues of gender and geographical/colonial marginality of the native in the form of exile. It is either exile in the solitude of forgotten spaces in the Himalayas, or exile as migration from India. In both cases, geographical displacement brings about a feeling of isolation and interior exile, counterbalanced in Desai's novel by the revival of the sacred. Along this line of thought, Biju's return home at the end of his exile casts an optimistic light upon the whole issue of displacement, which seems best summarised by Sandra Gilbert who writes:

> We must be displaced to be re-placed […] We must fly away to be regenerated. To be innocent as the healthiest processes of nature. To be immune to the hierarchical "principles" of culture. To be newborn. (1986:XVIII)

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ON INDIAN WOMEN AS BENEFICIARIES OF THE ARGUMENTATIVE TRADITION OF INDIAN CULTURE

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Abstract*: The unique emergence of Indian democracy and its resilience despite all kinds of historical odds is not only the result of British influence but - to a large extent - of the well-known argumentative tradition of Indian culture itself. It is this worship of reasoned debate and dialogue that best accounts for intellectual heterodoxy and for the tolerance of religious diversity in India starting with the ancient Buddhist councils and continuing with emperors Ashoka's and Akbar's sponsorship and support for the dialogic mode in their society. My contention in this paper is that to this day the argumentative tradition to which Indian women have contributed substantially throughout history has insufficiently benefited them.*
Keywords*: argumentative tradition, dialogic culture, diversity, agency, gender discrimination*

Introduction

India had developed a peculiar form of modernity with its highly atomized, fragmented and diverse citizenry. Identities of caste, religion, community and region often outpower broader-based loyalties. Paradoxically, whilst the lack of common purpose and identity has helped to perpetuate poverty and create only the most skeletal infrastructure, it has also fostered a robust democratic temper: Indians seize on elections as a relatively peaceful means of brokering their competing claims (Misra 2007:437).

Over the last 20 years India has been expanding at a rate exceeded only by China; since 2004 the economy has done remarkably well advancing from a 4-5% rate of economic growth to one of 8-9% producing a paradoxical model of a remarkably regulated liberal economy; India is

recognized as a nuclear power and its civil nuclear programme has been hailed and supported since 2005; India has switched from the status of borrower to that of net donor in the IMF. At the same time Indian society is hamstrung by poor infrastructure (only 3% of its roads are classified as highways), by the poor quality of mass education (which still gets barely 3% of GDP); it has some of the lowest literacy rates in the world (almost half of India's women do not know how to read and write and a large proportion of those who are technically literate can do little more than sign their name) and it consumes only 30% of the electricity used in developed countries. Agriculture is the black hole in India's economy. (In 2008 Aravind Adiga won the Booker Prize with a novel centred upon the unglamorous side of India's economic miracle. In the words of Balram Halwai, the protagonist, writing from the hub of the world's centre of technology and outsourcing - Bangalore: "And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them"; "India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness." (2008:4;14). Corruption, administrative cynicism, volatile political situations, 24-party coalitions complete this dismal picture: "the economy grows at night when the government is sleeping" argues Edward Luce (2006). According to the same author the Indian economy is 'schizophrenic': "its modern and booming industry is set in a sea of indifferent farmland with primitive brick kilns that dot the endless patchwork of fields of rice, wheat, pulses and oilseed, with yoked bullocks ploughing the fields; a schizophrenic glimpse of a high tech, 21st century future amid a distressingly feudal past" (2006:59). Absolute poverty affected 25% of the population in 2006: almost 300 million Indians can

never be sure where their next meal will come from; they also live with the probability that more than one of their children will die from easily preventable water-borne diseases. India spends less on primary healthcare as a proportion of GDP than almost any other developing country; 47% of India's children under 5 are malnourished, the majority of them being girls (when they become mothers they are bound to pass many of their mineral deficiencies to their own children). This brief survey of Indian society encapsulates some of the principal dynamics of modern Indian history with its enduring tensions between tradition and reform, hierarchy and equality, difference and commonality.

