

GENDER STUDIES

Vol. 1 No. 8/2009

GENDER STUDIES

Vol. 1 No. 8/2009

Gender Studies

**Revista de Studii de Gen a Centrului Interdisciplinar de Studii
de Gen al Universității de Vest din Timișoara**

ISSN 1583-980X

**As of January 2009 *Gender Studies* is indexed in the MLA
International Bibliography**

GENDER STUDIES

Editor: Reghina Dascăl

Language consultant: Stuart Elford

ADVISORY BOARD:

Haleh Afshar - University of York

Pia Brînzeu - University of the West, Timișoara

**Joan Kennedy Taylor - National Coordinator of
the Association of Libertarian Feminists, USA**

Hildegard Klein - University of Málaga

Krystyna Kujawinska-Courtney - University of Łódź

Isabel Marcus - State University of New York, Buffalo

Hortensia Pârlog - University of the West, Timișoara

Nóra Séllei - University of Debrecen

**Ann Stone – Co-founder of The National Women’s
History Museum in Washington, D.C.**

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

**All correspondence should be addressed to: Reghina Dascăl,
Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies,
English Department, University of the West Timișoara
Blvd. V. Pârvan, no. 4-6, 300223 Timișoara
Phone/fax (+ 40) 256 452 224;
e-mail: reghina_dascal@yahoo.co.uk**

CONTENTS

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

- NÓRA SÉLLEI (Female) Desire and Romantic Art in
Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall /
- ECATERINA HANȚIU Women with a Past and their
Sacrificial Role in Victorian Drama /
- MÁRIA BAJNER Women on the Road: Leave Your Baggage
Behind /

The Conundrum of Gender

- ERZSEBET ZELINKA The Woolf – Cunningham Literary
Trajectory.
Feminization of Time /
- REMINA SIMA The Public–Private Divide /

Women Writers Subvert the Canon

REGHINA DASCĂL

Christine de Pizan and the *Querelle de la Rose* /

Visions of Power/Powers of Vision

MONIKA SOSNOWSKA

Gendering of the Eye: Representation of Visual Perception in *Hamlet* /

Gender, Culture, Society

IRÉN E. ANNUS

Victorian Fatherhood in American Genre Painting /

ADRIANA RĂDUCANU and
CATHERINE MACMILLAN

Istanbul – The Palimpsestic City in C. Golna's *City of Man's Desire* and A. Gala's *The Turkish Passion* /

ANDREEA PELE

Black and White Lives in Tehran /

The Problematic Mother-Daughter Bond

KORINNA CSETÉNYI

In the Name of My Daughter. Female Bonding in Stephen King's *Dolores Claiborne* /

HILDEGARD KLEIN

Matricide – Violating the Sacred Mother-
Daughter Bond in *The Beauty Queen of
Leenane* /

ROXANA D. CRUCEANU

Byron's *Don Juan* as Addiction to
Motherhood /

About the Authors /

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

**(FEMALE) DESIRE AND ROMANTIC ART
IN ANNE BRONTË'S *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL***

NÓRA SÉLLEI

University of Debrecen

Constructed for posteriority by Charlotte Brontë as “the baby” of the family (*Myth* n.d.:11), described by their friend Ellen Nussey as “dear, gentle Anne” (Smith 1993:x), Anne Brontë has always been problematically positioned relative to her sisters. The reasons for this are multiple: first, biographical criticism has made her “meek and mild” (like Blake’s “Lamb”); second, her work has always been evaluated as of lower quality compared to Charlotte’s and Emily’s literary output; thirdly, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* created quite a bit of a stir on publication (see, for example, Smith 1993:ix, or Sullivan [2005:online], who states that “*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* attracted negative criticism for its subject matter; it was described as ‘disagreeable’ in *Athenaeum*, and ‘revolting,’ ‘coarse’ and ‘disgusting’ in *Sharpe’s London Magazine*”, and was consequently suppressed by Charlotte as she kept it out of print for ten years (*Myth* n.d.:11).

Yet, this novel is considered “the first sustained feminist novel” (*Myth* n.d.:11). In this paper, I will focus on one particular aspect of all its gendered/feminist features: on the correlation between female desire and romantic art, and how they are implicated in the complex sociocultural web of how propriety and femininity on the one hand, and art, desire, and the sublime on the other are defined. The text offers these questions most conspicuously since it revolves around a woman who evolves from a decent

middle-class wife and female amateur to professional painter following her escape from her heavy-drinking and abusive husband, and maintains herself and her child on the money she makes from painting. (Ironically, it is on account of the realistic representation of heavy drinking that the novel was considered unfit for, and indecent of, a female/feminine pen. Charlotte Brontë wrote the following to her publisher's reader: "For my own part I consider the subject unfortunately chosen—it was one the author was not qualified to handle at once vigourously and truthfully—the simple and natural—quiet description and simple pathos are, I think, Acton Bell's forte" (Letter of 31 July 1848 quoted in Smith 1993:xi)

Helen's turning into a professional artist is transgressive enough in contemporary social and cultural norms, yet the text at one point has a further transgressive element: the protagonist is presented at work, furthermore, as the iconic romantic artist desiring to reach for, to experience and to represent the sublime, a key aesthetic category in Romanticism, which is also highly gendered as critics have already pointed out (see, e.g. Leighton 1984:36,40,42). While trying to paint as a desiring subject, however, she is also being looked at, and desired by, a man. The close reading of this scene will reveal how intricately gender, sexual desire and romantic art are intertwined. In the interpretation I will also touch upon a painting by Anne Brontë: the copy (or intertextual revision) of some Caspar David Friedrich paintings, which may shed further light on Anne Brontë's figure as a desiring woman, writer, romantic artist, and also on her painter protagonist.

Although the function of art keeps changing in the novel, it is always entangled in one way or another with Helen, the protagonist as a desiring subject. Considering her story (not the narrative of the text as that

is a Chinese box of narratives, not unlike that of its more famous sister text, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*), first she looks no more than the archetypal accomplished lady, who cultivates her own artistic faculties, but mainly for the reason – and with the purpose – that she should look entertaining and properly feminine enough from the perspective of potential suitors, so that she should look properly accomplished to be the wife of a gentleman either in the capacity of entertaining guests at social events or as a mother educated enough to oversee the education of her children in the future.

Nevertheless, even at this stage it is quite indicative that her art has various sides to it, expressed in the fact that she makes drawings on both sides of the cardboard she paints on. One evening, when her future husband, Huntingdon is still a suitor, and they are surrounded by company, Huntingdon stealthily and intrusively starts exploring Helen's paintings, what is more, not only their front, that is, public side, but also their reverse side. What he finds, and gazes at with great complacency on the back side is his own portrait. Both his and the female protagonist's comments on this discovery clearly express the masculine appropriation and containment of female desire on the one hand, and the self-erasure of female desire on the other:

“I must look at *both* sides now,” he eagerly commenced an examination which I watched, at first, with tolerable composure, in the confidence that his vanity would not be gratified by any further discoveries [. . .]. I was sure that, with one unfortunate exception, I had carefully obliterated all such witnesses of my infatuation. But the pencil frequently leaves an impression upon card-board that no amount of rubbing can erase. Such, it seems, was the case with most of these;

[. . .] having ended his scrutiny, he quietly remarked,—
“I perceive, the backs of young ladies’ drawings, like the postscripts of their
letters, are the most important and interesting part of the concern.”
(Brontë 1993:146-147)

What is only an implication in this scene: the violent penetration of the male into the “embodiment” of female desire is made both literally and metaphorically explicit in the next instance when Huntingdon deprives Helen by force of her pictures. Coming back from hunting (he is obviously a “hunting don”), “all spattered and splashed as he [is], and stained with the blood of his prey” (Brontë 1993:152), he jumps into the library where Helen does her painting, leans his gun against the wall—thus securing all the paraphernalia of his power—, and draws Helen into a fight over her portfolio by exclaiming, “Let me have its bowels, then” (Brontë 1993:151). The violence of the metaphor, suggesting the opening up of the (female) body – and the embodiment of her desire – inevitably foreshadows how Huntingdon as a husband will try to utterly erase Helen’s subjectivity, take full possession and control of her, and how he will interpret her intentions to break free of him as the prostitution of her own body.