Democracy and India's Argumentative Tradition

Yet India has changed. India has freed itself from the hierarchical cosmology decreed by the Raj, it is a democracy and there is an overarching sense of Indianness, albeit a fragile one.

India alone among large nations embraced full democracy before it had a sizeable middle class or anything close to majority literacy among its voters. At the latest general elections - the largest exercise in democracy in the whole world, unfolding over a period of a month (April 16 - May 13 2009) in 5 phases and involving an electorate of 714 millions - Indians had uniquely come out in favour of a cohesive government where one party (the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance) is more or less in control, rejecting those parties that contested the elections playing the communalist, regional or casteist cards, sidelining consequently an array of regional and left leaning parties, which came to the centre stage of Indian politics over the last two decades as national parties lost influence.

When more than half a century ago India became the first country in the non-Western world to choose a resolutely democratic constitution it also drew on its own traditions of public reasoning and argumentative heterodoxy. India has a long argumentative tradition and a long tradition of accepted heterodoxy (Sen, 2005:XII). For over a thousand years Buddhism was the prevalent religion. The great emperor Ashoka of the 3rd century BC (Mauryan dynasty) embraced Buddhism and laid down the first rules for conducting debates and disputations. The Indian Buddhists' great commitment to discussion as a means of social progress is impressive, whilst the Buddhist councils rank among the earliest open general meetings (15). The largest and best known of them was placed under the patronage of Ashoka. Among the Mughal rulers, the most powerful defence of toleration and of the need that the state be equidistant from different religions came from the Muslim Indian emperor Akbar at a time when Inquisition was in full swing in Europe. Akbar organized the first inter-faith dialogues in the world (81), his overarching thesis being that the pursuit of reason rather than reliance on tradition is the way to address difficult issues of social harmony. His reign is mostly remembered for this robust celebration of reasoned dialogue. Akbar aimed at making the state religiously neutral and to that effect he attempted to launch a new religion - *Din Ilahi* ('God's religion'). In Salman Rushdie's magic prose dedicated to him Akbar is portrayed as a ruler pursuing the creation of a culture of inclusion: "his true vision came to life, in which all races, tribes, clans, faiths and nations would become part of the one grand Mughal synthesis, the one grand syncretization of the earth" (2008:317). Buddhism and Jainism both emerging in the 6th century BC, Jews who came to India after the fall of Jerusalem, the 4th century large Christian communities established in the

south in Kerala or the Parsees's arrival in the late 7th century fleeing persecution of Zoroastrians in Persia further bear witness to this grand multiethnic, multi-faith and multicultural synthesis.

A splendid literary expression of this celebration of diversity can be found in Kalidasa's *Meghdautum* (*The Cloud Messenger*) which applauds the beauty of varieties of human customs and behaviour through the imagined eyes of a cloud that carries a message of longing from a banished husband to his beloved wife, as the cloud slowly journeys across 5th century India.

The argumentative tradition if used with deliberation and commitment can be extremely important in resisting social injustice, in exposing inequalities and removing poverty and deprivation. This tradition has not been confined to any particular group in Indian society, although men tended to rule the roost in argumentative moves.

***Stree shakti*: women's power**

In ancient India some of the most celebrated dialogues have involved women, with the sharpest questioning often coming from women interlocutors. In one of the *Upanishads* of the 8th century BC, entitled *Gargi*, a woman scholar provides the sharpest edge to the intellectual interrogation. She enters the fray without any special modesty: "venerable Brahmins, with your permission I shall ask him two questions only. If he is able to answer those questions of mine, then none of you can ever defeat him in expounding the nature of God" (quoted in Sen 2005:7). Such interventions of women are not always on the irenic side. In the epic story of the *Mahabharata* the good king Yudishthira reluctant to engage in a bloody battle is encouraged to fight the usurpers of his throne with

appropriate anger and the most eloquent instigator is his wife Draupadi (this episode reminds us of the famous tussle in *Bhagavad-Gita* - a small section of *Mahabharata* - between two contrary moral positions: Krishna's emphasis on doing one's duty and Arjuna's focus on avoiding bad consequences. Eliot also echoes it in his *Four Quartets*: „And do not think of the fruit of action /Fare forward. Not fare well but fare forward, voyagers").

Distinguished women poets like the famous Mira Bai of the 16th century wrote on interreligious tolerance, like Kabir, Ravi-das or Sena.

The participation of women in both intellectual pursuits and political leadership has been remarkable, many of the dominant political parties being led by women. The first woman president of the Indian National Congress Sarojini Naidu was elected in 1925, the second, Nellie Sangupta, in 1933. From Pandita Ramabai in the 19th century - a brave advocate for women's education and for the social inclusion of widows - or Bhicaiji Rustomji Cama, involved in the revolutionary movement in India and abroad in the first decades of the 20th century, to Aruna Asaf Ali - also known as the Grand Old Lady of the Independence Movement and the Heroine of the 1942 Movement - the history of India provides innumerable examples of women's intense participation in the public life of the nation (Kumar 1993).

The modern and contemporary history of India abounds in examples of great women politicians. In the wake of the latest general elections - April-May 2009 - Meira Kumar became the first Dalit and the first woman Speaker of the Lok Sabha (the lower chamber of the Indian Parliament), whilst another politician, Pratibha Patil, has served as the President of India since 2007. Strong women politicians have left an indelible mark on

regional politics: Mayawati Naina Kumari, born a Dalit and educated to be a teacher has been elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (India's most populous state) four times; she is the leader of BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) and is considered to be present day's Indira Gandhi; Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed is one of the few female politicians from Kashmir who is recognized across all India, a former CM of Jammu and Kashmir, she is the leader of the People's Democratic Party. Sheila Dixit is the CM of Delhi since 1998. Sushma Swaraj is BJP's (Bharatiya Janata Party) most prominent female politician; Mamata Banerjee is the founder of Trinamool (Grassroots) Congress Party and curently railway minister (a ministry that became the supreme testing ground for ministers, its former leader Lalu Prasad Yadav performed nothing short of miracles in the field (see Misra, 435-436)). In July 2009, Nirupama Rao became the second woman to hold the post of Foreign Secretary. Prior to this, she was India's ambassador in China. She has also held powerful diplomatic positions in Sri Lanka, Peru, Moscow and Washington. No doubt Nirupama will play a key role as India passes through sensitive times with the constant spectre of terrorism. Jayalalithaa, a very colourful and volatile politician is a former star of the Tamil and Telugu cinemas, former CM of Tamil Nadu and leader of the AIADMK (*Hindu*, 17 June; Nov 27 2009). Sonia Gandhi, a formidable representative of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty navigated her party to a grand victory in the national as well as several state elections. She proved her power to hold together a diverse group of combative men and women who now are given the job of governing India.

Gail Omvedt (1993) argues that even India's rural women are nowadays at the forefront of new alternatives as they are reworking issues of gender, caste, ecology, and rural livelihoods through their focus on *stree-*

shakti, "women's power," rather than women's oppression, victimhood. She demonstrated how rural women are developing this *stree-shakti* through an alternative model of development based on biomass production, renewable energy sources, and skilled employment in rural areas, seeking property rights as well as political power at the local level.

In a most convincing study, *Women Politicians, Gender Bias, and Policy-making in Rural India,* the authors document the impact of women as policy makers as part of the mandated poltical representation of women (30%) in local governments *Gram Panchayats* - local village councils - with far reaching consequences not only for children and women but for the well-being of their rural communities on the whole (Beaman et al. 2006:3-4)).

All these women and many more like them in the fields of business, arts, fashion and entertainment are living proof of the astonishing extent to which Indian women overcame gender roadblocks to achieve incredibly high goals (Patil, *Asian Tribune*, 26 December 2009).