This is what can be seen when Helen is desperately fed up with Huntingdon’s constant drunkenness, his concomitant moral perversion and parental irresponsibility (partly, he lodges his mistresses under the roof of the family mansion, in the presence of his wife, partly he wants to turn his own four-year old son into a drunkard), so Helen decides to leave him, go to New England, and live on the income of her paintings. On guessing this secret plan (and, again, desire), he requires all “[t]he keys of [her] cabinet, desk, drawers, and whatever else [she] possess[es],” then adds: “we must have a confiscation of property. But first, let us take a peep into the studio.”

(Brontë 1993:349,350) As a result, discovering all the paintings prepared for sale, he confiscates what she considers her own property (jewels, trifles, money), and leaves her with some pin money for a month. This act can be read as symbolic of how Helen's—a woman's—property is “hers”: it is obviously not hers as she can be deprived of it at any moment when she is deemed not to have behaved as a proper lady (the only function of a decent woman in which she deserves jewels, e.g., which can also be read as decoration which turns her into a pleasurable object of the male gaze, created by the economic power of the man).

This very same act of taking away all she has, on the other hand, can also be seen as the indication of how female desire and subjecthood are exposed to, and constructed by, the power of the male, and how—the moment it leaves the boundaries of the no matter how only apparently decent façade of the home—it can be turned into the public self-exposure of the woman. When depriving Helen of her possessions, Huntingdon argues that he only does it “lest [her] mercantile spirit should be tempted to turn them into gold,” and adds, “[. . .] you thought to disgrace me, did you, by running away and turning artist, and supporting yourself by the labour of your hands, forsooth? And you thought to rob me of my son too, and bring him up to be a dirty Yankee tradesman, or a low, beggarly painter?” (Brontë 1993:351)

Here, again, metaphors, similes and their implications indicate threat to the properly controlled female desire: on the one hand, the section on the page in between these two quotes abounds in expressions of temptation. On the other hand, Huntingdon's visionary description identifies the professional female artist with disgrace. This term is clearly loaded with sexual connotations, and once we consider how much Helen's painting is all

through related to her desiring self, and if we also consider how turning professional and selling her art is identified with entering the public, that is, how the female body is exposed to the public male gaze, it is no exaggeration to claim that what Huntingdon primarily wants to prevent is the prostitution of Helen's body—which is understood as disgrace on *him* as that could mean the sexual contamination of what he considers his own possession. This is further confirmed by his fear of how via that transgressive act—let us recall: in (a) *New England*—Helen could disrupt Huntingdon's decent patrilineage by “prostituting” their son either into a trade, or into being a beggarly painter—both of which ultimately amount to the same.

The problematic relationship of a professional woman artist to the public arena she inevitably has to enter can be seen in a painting by Emily Mary Osborn, entitled *Nameless and Friendless* (1857). Uncannily, the painting depicts a young woman in the same situation as Helen: nameless (Helen denies her “real” name on leaving Huntingdon) and friendless (in traditional terms, she is left unprotected and thus vulnerable on her leave) a young woman enters an art dealer's shop, with a portfolio in hand, and accompanied by a boy, perhaps her son. Whitney Chadwick makes a succinct interpretation of this picture, which I can simply quote as it stands as it is perfectly relevant to Helen's being an emphatically female artist and in what terms Huntingdon visualises it. Chadwick's analysis (1996:188) goes as follows:

The painting is carefully structured to emphasise the commodification of women in the art trade and the isolation and helplessness of the single woman in patriarchal society. While the dealer studies the painting with barely disguised contempt, the other male figures in the room focus their gazes on the woman,

turning their attention away from a print showing a dancer's nude legs and toward the cowering woman. The message is clear: women have no place in the commerce of art; they belong to the world of art as objects, not makers or purveyors.

Clarissa Campbell Orr calls attention to another aspect of gender discrimination in nineteenth-century British art and culture. Her claim (1995:6) is that

[e]ven though there are numerous women from the middle classes who entered the public sphere by painting for money, they were not given the accolade of full professional recognition because they were excluded from membership in professional associations such as the Royal Academy, or the Society of Painters in Watercolour. Their work was therefore not fully 'public', but could be classified either as 'woman's work', or as 'trade' rather than profession.

This presentation of the female artist coincides with Huntingdon's fearful vision of Helen turning into artist and bringing disgrace on him, and this is what he wants to avoid by trying to take full control of her. At her second attempt, however, Helen can finally escape from this total appropriation of her body, desire, painting, and son by her husband, and she finds refuge with her son as a tenant of Wildfell Hall. The Hall is situated on the margins of an established community, surrounded by an untended, rather wild garden, which indicates her problematic social positioning, even though she assumes a relatively decent identity as a widow, and keeps her professional identity as artist (that is, that she actually sells, and lives on the revenues of her paintings) a secret.

The community, however, identifies her perfectly as 'other', as 'different', and depending on their position, most of them make attempts—

sometimes very inquisitive ones—to discover her secret, to read her body, her story, and her morals from their own perspectives. Out of these, the most significant attempt is made by Gilbert Markham, who falls in love with what he interprets first almost as a *femme fatale*, the distant, unreachable, yet very seductive and sexually powerful woman with a hidden secret, who, at the same time, needs protection, at least from Markham's perspective. In this respect, at the beginning, he is quite similar to several male characters in the text, among them to Huntingdon as neither of them can conceive the idea that a woman may have, or desire, a socially and economically independent existence.

This attitude is amply expressed by the fact that quite like Huntingdon, at one point Gilbert starts exploring Helen's paintings as well, without asking her permission, and he stumbles upon a painting behind another one, *and* facing the wall, that is, doubly hidden. No matter how much he tries to at least rhetorically position himself as an apologetic intruder, by which he wants to absolve himself from the committed sin, which also amounts to *not* considering it a sin in effect, in this instance Helen claims possession and control of the picture. Their dialogue goes as follows:

“I fear it will be considered an act of impertinence,” said I, “to presume to look at a picture that the artist has turned to the wall; but may I ask—”

“It *is* an act of very great impertinence, sir; and therefore I beg you will ask nothing about it for your curiosity will not be gratified,” replied she [. . .].
(Brontë 1993:45)

Gilbert at least rhetorically acknowledges his illicit intrusion, even though by using impersonal structures like passive voice and generic

references he distances both himself and Helen from this concrete situation. Yet, the apology itself places him slightly differently from Huntingdon in their relation to Helen's subjectivity, and this is the attitude that keeps changing, into the direction of greater tolerance, in his case all through the text. At the beginning of their relationship, however, Gilbert is incapable of considering women, Helen among them, in any other way but the ones needing protection and support on the one hand, and as objects of male desire on the other, which must inevitably clash with Helen's claims for desire and subjectivity.