Gender Discrimination in India

Yet millions of Indian women live in abject, shocking poverty, are victims of domestic violence, unjust treatment at workplaces, harassment and utter despair. Millions of Indian widows face social exclusion, ostracism and extreme destitution (Saravana 2000). One cannot help thinking that many of the successful women of India have attained the highest offices despite Indian government and society rather than because of them.

Economic performance, social opportunity and political voice are deeply interrelated and despite the political facilities provided by India's democratic system the weakness of voices of protest has helped to make the

progress of social opportunities unnecessarily slow (Sen 2005:201). In his seminal study "Women and Men" the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen considers the gender asymmetries of Indian society from the perspective of agency and well-being. Defining agency as the pursuit of goals and objectives that a person has reason to value and advance, whether or not connected to that person's well-being (221) he emphasises that in the course of the evolution of women's movements their objectives have gradually broadened from a welfarist focus towards incorporating and emphasizing the active role of women as agents in doing things, assessing priorities, scrutinizing values, formulating policies and carrying out programmes (222); thus women are not only seen as receivers of welfare but as active promoters and facilitators of social transformations.

Attitudinal factors play a major role in obstructing women's progress on the road to autonomy, independence and agency; apathy and indifference reinforce the general acceptability or permissiveness of discriminatory behaviour. I spent 3 weeks in India in January 2009 and I can testify to having sampled such attitudes in various environments. Whilst lecturing on European women in history and on proto-feminists in Vellore and Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu) I was astonished by the reactions of the audience who not only downplayed the many types of discrimination that women are confronted with in Indian contemporary society, but constantly displayed an attitude of self-denial. Even in more informal settings the women I talked to would not admit to having any knowledge about other women's problems, whilst declaring that their own families had a sound gender-egalitarian foundation.

There are many faces of gender inequality and whilst in a field, e.g. political, there might be no significant inequality we could encounter a great

deal of inequality in other fields. In Indian society we come upon different sources of inequality that are additive to each other (class, gender, caste, religion etc) and the convergence of these different sources of deprivation and gender discrimination blights the lives of women very severely.

To illustrate these assumptions I will mention some of the egregious cases of gender discrimination that mar the lives and agency aspirations of Indian women.

Female Foeticide and High Tech Sexism

Already in the 1921-1931 decade the Indian census not only registered the substantial growth of urban population but also the extreme gender bias accompanying it. In 1931 the gender ratio stood at 696 women to every 1000 men. At the same time in keeping with ultraconservative revivalist agendas (rejecting westernizing influences) only 9% of the workforce was represented by women, therefore revealing strikingly masculine environments in the towns and cities of India (Misra 2007:117).

Sex-specific abortion is a potent example of the anti-female bias in India. The skewed gender ratio is the best measure for the worsening status of women. The selective abortion of girls in India - where abortion is legal before 20 weeks - is an old story. What is new is that educated Indian women are more likely to abort female foetuses because they can afford ultrasound technology to find out the sex of their babies (that is why it is sometimes dubbed 'high tech sexism'). Discrete yet illegal advertisements and flyers for ultrasounds tacked on billboards read "Pay 500 rupees now and avoid paying 5 lakhs (500,000) later." The economic motivation of female foeticide cannot be ignored: families are expected to provide

cripplingly large dowries, although the practice has been legally prohibited since 1961.

A survey carried out by epidemiologists from the University of Toronto for the famous journal *Lancet* documents that 500,000 female foetuses are aborted each year in India. According to UNICEF, 7,000 fewer girls than expected are born daily in India, and about 10 million fewer girls were born in the past 20 years. The craze for a male child runs across the class system, so that in South Delhi's richest neighbourhood, there are 845 girls to every 1,000 boys (the female-male ratio for the 0-5 age group in Germany of 94.8% has been taken as the cut-off point below which significant anti-female intervention can be suspected). Even small families are no friend of the girl child: one girl, it seems, may be tolerated, but two or three are out of the question. Authors of the *Lancet* survey warn that the skewed sex ratio may lead to a nation of bachelors desperate for brides, which could lead to more rapes and kidnappings. Women who only bear girls may face ostracism, abandonment or worse, particularly in rural areas.

In 2002, a "Save the Girl Child" campaign was launched and some years ago India's tennis sensation Sania Mirza became its ambassador. Public-service ads run regularly on TV and in the papers.

In 2007 India's government announced that it would set up orphanages for female infants to curb foeticide and sex-selected abortions as the *Hindustan Times* reported on February 18. Minister of Women Renuka Chowdhury says that the government is treating the disparate sex ratio as a matter of national urgency, but in a country as huge as India, the efforts barely seem to make a dent. (Rao 2006)

Caste-based Prostitution

Concerning prostitution and trafficking a recent survey provides alarming data: the number of prostitutes in India has risen by 50% in less than a decade and 35% of the prostitutes enter the sex trade before the age of 18 (Bhat 2006). Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal states together account for 26% of the total number of prostitutes in the country, but Delhi and Mumbai (Bombay) are said to be the preferred places of operation.

Engagement of women in prostitution with familial consent (or traditional prostitution, as it is alternatively called) is widespread among some of the erstwhile nomadic groups such as the Bedia, Nat, Sansi, Kanjar, and Bachada found in north, northwestern, and central India.

> She tells me she is a Bedia tribal girl from the Bhind district in Madhya Pradesh. Both her parents are still alive and she has a brother and a sister who is happily married. In her community, it is the tradition for one girl from each family to serve as a communal prostitute, called the bedni. The girl earns money for her family, while the males spend their time drinking alcohol and playing cards. That is why the birth of a girl is an occasion to celebrate in our community, not a cause for gloom. A boy is, in fact, a liability. You can find bednis from my village in brothels, truck stops, hotel and roadside restaurants, all selling their bodies for money. (Swarup 2005:305)

Women born into a Bedia family remain unmarried. They engage in prostitution in order to provide for the economic needs of their family. Bedia brothers, although not economically productive, do marry. The wives of Bedia men generally accomplish all the domestic work: they cook, clean, wash, and take care of all the members of the household including their sisters-in-law and any children that the latter may have. Therefore, a crucial feature of the Bedia families dependent upon the prostitution of their women

is that women do all the well-defined work within and outside the household.

The needs of a cash income are fulfilled by the prostitution of unmarried women or the non-kin women kept for this purpose within a Bedia family. In sharp contrast, Bedia men do not engage in any kind of wage or even non-wage work for the major part of their lives. While the community members do own some land, the young Bedia men do not participate in its cultivation although some of the older men do so intermittently. The Bedias' situation departs considerably from the 'man the breadwinner, woman the home-keeper' model. The economy of the Bedias, insofar as it is dependent on prostitution, is sustained at two levels by women's labour. The Bedia men on the other hand are the most parasitic members of their family. It is hardly surprising that the community members draw a clear correlation between men's inactivity and their increasing dependence upon prostitution.

Categorized by the Constitution of India as a scheduled caste, otherwise known as Dalits, the Bedni caste has traditionally been relegated to the most menial labour, discriminated against and excluded by the wider community, with no possibility of upward mobility. The exertion of power by the upper castes over these lower caste prostitutes also reinforces caste hierarchy as the women's bodies come to represent the community at large. Historically, Bedia women were dancers in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, entertaining feudal lords with the erotic Rai dance. The collapse of the landlord system, and the loss of their patrons, forced many of them to turn to prostitution. This has now acquired a whole set of rituals, which further legitimize Bedia women's work as prostitutes. As soon as they reach puberty, Bedia girls take part in an elaborate initiation ceremony, which

involves taking off the nose ring and covering the head to symbolize the end of childhood. The supply of women from lower castes into the sex trade is driven by the demand for prostitutes, even though prostitution is illegal in India. Indeed its very existence and pervasiveness in Indian society is an anomaly in an otherwise conservative country (Mohini Giri 1999:41-45).