This clash comes out very succinctly in a scene described from Gilbert Markham's perspective, who is the narrator of the frame to the novel. Markham once mentions to Helen that they could go to the sea, which she longs to see. As an *artist*, what she originally imagines is a solitary walk there, but she cannot escape society to involve her in this way as a *woman*: the village company had long been planning a "pic-nic" by the sea, and Gilbert's sister suggests that she could join them. The idea "dismays" her, yet after some excuses she cannot but accept the invitation. She is not willing, though, to fully accept the rules related to the codes of feminine behaviour: she is not willing to sit into the carriage but walks all the way to the cliffs; she is not willing to gracefully and cheerfully entertain her male companion on the way (she either does not speak, or her comments are not reverent enough); and rejects Gilbert's helping hand when she comes back from the cliff to the 'proper' path.

In addition, the perspective she is associated with, and actually positioned in, is that of the sublime: a space and aesthetic category gendered as masculine, and as such definitely not a woman's space.

The increasing height and the boldness of the hills had for some time intercepted the prospect; but, on gaining the summit of a steep acclivity, and looking downward, an opening lay before us—and the blue sea burst upon our sight!—deep violet blue—not deadly calm, but covered with glinting breakers—diminutive white specks twinkling on its bosom, and scarcely to be distinguished by the keenest vision, from the little sea-mews that sported above, their white wings glittering in the sunshine: only one or two vessels were visible; and those were far away. I looked at my companion to see what she thought of this glorious scene. She said nothing; but she stood still, and fixed her eyes upon it with a gaze that assured me she was not disappointed. (Brontë 1993:61)

This passage can be understood as the archetypal description and the experience of the sublime: all the paraphernalia of the Kantian “numinous”, capable of invoking the complex emotion called “awe” consisting of fear and admiration at the sight of some almost metaphysical presence in a physical experience are enumerated, including the fragmentation of the text, as if the narrator were gasping for air, including the inevitable silence—the silencing of the human being—, and including the basic feeling of loneliness and isolation in this awe-inspiring sublime landscape.

Can, however, the ultimate loneliness of the sublime experience really and fully be present for, and can it, thus, be the experience of the desiring female artist as subject? The very narrative situation that Helen is accompanied to this site denies the possibility: she is not allowed to enter this masculinely gendered experiential space, she is accompanied all through by Gilbert. Furthermore, as beginning of the second paragraph indicates, not only is the story narrated at this point from Gilbert’s

perspective, she is even looked at by Gilbert while *she* gazes at the sea—the sublime landscape. True, the section of the paragraph above does not appropriate her, but it goes on:

She had very fine eyes by the bye—[. . .] they were full of soul, large, clear, and nearly black—not brown, but very fine grey. A cool, reviving breeze blew from the sea—soft, pure, salubrious: it waved her drooping ringlets, and imparted a livelier colour to her usually too pallid lip and cheek. [. . .] Never had she looked so lovely: never had my heart so warmly cleaved to her as now. Had we been left two minutes longer, standing there alone, I cannot answer for the consequences. (Brontë 1993:61)

This is a very ironic scene in which a woman figuring as artist of, and in, the sublime landscape desires all the sublime has to offer: infinity, transcendence, the metaphysical, existential loneliness—all of them privileges of the masculine subject. In the meantime, in this (sexually) transgressive act she becomes the object—and potential prey—of the male gaze, as a result of which she is recontained in traditional femininity, and her metaphysical rapture is interpreted as invitation for sexual rapture and seduction. Her experience of the sublime, from Gilbert's perspective, can also be read as her recontainment in an aesthetic which is her 'proper' sphere: in Gilbert's reading the landscape affects her in a way that 'softens' her and restores her into a model image of femininity that she has never been before. She herself becomes a landscape gazed at by Gilbert, but definitely not a sublime one: she is posited as beautiful, as *the beautiful*, which, as critics have pointed out, is the feminine parallel of the masculine sublime.

This concept of the sublime promoted by eighteenth-century theorists and the male Romantic poets, as well as their myriad commentators [. . .] is distinctly, if unwittingly, gendered. The sublime is associated with the experience of masculine empowerment; its contrasting term, the beautiful, is associated with the experience of feminine nurturance, love and sensuous relaxation. (Mellor 1993:85)

No matter how separately she wants to be seated in this company, she can escape recontainment—and reach a state of artistic creativity—only by seeking out even more ‘dangerous’ sites which her lady companions warn her of visiting: “she left us and proceeded along the steep, stony hill, to a loftier, more precipitous eminence at some distance, whence a still finer prospect was to be had, where she preferred taking her sketch” (Brontë 1993:62). Not even here—on “a narrow ledge of rock at the very verge of the cliff which descended with a steep, precipitous slant, quite down to the rocky shore” (Brontë 1993:62)—is she left alone: Gilbert follows her. Significantly, in Gilbert’s thinking, her art and her body coincide, or rather, her body *as* artist becomes an art object—or an object of art—to be admired: “I could not help stealing a glance, now and then, from the splendid view at our feet to the elegant white hand that held a pencil, and the graceful neck and glossy raven curls that drooped over the paper” (Brontë 1993:63).

But at this moment, Gilbert refrains from speaking out and loudly articulating his desire for her, in the same way as he refrains from airing his rather condescending view of Helen’s art: he just silently muses on its quality. The unspoken comment however, betrays a further element of how a female artist is received and interpreted: “‘Now,’ thought I, ‘if I had but a pencil and a morsel of paper, I could make a lovelier sketch than hers,’

admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me” (Brontë 1993:63). Almost all the words of this short quote are telling. What he expects of Helen as artist is loveliness and mimesis-like copy of what she is supposed to see realistically. Also, her drawings are called a sketch. The implications are multiple: “sketch” suggests temporariness, insignificance, incompleteness, of lower quality; “faithfulness” is the requirement of realism, but also the requirement of attention to minute details (a feminine accomplishment), and of proper copying; whereas “loveliness” much rather belongs to the aesthetic category of the beautiful, and definitely not to the sublime.

In this way, what Gilbert expects of Helen’s art is femininity, embodied in, and by, insignificance and mimesis, whereas, let us not forget, what Helen paints, desires and experiences is the sublime. There is no way, however, for the reader to see what she paints from any other perspective but that of Gilbert as he is the narrator of this part. It does not seem to be a far-fetched claim, though, to state that his derogatory remarks on Helen’s style and drawing derive from his embarrassment at seeing her where she does not belong: painting the sublime, perhaps even in a way that has never been the taken-for-granted prerogative of women, in a visionary way, quite like all the (male) Romantic painters did.

In this sense, in Helen’s figure as an artist, Anne Brontë does not allow her protagonist the same freedom and transgressive potential that she allows to a female figure in a drawing of hers from 1839: “Woman gazing at a sunrise over a seascape” (Alexander and Sellars 1995:406; also plate L). As critics have pointed out, this is “a symbolic drawing,” and

the image of the solitary girl seen with her back to the viewer, gazing out towards a far horizon, is one that is often found in nineteenth-century northern European romantic art, notably in the melancholy *Rückenfiguren* in the work of the German landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840). It is uncertain whether or not Anne Brontë could have seen reproductions of Friedrich's art but the figure of the young woman here expresses the emotion of yearning for contact with a larger world than her own, in the manner of romantic art, the symbolism of which would have been understood by her. (Alexander and Sellars 1995:41-42)

The parallel between the drawing of Anne Brontë and the image of Helen gazing at the sea has already been commented on by Edward Chitham, who also suggests that the female figure in this drawing is “a self-portrait at the point in Anne's life when she was becoming aware of feelings of affection for William Weightman, her father's new curate, who was to die so tragically of cholera just three years later” (quoted in Alexander and Sellars 1995:42). Considering the implications of the sublime, however, one can easily refute the claim that the painting expresses the female figure's acceptance of her intimate emotions towards a man; much rather, it can be seen as the wish to go beyond the earthly, the bodily and the physical – to get in touch with the unearthly, the metaphysical and the transcendental. In this way, ironically, one can draw a parallel between Chitham's reading of the drawing and Gilbert's interpretation of Helen's painting: both want to recontain a female figure in the proper sphere of femininity, whereas in my view, both images rather suggest the attempt to go beyond the boundaries of the feminine.