The legal framework to eradicate prostitution does exist at an international level, and laudably, at a national level. However, the effective implementation of laws and national action plans which tackle the economic and social roots of caste-based prostitution is required if women are to escape the cycle of poverty and sexual exploitation.

Whilst the Government of India has created policies to end the practice and rehabilitate prostitutes, these have been ineffective. For example, the National Commission for Women has little power to intervene in cases, there is no formal complaints procedure, and within the commission there is no dedicated expert committee on the issue of prostitution. In the short term, criminalizing prostitution itself has left women vulnerable, unable to defend their rights, unable to speak out against sexual violence, and unable to access medical services.

Long-term rehabilitation programmes have lacked the resources to give the women the necessary skills, as well as sufficient financial assistance to find alternative employment. Social programmes also fail to take into account that women who do escape prostitution risk ostracization by their community and are left isolated.

Unfortunately, social approval for caste-based prostitution persists. No upper caste clients engaged in promoting caste-based prostitution with lower caste women have been punished yet. The lack of educational

opportunities feeds the vicious cycle with individuals forced to choose between a life of poverty and a life of sexual exploitation.

Most important however is the government's inability, or indifference, to tackle the wider problems of discrimination. Bedia women's rights are not only subordinated because of their gender but also because of their caste. The Indian Constitution may revere the principle of equality for all, yet it appears to exist within a utopian bell jar that is inaccessible to the majority of India's citizens. Similarly, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 has failed to protect those it claimed to benefit.

As an effort to empower Bedia women, the Abhyudaya Ashram in Morena (Madhya Pradesh), a residential school for Bedia girls and boys, was established in 1992 by Ramsanehi, a Bedia, who has crusaded against the prostitution of women in his community for over half a century. The Ashram, which is funded by the State Department of Women and Children, has made a difference in the lives of around 1,000 Bedia children. After Class X, most stay on at the ashram and continue their studies in government schools and then at college. More importantly, no ashram girl is ever likely to engage in sex trade. (Agrawal 2008)

Indian Widows

Dressed like ghosts in pure white, thousands of Hindu widows thrown out by their families have reluctantly found sanctuary in Vrindavan and Varanasi, the holiest cities of India. Ostracized by society, they flock to the holy cities hoping to attain *moksha*, liberation from the endless cycle of life and dealth. These Hindu widows, the poorest of the poor, are shunned from society when their husbands die, not for religious reasons, but because of

tradition - and because they're seen as a financial drain on their families (as Deepa Mehta's film *Water* clearly suggests: it is a patriarchal society's way of ridding itself of unwanted women).

Traditionally, Hindu women take vows never to remarry after the death of their husbands (although the remarriage of widows was one of the most recurrent issues on the agenda of 19th century reformists, British and Indian alike (Kumar 1993:18-19; 28)). Among the higher castes the ritual of *suttee* - in which widows were considered virtuous if they agreed to self-immolation on their husbands' funeral pyres - began in the sixth century. The British colonial rulers banned the ritual suicide in the 19th century, but the ban was only sporadically enforced until after India's independence in 1947 (about 40 cases of suttee have been reported since Indian independence in 1947, the great majority in the northwest state of Rajasthan, home of the traditional Rajput warrior caste where *suttee* was construed in terms of female heroism. A fundamentally martial society the Rajputs lost a lot of men in combat, leaving many widows without support. But whereas their Muslim foes dealt with the problem through polygamy, the Rajputs were said to be strictly monogamous, therefore deciding that their surplus of women had to practice ritual immolation, self-sacrifice being one of the cardinal values of womanhood. The best-known case of suttee in modern times involved the 1987 suicide of 18-year-old Roop Kanwar, an educated, middle-class, devoutly religious woman, who had been married for just eight months when her husband died. Much of the world was outraged, but some traditionalists venerate Roop as, literally, a deity - the model Hindu woman. For some Hindu fundamentalists the prohibition against suttee violates a basic civil right).