This claim can further be supported by a comparison of Anne Brontë's drawing with three paintings by Caspar David Friedrich. By making this comparative analysis I am not stating that I have found

evidence that Anne Brontë actually was familiar with Friedrich's paintings, all I am claiming is that there is an uncanny intertextual relationship between these visual representations. This intertextual relationship, at the same time, can also be considered as a gendered revision and uncanny confluence of the elements of three Friedrich paintings – and revised in a transgressive way at that. Alexander and Sellars are hesitant to define if the drawing is a copy or a product of her imagination: the ambivalence is maintained in two instances (cf. 1995:42, 406).

The woman standing on a dangerous cliff, and looking into the infinite distance clearly resembles perhaps the most archetypal Friedrichian figure: “Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer” (cca. 1817), in his absolute solitariness, standing on a dangerous precipice, and gazing at the foggy sea that stretches into infinity. There is, however, another painting by Friedrich, representing a woman gazing at the sun going down (“Frau vor dem untergehender Sonne” [cca 1818]), with rays of sun surrounding her as if the rays of God's eyes, and thus attributing to her a kind of a sublimity. In Anne Brontë's drawing, we do have a female figure, and the rays of sun, what makes the difference, however, is the surrounding landscape, which – although she gazes into infinity – is rather her congenial place in Friedrich's painting: a relatively mild, humane landscape, the landscape of the beautiful. Furthermore, in Friedrich's case, even the boundaries of the woman and the landscape are blurred, thus abolishing the difference between her and the nature of the aesthetic beautiful.

The third picture by Friedrich, “Kreidefelsen auf Rügen” (cca. 1818) is perhaps the most intriguing one from the perspective of Anne Brontë's drawing: here, the dangerous cliffs construct a curve quite like in the drawing, and there are three figures in the foreground of the picture.

Supposedly, the three figures can be identified as Friedrich's newly-married wife, his brother, and the painter himself, gazing at the sea (Bragg 1987:324). What is remarkable, however, is that out of the three, only one (the artist) is concerned with the infinite stretch of the sea, whereas the other two are involved in what they see right in front of them, that is, they are represented as if they did not want to (or could not) see further, and see the genuine experience of the sublime since they are fully involved in the pettiness of earthliness.

In my view, Anne Brontë's drawing – whether it is a conscious revision of Friedrich or not – uncannily creates a radical gendered intertextual revision of these *three* images, by positing a *female* figure in the centre of the *sublime* landscape, *on her own*, and *gazing into infinity*. This figure, at the same time, is not dissimilar from the representation of Helen in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* – no matter how much Gilbert Markham makes recurrent attempts at recontaining her in her proper sphere. The scene I have analysed revolves around the question of the sublime as a heavily gendered space for the female artist whose art is all through the text entangled with questions of economic power, the public space, proper femininity, female desire, and female sexuality, and, thus, ultimately with questions of female subjectivity.

References

- Alexander, C. and J. Sellars. 1995. *The Art of the Brontës*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Bragg M. (intr.). *Great Artists*. 1987. N.p.: Marshall Cavendish
- Brontë, A. 1993. [1848]. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Chadwick, W. 1996. *Women, Art, and Society*. World of Art Series. London: Thames and Hudson

- Friedrich, C. D. "Frau vor dem untergehender Sonne". 1818. [Online]. Available:
<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/commons/caspar-david-friedrich.html>. [2007,
 August 10]
- . "Kreidefelsen auf Rügen". 1818. [Online]. Available:
http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspar_David_Friedrich. . [2007, August 10]
- . "Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer". 1817. [Online]. Available:
http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspar_David_Friedrich. . [2007, August 10]
- Leighton, A. 1984. *Shelley and the Sublime. An Interpretation of the Major Poems*.
 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Mellor, A. K. 1993. *Gender and Romanticism*. New York: Routledge.
Myth and Reality. The Lives of the Brontës. n.d. Haworth: The Brontë Society
- Orr, C. C. 1995. "Introduction" in *Women in the Victorian Art World*. C. C. Orr (ed. and
 intr.). Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Osborn, E. M. 1857. "Nameless and Friendless". [Online] Available:
http://www.mystudios.com/women/klmno/osborn_nameless.html [2008, May
 20]
- Smith, M. 1993. "Introduction" in A. Brontë. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Oxford: Oxford
 University Press
- Sullivan, L. 2005. "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" in *The Literary Encyclopedia* The Literary
 Dictionary Company. [Online]. Available:
<http://litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=7906> [2005, November
 18]

**WOMEN WITH A PAST AND THEIR SACRIFICIAL ROLE IN
VICTORIAN DRAMA**

ECATERINA LIA HANȚIU

University of Oradea

MOTTO:

“Truth is rarely pure and never simple.”

(Algernon in *The Importance of Being Earnest*)

The Victorian period – especially in its final years – marked a tendency towards constructing a new identity for women and womanhood. Nineteenth century literature in Britain was largely created by, about and – to a great extent – for women, but it was certainly entirely different from the “chick literature” of our days. The already-canonised great literature of the past had outlined several female models: the romantic young lady in search of her soul-mate and the woman as housewife/mother/slave, whose only desire was to love and serve her man. The other types, such as the adventuress, the woman for sale and the criminal were rarely presented, but now and then they made stunning appearances, such as in the works of Daniel Defoe or Aphra Behn.

New novel and drama taxonomies were generated in the 19th century and new subtypes of characters were added to those already known. Among them were the representatives of new professions, such as the police inspector and the woman with a past, a former sinner asking to be forgiven and accepted by society.

Throughout history, art has generally shown woman in one of two roles, saint or sinner, not only revealing but also creating a mind-set that affects us all. Some movements have made progress in battling these time-honoured stereotypes. Oscar Wilde was one of the first to notice that: “The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past and every sinner has a future” (‘Sinner quotes’).

19th century drama in Britain meant a step forward in the revalorization of traditional “feminine stereotypes”, although a perusal of nineteenth century plays will reveal a touching display of tragic overtones.

Germaine Greer, in *The Female Eunuch* (1970), argues that whatever kind of feminine stereotype women are supposed to conform to is necessarily a construction of patriarchal capitalism. Referring to her book, she said in an interview with the *New York Times* in 1971 that:

The title is an indication of the problem. Women have somehow been separated from their libido, from their faculty of desire, from their sexuality. They've become suspicious about it. Like beasts, for example, who are castrated in farming in order to serve their master's ulterior motives — to be fattened or made

docile — women have been cut off from their capacity for action. It's a process that sacrifices vigour for delicacy and succulence, and one that's got to be changed. (quoted in ‘Germaine Greer’ 2008)

The idea of sacrifice appears here at its worst, with its allusion to women turned into helpless victims of veritable cannibalistic acts. According to Greer, sometimes family is a bad environment for women and for the raising of children; and the manufacture of women's sexuality by society is demeaning and confining. Girls are made aware of their status

from childhood through being taught rules that subjugate them, she argued. Later, when women embrace the stereotypical version of mature femininity, they are expected to behave according to certain rules, thus losing their natural and political autonomy. The result is powerlessness, isolation, and a sense of frustration. It is the aftermath of what Angela Carter called the *colonization of the mind*: a general acceptance of established positions that do not give proper weight to the experience of women. (Alexander 1989:5)

The feminist issues evident in the 20th and 21st centuries have their roots in the thoughts and attitudes of the past. Late Victorian literature already shows signs of feminist criticism, taking up the distinction between “sex” and “gender”, borrowed from social science (where sex is determined biologically and gender is a psychological concept which refers to culturally acquired sexual identity) and shifting the emphasis from the fight for women’s rights in all areas to the politics of reproduction, women’s “experience” and sexual “difference”. Sexuality has become a key issue ever since the first courageous attempts at revealing Victorian women’s secrets, secrets that in most cases appeared as outrageous to the morality of an age famous for its “decency”.

The photos of Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) – a celebrated woman photographer of the Victorian Era and Virginia Woolf’s great-grandmother – reflect this type of decency: a seriousness that modern taste would not accept. Her reverential portrayals of soulful women and great male spirits of the age are examples of an outlook that later photographers would reject. Her carefully staged tableaux and poetic style are artificially created, no photographs are taken out in the streets, and everything is done according to the rules. Her presentation of the place of women, whom she often depicted in the elevated roles of holy mother, pure-hearted lover, and

flower-adorned maiden, is utterly Victorian. Still, melancholy and a kind of bitter resignation appear evidently on the beautiful faces of the women in her photos. In Cameron there is no presentiment of the later proud suffragette fighting for women's rights, but a sense of dissatisfaction and even despair is evident, as in the photograph inspired by Tennyson's *Mariana of the Moated Grange*.

Unlike Shakespeare's Mariana in *Measure for Measure*, Tennyson's heroine follows a common theme in much of the poet's work: that of despondent isolation and lack of connection with society. With Tennyson isolation defines her existence, and her longing for a connection leaves her wishing for death. It provides a contemporary illustration of many Victorian women's feelings towards a society that marginalized them, colonized their minds and changed them into puppets.

The question that might arise when discussing the problem of women in the Victorian age is whether they ever felt independent. Was the working woman victimized or sacrificed or were marriage and domestic life an equally powerful victimizing background? Apparently women were the underdogs in both cases.

Late Victorian literature, drama especially, constituted a crucially influential challenge to traditional (male) thinking. A new type of character was developed and more and more openly presented to both readers and spectators - *the woman with a past*. New tendencies were pushing their way through a forest of prejudices: the most enlightened writers of the time, both male and female, tackled topics that were regarded as taboo and debunked the apparently strict respectability of an age that has often been labeled as hypocritical.

Most of the characters in the plays of the Victorian period accept hypocrisy as a necessary component of their world. Hypocrisy is directly connected with secrets, and they are a result of the Victorian way of living.

One of the fundamental traits of Oscar Wilde's aestheticism is that it searches for depth not in the realm of essences, but right in the midst of appearances. Wilde's condemnation of shallowness as the "supreme vice" (1990:876) in *De Profundis* (1897), is a continuation of some of his basic insights, according to which he had written with contempt that "only the shallow know themselves" (Wilde 1990:1205). Wilde's witticisms, belonging to his strategy of paradox, underline the shallowness and hypocrisy of a whole society. For example, when Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), proclaims that "people nowadays are so absolutely superficial that they don't understand the philosophy of the superficial" (Wilde 1990:459) and then advises Gerald, who finally turns out to be his illegitimate son, to learn how to tie his tie better, since "a well-tied tie is the first serious step in life" (Wilde 1990:459). Having read Schopenhauer, and anticipating some Freudian principles, Wilde is well aware of the self-delusions of consciousness and that "style, not sincerity is the vital thing" (1990:371) in matters of great importance. In his well-known tongue-in-cheek manner, Wilde asserts truth as "entirely and absolutely a matter of style" (1990:981). He concentrates on the roundabout way depth reveals itself in the surface of sensible appearances.

Secrets in Victorian literature become the glue that holds together a complex web of relationships; if the truth were to come out, and most of the time it does, these relationships would fall apart. This was true for Wilde, as it was true for the characters in the literary works of the time, too. Some Victorian literary heroes create their own secret world with

definite rules and representatives (such as the creation of Bunbury in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*). Most secrets are connected with the past and "the women with a past" become in a way the taxonomic peers of the male "bunburyists".

The secret is like a mask that one wears when entering the "outside" world of "respectability" and "importance". Having a secret implies *the art of acting* and following the rules of a certain *ritual*. Both hiding and revealing imply a ritual. A good example would be G.B. Shaw's Mrs. Warren revealing her secret "profession". A primary classification of secrets is that of secrets that are finally revealed and those that remain hidden. Mrs. Erlynne's secret (in Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*) remains hidden, while Mrs. Warren's secret (in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*) and Paula's (in Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*) are fully revealed. Still, there are no secrets that remain completely hidden – the playwright needed at least one character to know the secret so that it could be shared with the audience. Mrs. Erlynne's secret is known by only one person within the play – but by all the members of the audience.

The knowledge of a secret does not necessarily lead to the revealing of it. Revealing means transferring something from the intimate to the public, from the personal self to the public self, which for the Victorians, theoretically, had to be equal.

The real fascination of the Victorian period is in the splendor of its hidden things. Henrik Ibsen's impact on the British playwrights was enormous and Oscar Wilde, G.B. Shaw, Arthur Wing Pinero and others tried to capture the picture of the period with all its secrets and unreliable

appearances, whose best messengers are women with a past, women who all have something that they want to keep secret.

As mentioned before, hiding and revealing secrets follows a certain pattern, a certain ritual; in the Victorian drama masks, screens, fans and the whole truth-concealing paraphernalia help in keeping a secret well-hidden, nevertheless letters and conversations (that is verbal and written confessions) as well as other methods are employed for revealing them. A complete code was invented as connected with the use of fans, for instance, the object in case serving to convey messages through a specific Victorian fan language:

- The fan placed near the heart: You have won my love.
- Half-opened fan pressed to the lips: You may kiss me.
- Hiding the eyes behind an open fan: I love you.
- Opening and closing the fan several times: You are cruel.
- Fanning slowly: I am married.
- Fanning quickly: I am engaged.
- Twirling the fan in the left hand: You are being watched. etc. (Fendel 2008)

The principles of Victorian society were concerned with domestic life, insisting on people's being honest, sober, serious, dedicated to their jobs and families. Still, "human nature" made things different, thus the whole period came to be labeled as "hypocritical".

The influence of Darwin was obvious during the period too. Beliefs were shaken and a feeling of insecurity prevailed. Writers managed to point out things that were not pleasant, literature started bringing taboos to the surface. Society was caught between two worlds: one that was already dead and one that was trying to be born in an age of doubt.

Wilde was concerned with the secrets that were hidden under the mask of seriousness and elegance of high society. Like Ibsen, Wilde crushes, despises and exposes the social flaws in his satirical attacks against the cruel and corrupt world in which he lived, but he does all that using more or less subtle paradoxes, witticism, irony and a refined aestheticism. As for Shaw, his number one enemy is the lie, the secret and its most different shapes from the simple appearance of honorableness to the justification of colonialism. For him the theatre meant exposing and unmasking all sorts of secrets.