At the same time being an institution and a practice pertaining to the upper castes it was emulated by the lower castes within the phenomenon of *sanskritization*, a self-styled form of social mobility in contemporary India. While *suttee* is now considered an anomaly among some traditionalists, widows are still treated as pariahs.

The widows from Vrindavan and Varanasi spend eight hours a day in ashrams, or monasteries, reciting prayers to the glory of Krishna, the god of divine love. In exchange, they get one rupee a day - about two US cents - and a serving of rice. But the ashrams do not provide housing, and the widows live in shabby shacks on Vrindavan's outskirts.

One of the most informative studies conducted on the the plight of Indian widows is Mohini Giri's *The Status of Widows of Vrindavan and Varanasi. A Comparative Study by the Guild of Service Supported by National Commission for Women*. The study looks into the state of widowhood as an extreme form of women's marginalization: as widows, women suffer some of the most severe subjugation of their whole lives; they are harassed, abused, and denied land and livelihood. Thus they have to face multiple types of deprivation: economic, social, cultural and emotional. Of all the deprivations the economic deprivation is the most harmful and it stems from restrictions on the residence, inheritance, remarriage and employment opportunities of widows. Although the Hindu Succession Act 1969 made women eligible to inherit equally with men and some individual states have legislated equality provisions into inheritance law, widows are mostly deprived of their legal rights. Patrilocal residence and patrilineal inheritance (the wife goes to live in her husband's village; only males can inherit) is a fundamental source of the poverty and marginalization of Indian widows. Conflicts over land and property are often so bad that brothers-in-

law force the widow to leave the village. In their attempts to gain control of land and property, the brothers-in-law (often abetted by their wives) may harass, persecute, beat and torture and even arrange the murder of the widow. Long after the abolition of suttee, there continue to be reported cases of women being forced to kill themselves on the death of their husband, in order for relatives to seize her inheritance.

Along with economic deprivation, when a woman becomes a widow, a stringent moral code is imposed on her, her emotional and physical needs utterly ignored. When the husband is alive she is supposed to wear colourful clothes, ornaments, flowers and apply *sindoor* and *kumkum*. But after the death of her husband she is doomed to live a life of sensuous self-denial. Widows are expected to remain in mourning during the remaining part of thier life. They are disfigured to the extent of shaving off their hair and wearing white saris. The explanation given to such an act is that the widow should not induce carnal pleasures in another man. She is expected to remain inside the home and is allowed to perform personal *pujas* (preayers) only. She is forbidden to take part in any joyful occasion or to attend any family festival because her very presence would be considered as an evil omen (even the shadow cast by her is considered inauspicious and has a polluting effect on people).

Social conditioning plays a great role in the deprivation of the widows and this conditioning is so strong that it determines the widows to internalize their victimhood status, they see temselves as inauspicious and this renders them further on vulnerable, helpless, with extremely low levels of self-esteem and even personhood. In the study conducted by Mohini Giri many of the widows in Varanasi were found to come from well-to-do

families, that could have supported them (a large section of the women in the survey (65%) were Brahmins).

Indians constantly tell the world that family ties are very strong in India. The facts seem to contradict this.

The remarriage of widows is not forbidden in the *shastras* (religious texts) and the *Rig Veda* has a direct connotation on widow remarriage, which is conveniently not read by the religious leaders. Hence even the poorest Brahmin feels indignant at the very suggestion of widow remarriage. The over all probability that a widow will remarry is quite low, perhaps of the order of 15 to 20 percent in India as a whole. There are exceptions: a child widow or a young childless widow may usually remarry. In some areas of Indian society, a widow chooses not to re-marry but is forced to live with the younger/youngest brother of her deceased husband for "protection", a crime which condemns her to a lifetime of repeated rape.