Late Victorian drama challenged women's restricted roles in society. The "emancipated female" of the 1900s was not yet articulate, her components were not yet assembled (or not well-assembled), she had not managed to obtain an aura of power and effectiveness yet. She is not yet well-defined, as the old values are still there, but she is ready to accept changes, although they might bring about marginalization or even sacrifice. She is ready to give up some of the old ways, even if the difference is to be taken for "monstrosity". As L'Alcharisi, the diva in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* says: "Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster" (Eliot 1995:691).

Liberty was a much desired thing, whether it implied the possibility of wearing bloomers, smoking cigarettes, or getting rid of the standardized status of devoted mother.

Liberty and dignity are ideas present in *A Doll's House*, in which Ibsen engages his heroine in a conflict with one of the most accepted duties of the time: her duty as a mother and as a wife. Ibsen deals here with the condition of the woman in society and family in a time when equality of rights was asked for. The play can be regarded as a plea for equality

between sexes, as Nora's sincerity, generosity, courage, the capacity of sacrifice makes her at least equal if not superior to her husband. If all these ideas had been uttered in a discursive way, they would hardly have been at all noticed. Ibsen managed to find a form of presentation that was subtler and at the same time more expressive. As Nora's awareness of her life grows, her need for rebellion grows as well, culminating in her walking out on her husband and children to find independence.

Over the course of *A Doll's House* appearances prove to be misleading, as first impressions of Nora and the others are all eventually undercut.

A.W. Pinero's gestures towards a "new sexual frankness" (in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*) suggest the degree to which the English drama was edging towards the still dangerous openness of Ibsen. (Sanders 1994:478)

Like in *A Doll's House*, in Pinero's play the premises of the conflict are formed before the action of the play starts. A future marriage is threatening the so-called social "morality" from the very beginning. Like Ibsen, Pinero criticizes the status of women and the assumptions made about women's role in a male dominated society. Paula, a woman with a past, manages to get married to a widowed gentleman of honourable status, thus becoming the second Mrs. Tanqueray. The status of an honourable wife proves to bring unhappiness to Paula, as she is now trapped in between the respectable marriage and Victorian prejudice.

The play starts with Aubrey Tanqueray telling his friend about his future marriage, mentioning that "respectable" society will not accept his wife, like it did in the case of George Orreyed who was marginalized because of his marriage to a Miss Mabel Hervey, a woman from the lower stratum of their "advanced civilization". Paula had had several "protectors"

before meeting Tanqueray, who marries her in full knowledge of the truth. The plot becomes complicated because Ellean, Tanqueray's daughter from his previous marriage comes to live with them, while Paula is bored and irritated that her dreams of social acceptance fade away. In the third act, we discover that Ellean has fallen in love with Hugh Ardale, one of Paula's ex-lovers. Paula decides to tell Aubrey the truth. Hugh's name was on the list she gave her husband before marriage, a list that he refused to read. Finding no solution and convinced that: "the future is only the past again entered through another gate", Paula commits suicide. (Rowell 1968:76)

Pinero's drama points out that the merciless and cruel society helped to kill Paula, an idea that is voiced by a remorse-tortured Ellean: "Killed – herself? (Nodding) Yes – yes. So everybody will say. But I know – I helped to kill her. If I had only been merciful!" (Rowell 1968:79)

Paula Tanqueray's suicide, though regarded with pity and sympathy at the time when the play was first performed in 1893, was more than satisfactory for the taste of the respectable Victorians. As an article in the *Time* magazine underlines:

When *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was originally presented, it shocked Victorian audiences out of their buttoned boots. The play pointed up the fact that a lady can't roll in the hay and then expect to live in the manor. Although Sir Arthur Wing Pinero laced his drama with many a tight homily and saw to it that his Paula's past caught up with her in the end, the uniform reaction of audiences was one of shocked disapproval. Produced during the same year in London and New York, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* inspired much palpitation, was condemned by critics as unfit for mother, brother, sister or wife. Not for a couple of years was it generally admitted that *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* had made Pinero England's top-flight problem playwright. ('Tallulah in Maplewood' 1940)

Both Ibsen's Nora and Pinero's Paula have a past that haunts them. One committed a crime for a good cause, while the other was indeed a "woman with a past", a woman with experience and a woman of the world. Both live their life in downfall; a downfall towards sacrifice. Nora's sacrifice is leaving the children she loves to search an identity, but Paula's sacrifice is the supreme one: suicide. Starting from Ibsen, Pinero pushed the inner conflict that resulted from the prejudices of the society, to the extremes and the effect was even greater.

In a more playful manner Oscar Wilde is addressing serious issues about maternity and maternal instinct as experienced by late nineteenth century women who did or did not accept the role of motherhood as central to their lives. Maternal instinct became a critical element in discussions of gender differences, especially after the attitude towards children and their education was changed. Wilde's *Lady Windermere* is on the point of forgetting about her duty as a mother, but she reconsiders her attitude and, unlike her mother, decides to stay.

Mrs. Arbuthnot in Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* had sacrificed her youth and real identity in order to offer her illegitimate son a decent life and a bright future, but she is no more willing to be victimized again when her son insists that his parents should finally get married for the sake of respectability. Unlike in Pinero's *Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, new mentalities come to help old ones get out of trouble here: young Hester Worsley makes her future mother-in-law realize who the person of no importance really is. This young American lady, bearing the name of the sacrificed woman in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* is the representative of a new way of thinking. There is no doubt of Hawthorne's disdain for the stern

morality and rigidity of the Puritans who blamed Hester Prynne for her sin; Hester Worsley in Wilde's play is disdainfully called in turn "a Puritan" and a *fin-de-siècle* person by Lord Illingworth; she obviously is an open-minded but decent new mutation form on the (r)evolutionary pathway of women's emancipation. Still, the end of the play sees Mrs. Arbuthnot, her son and Hester on their way into an exile of sorts, while Lord Illingworth continues his life in the mainstream of smart London society.

Wilde shows feminist leanings as he attacks the injustice of a society that condemns a "fallen" woman while admiring the cause of her downfall.

If the conflict in this play is solved much like in the old melodramas, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the conflict between Mrs. Erlynne and young, moralistic Lady Windermere, who is in fact her daughter, is not resolved in quite the way previous examples would suggest. Mrs. Erlynne's experience in life has not led her to become pathetic and motherly; rather, she is practical, sophisticated and witty. The unexpected behavior of the *dramatis personae* gives the play a two-dimensional quality.

Mrs. Erlynne is a "woman with a past", unlike the ever-popular *La dame aux camellias*, but still one with a bad reputation. Dumas' work was central in establishing the conventions for dealing with the "woman with a past", conventions that Wilde through his character Mrs. Erlynne would consciously refuse. Wilde's Mrs. Erlynne stands in epigrammatic relation to Marguerite Gautier, who sacrifices, weeps, and dies. "Mrs. Erlynne might have a past, but she's past it. "Oh, don't imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene," she says, speaking as much to an audience raised on Dumas as to the character she's supposedly addressing." ('Reading Wilde, Querying Spaces. Oscar Wilde's Epigrammatic Theater')

In spite of all these, she delivers her daughter a moralizing speech meant to send her back home, to her duties as a mother and a wife.

You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at - to be an outcast! to find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed. You don't know what it is. One pays for one's sins, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. You must never know that. [...] Back to your house, Lady Windermere [...] your place is with your child. (Wilde 1990:413)

Why a woman like Lady Windermere should take the advice of Mrs. Erlynne and what had she learned from her experience and her mother's final sacrifice (that of not revealing her real identity) is hard to say. But as the action takes place while Lady Windermere is celebrating her 21st birthday, one can easily interpret the succession of gifts she gets along the play to mark her coming-of-age: a fan, declarations of love, good advice, a reputation kept intact by the sacrifice of a repenting mother, and – last but not least – wisdom.

If Oscar Wilde's gracefully hidden and revealed secrets could be performed on the stage without causing a real shock, G.B. Shaw's blunt manner of presenting unpleasant aspects of society was regarded as too outrageous for the public to see. *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, written in 1893, could be staged only in 1902, in a private performance. The secret in this play is no more a family secret, and it is also an implied one, only hinted at: we find out what kind of profession the author had in view, but the word in itself is never uttered.

The issues that George Bernard Shaw raises in his "secrets and lies" play are as relevant today as they were more than a century ago. Mrs. Warren's profession is the oldest profession in the world, and even today many women work in the sex industry, which can offer a lifestyle of luxury far in excess of anything they could expect from other work. But this is not the only subject matter of Shaw's play, which is about control and disaffection and also about the relationship between mother and daughter. The mother's efforts have paid for the daughter to be raised in an affluent and educated environment, and these financial sources, once revealed, cause her to despise her own mother.

The male characters of the play are presented as caricatures mainly, and all of them are nasty. Women, however, are more complex. Vivie is a blue stocking, imbued with a work ethos in her ambition to earn a living as an actuary. She lacks an interest in culture and the arts. Her mother, Mrs. Warren, is full of contradictions: victim and exploiter, kind hearted but manipulative and embarrassingly vulgar.

In the most notorious scene of this play the mother who has grown wealthy through brothel-keeping and her respectably raised daughter clash head-on, and thrash through the terms on which a woman may earn a measure of independence and self respect.

Shaw said that he wrote the play "to draw attention to the truth that prostitution is caused not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together" (quoted in 'Mrs. Warren's Profession' 2008).

Again new ways of thinking come to meet old ones, but this time reconciliation is not possible. Vivie can accept (and even understand) her

mother's past, her choice of becoming a prostitute instead of dying of starvation, but she cannot live with her present.

Mrs Warren's Profession probably would not have shocked the Victorian audience provided it had been well-disguised by euphemisms. What was shocking indeed was that it was a fierce attack on the domestic imprisonment of women by the male-dominated culture of the period. Perhaps even more shocking was the suggestion that Mrs. Warren not only survived but actually prospered, in spite of her being a sinner. She is not compelled to make any sacrifices, on the contrary – she is ready to sacrifice her daughter, forcing her into a marriage that would be nothing but legalized prostitution and which Vivie rejects in disgust. The “skeleton in Mrs. Warren's closet” once discovered, Vivie's life takes a new turn, but Mrs. Warren's remains much the same. Her punishment will reside in Vivie's estrangement from her, although her confession was supposed to restore in her daughter the duty of the children to honour their parents. When Mrs. Warren appeals to her daughter to pay her this sort of respect, Vivie refuses.

Don't think for a moment I set myself above you in any way, she says. You attacked me with the conventional authority of a mother: I defended myself with the conventional superiority of a respectable woman. Frankly, I am not going to stand any of your nonsense; and when you drop it, I shall not expect you to stand any of mine. I shall always respect your right to your own opinions and your own way of life. (Shaw 1935:64)

The Victorian popular theatre provided stock storylines of domestic life that, after various crises, would culminate in the reaffirmation of familiar themes: loyalty, sacrifice, undying love, forgiveness and devotion.

We can speak about a bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women of all classes in society. There is a general liberal plea for greater understanding of the plight of a fallen woman, but at the same time a stoically conservative recognition that understanding might not be achieved.

Society meant respectable society and the world of influence and power that demanded women's reputation be spotless. Though some are economically carefree, nevertheless they lead a difficult life because society dictates that the husband is the marriage's dominant partner.

Women with a past seem to have only one option: *self-sacrifice*. But self-sacrifice in itself can become the object of despise, as Hester in Wilde's *Woman of No Importance* states, when comparing the new American ways to English hypocrisy:

We are trying to build up life [...] on a better, truer, purer basis than life rests on here [...] You shut out from your society the gentle and the good. You laugh at the pure and the simple [...] Living, as you do all, on others and by them, you sneer at self-sacrifice, and if you throw bread to the poor, it is merely to keep them quiet for a season [...] You've lost life's secret! Oh, your English society seems to me shallow, selfish, foolish. (Wilde 1990:449)

Nineteenth century English drama had come a long way from *Lady Audley's Secret* (a highly melodramatic play by C.H. Hazlewood, based on a sensational novel written by Mary Elizabeth Braddon in 1862) in which the seemingly perfect domestic lady turns out to be a violent criminal to *Hindle Wakes*, a play in three acts by Stanley Houghton, first performed in 1912. While Lady Audley, the woman who has not only tried to commit murder, but has also committed bigamy and abandoned her child, is forced to

commit suicide once her real identity and crimes are revealed, in *Hindle Wakes* a new attitude towards life becomes obvious.

The characters in *Hindle Wakes* are well drawn, lifelike, and thoroughly human. Over a week-long holiday, Fanny, a young, unmarried working-class woman, allows herself a few days of casual sex with Alan, the single son of an affluent family. Even though pregnancy is not an issue, the parents of both parties believe that their children should marry for appearances' sake. When Fanny walks out on her parents (and, by Houghton's implication, from community standards) to start a life on her own, without male guidance – that meant revolutionary stuff indeed. Alan's pride is hurt to an extreme by Fanny's detached, so to say "masculine" way of treating the situation. She is not to accept a conventional marriage, one meant to sort things out, but deprived of love and mutual respect.

ALAN: But you didn't ever really love me?

FANNY: Love you? Good Heavens, of course not! Why on earth should I love you? You were just some one to have a bit of fun with. You were an amusement

- a lark.

ALAN: (shocked) Fanny! Is that all you cared for me?

FANNY: How much more did you care for me?

ALAN: But it's not the same. I'm a man.

FANNY: You're a man, and I was your little fancy. Well, I'm a woman, and you were my little fancy. You wouldn't prevent a woman enjoying herself as well as a

man, if she takes it into her head? (Rowell 1968:503)

In 1914 the feminist radical Emma Goldman noted that Houghton "had the courage to touch one of the most sensitive spots of Puritanism -

woman's virtue. Whatever else one may criticize or attack, the sacredness of virtue must remain untouched. It is the last fetish which even so-called liberal-minded people refuse to destroy". (quoted in Young 2005)

Lady Audley's crimes disrupt the domestic sphere and remove the safety of the home. Paula Tanqueray is the step-mother of a girl who wants to marry her ex-lover, Mrs. Arbuthnot has an illegitimate son, Mrs. Erlynne had abandoned her family, Mrs. Warren is a prostitute who makes money for her daughter. This was unsettling to a Victorian readership because it made it clear that the ideas of "the perfect lady/mother" and "domestic bliss" were more idealistic than realistic. As compared to such plays, *Hindle Wakes*, which already belongs to a different age, represents a closer approach to reality. Fanny does no more think about sacrificing herself or her life for the sake of appearances, she belongs to a new group of female characters whose unusual behaviour does no more create the impression of social monstrosity. The 20th century had started to affirm its new ways.