Because of the process of sanskritization mentioned-above, there is an emerging trend towards prohibiting and discouraging remarriage even in the lower and middle castes as a means of achieving higher social status; most widows interviewed in the study do not wish to remarry. They fear ill treatment in a new family, especially abuse of their children.

From my own visit to Varanasi I can painfully remember the meagre crowd of widows begging on the various ghats, but particularly on the dirty steps of Dashvamedh ghat. Stronger women among them would be taken as domestic servants; another small group live in religious havens, ashrams but the majority live in horrendously precarious conditions in ramshackle and improvised shelters.

Again as far as widows and their plight are concerned we should mention the various enterprises and initiatives undertaken by the Indian

state and the Indian civil society working in tandem to raise awareness of their abuse at home and abroad and to change their status. Adequate pension benefits, access to fair price shops, availability of banking benefits along with alternative options of earning a living are a few short-term solutions envisaged.

Whilst in Varanasi I was granted permission to visit the Asha Bhavan Widows' Home (literally 'House of Hope').

Set up in 1997, as a Christian mission it is meant to rescue widows that find themselves in extremely bad circumstances: some of the widows were found half-dead in railway stations, abandoned and sickly, living on the streets, handicapped physically or mentally. There were 25 widows living in the home (including 9 widows working) at the time of my visit (January 2009) and my guide, Mr. Carl, told me that the main targets of Asha Bhavan were to house as many as 50 widows in the near future, provide for them and their children who often accompany them and also equip them with skills so that they can earn a decent income and experience the Hope that they never had. They have trained and employed between 50-100 widows in various income generating projects and have opened a small shop selling some of their products (handicraft mostly). Till July 2008, they helped around 100 widows to start small micro enterprises.

Their goal is to employ 1500 widows by the year 2010 who come daily to learn and earn through various micro enterprises i.e. handicrafts, baking, tailoring, soap and candle making, peanut butter and jam making, and making jewellery. As their location is surrounded by many villages (on the way to Sarnath, the famous Buddhist sanctuary) part of the widows whom they train, will work from their own houses and bring their produce to the centre once a week. Outside nonresidential widows, younger,

unemployed, trainable, although mostly illiterate are another challenge. They want to give them an alternative for begging or prostitution. They already started Hope Arts, a Bakery and many other micro enterprises like shops, Fresh Juice stalls, etc.

Conclusions

India is a unified, democratic nation, but its history demonstrates the immense difficulties involved in shaping a cohesive society from ancient, highly diverse, multi-lingual and fissiparous materials. Although India is a democracy and one bound by the rule of law, it is also a place where an individual's status and his treatment by others and by the state is determined to a significant degree by supposedly traditional identities of caste, gender and religion (Misra 2007:XXIV-XXV).

Globalization impacted dramatically Indian society both economically and culturally. The unprecedented expansion of the middle class (multi-tiered in itself) is no doubt an important consequence of this process. Whilst many scholars argue that globalization has been detrimental to women due to growing structural gender inequalities, many Indian women perceive is as beneficial, contending that it provides them with greater opportunities to challenge patriarchal norms, not least through the role models available in the globalized media and thus they see it overall as a source of empowerment (see Ganguly-Scrase 2003:544-566).

Gender inequality is a far-reaching societal impairment, not merely a special deprivation for women. The extensive penalties of neglecting women's interests rebound on the whole society with a vengeance. The survival of archaic privileges and customs, the superimposition of various layers of inequality: caste, gender, religion continue to mar the lives of

Indian women. The signing and ratification of international treaties (such as The Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) have largely been symbolic even though these documents are legally binding. But we live in hope and the ever growing educational and employment opportunities of women, the growing influence of a progressive and forward-looking Indian middle class will no doubt lead to the creation of a critical mass whose reasoned agency will one day gain the larger recognition it deserves.

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