References

- Alexander, F. 1989. *Contemporary Women Novelists*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Cucu, S. 1974. *Teatrul european al secolului al XIX-lea*. București: Editura Meridiane
- Eliot, G. 1995. *Daniel Deronda*. London: Penguin Books
- Fendel, C. 2008. 'The Language of the Fan' in *All about Hand Fans* [Online]
Available: <http://www.handfanpro.com/Allaboutfans/Lang/language.htm>
[2008, May 18]
- Galea, I. 2000. *Victorianism and Literature*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia.
- 'Germaine Greer'. 2008. in *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*
Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germaine_Greer#cite_note-22 [2008, May 16]
- Hanțiu, E. 1996. *The Magic World of Nineteenth Century British Drama*. Oradea: Editura

Librăriile Crican

Ibsen, H. 1957. *Three Plays*. London: The Penguin Classics. Penguin Books.

'Mrs. Warren's Profession'. 2008. in *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia* [Online]

Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mrs._Warren's_Profession [2008, May 18]

'Reading Wilde, Querying Spaces. Oscar Wilde's Epigrammatic Theater' in *New York University Libraries* [Online] Available:

<http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/fales/exhibits/wilde/1epigram.htm>
[2008, May 20]

Rowell, G. (ed.). 1968. Introduction to *Late Victorian Plays 1890 – 1914*, London: Oxford University Press

Sanders, A. 1994. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

Shaw, G.B. 1935. *Nine Plays*. New York: Dodd Mead & Co.

'Sinner quotes' in *Thinkexist.com* Available:

<http://thinkexist.com/quotes/with/keyword/sinner/> [2008 May 16]

'Tallulah in Maplewood' in *Time*. 15 Jul. 1940 [Online] Available

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,777406,00.html?promoid=googlep> [2008 May 16]

Wilde, O. 1990. *Complete Works*. London and Glasgow: Collins

Young, R. 2005. 'Hindle Wakes' in *Flickhead. Film Review* . [Online].

Available <http://home.comcast.net/~flickhead/Hindle.html> [2008, May 20]

WOMEN ON THE ROAD: LEAVE YOUR BAGGAGE BEHIND

MÁRIA BAJNER

University of Pécs

“How many roads must a man walk down before you can call him a man?”, — asks Bob Dylan in his 1963 song “Blowing in the Wind”— or before you call her a woman, we might add. “Hitting the road” implies an adventurous, boisterous, trying journey, more applicable to men than women. Moreover, examples of past travel teach us that women have never had the same access to the road as men did. From explorers to vagrants being on the road suggests engagement in *doing* something, although *being* on the road carries epistemological meaning that is the accessibility of knowledge and independence. Traditionally, while men are *on* the road, women are *on and off*, motivated by a cause, rather than a reason. In this paper I intend to highlight some gendered intricacies of travel and their related aspects in relation to home, female identity and male/female experience, as compared to the 19th century Gothic representation of the travelling woman. The brief analysis of the American movie *Thelma and Louise* — seen as a bookmark of female bonding and a kind of modern Gothic wandering by feminist thinkers (see Ashley; Hobson; Koo; Sidione; Siegel) — will pinpoint the major similarities between the icon of the 19th century Gothic heroine and the female traveller of our age, both paying the toll for their odyssey in the “restricted zone”.

Gender is not the only dimension involved in travel. Cultural, capital and class differences have always shown up in the discrepancies in

means of, access to and modes of travel. In examining a single notion of it, which for the most part rests on a Western, middle-class idea of the chosen and leisured journey, it can be concluded that historically men have travelled and women have not. Although there is evidence that women did actually travel (the Victorian lady travellers and the female travellers of early modern Scotland are prime examples) it is quite easy to trace an intrinsic relationship between masculinity and travel that is between mobility and constructed male/female identity.

Ellen Moers created the term “female gothic” which manifests itself in actions and heroism (1985:90). It is not the loving woman, the thinking woman, but the travelling woman who acts, who moves, and who copes with adventures. The act of liberation of the self and “breaking out” of the constructed social role fits the American pattern of puritanism. In traditional puritan literature, the goal of life is seen as a need to escape from the artificial cages of cultural construction. Elaine Showalter describes the unfolding of gynocriticism in her essay as “the journey through the wilderness” (1985:266-7). Women’s experience — intangible for men — Showalter argues, has to be explained and examined in its own terms. Women are not inside and outside of the male tradition; rather, they are inside two traditions simultaneously: they are trespassing on male territories while abandoning the beaten path of their “foremothers”.

The travel motif in women’s literature – according to Moers — can be separated into two distant kinds: indoor and outdoor travel. In the Gothic castles with their dark, twisting, haunted passageways there is travel with danger, with a challenge to the heroine’s enterprise, ingenuity, and physical strength. Inside the Gothic castle Ann Radcliffe’s heroines are safe. With Moers’s words: “[...] the Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an

indoor and therefore freely female space” (1985:126-27). Outdoor travel for Catherine Morland, Jane Austen’s heroine is country walking, which is the symbol for the joys of independent womanhood; while Lucy’s, Charlotte Bronte’s heroine’s city walking in *Villette* (1853) evokes fear of the unknown, the “unladylike” adventure.

Women — being more engaged in indoor than outdoor travel — seek to explore spaces, interior and exterior, defined in relation to others. What characterizes the female traveller? What is hidden in her baggage of past experience? What emotions, restraints and suppressed grievance of the past is she compelled to carry with her?

If we take travel as a Western middle-class idea of the chosen and leisured journey, then the whole act is *optional, relational, subjective, and fluid*, having no clear boundaries, except for the ‘billboards’ of travel, the signposts, that show us the whole structure: the stations and terminals the travellers are passing by and through, depart from and arrive at. The ultimate voyage for all humans starts with travel or transition through the birth canal, as the final stage labour develops, and the independent journey starts. The womb’s protection, security, and warmth will be lost forever as soon as this painful and hazardous endeavour towards the unknown starts. With birth a newborn is licensed to a lifelong journey, the first signpost of which is home. Home is the domestic place for shelter and protection, where — similarly to the womb — the maternal role is significant. Home is associated with a building for living, a closed place, a scene for stability, and/or suffering. There is a desire on the woman’s part to stay at home, or create a home, and if she is leaving, she is leaving for a home. She either returning back home (that is the house of her father) or finds a new shelter (the house of a male protector).

Once home, the central image of a woman's life becomes damaged, lost or broken, the notion of female travel will take a new dimension: outdoor travel becomes an "exilic wondering", where mobility is often qualified by necessity and risk. Wandering suggests a kind of hindered or incomplete travel, as opposed to the goal-oriented expeditions of the male explorer. Those who are wandering around with no definite purpose in mind and no place to arrive at end up as vagabonds, outside the conventional structure of man-made law and order. The followers of Huck Finn do not travel light: they all have a story to share. The "baggage" of Huck's female alternative is far from being neatly shaped, since she is expected to take the traditional male role in a traditional male narrative. The house she leaves behind changes from the symbol of security and status into a symbol of male privilege, threatening and oppressive.

Travelling for women is an imaginative vehicle for feminism, since it provided a radical alternative to the daylight reality of conformity and acceptance, a symbolic immersion of the hero in masculine experience. The American 1991 road movie *Thelma & Louise* seems to be a still living and valid example to justify this.

The movie breaks with tradition by featuring two women playing the classic outlaw roles usually reserved for males. Directed by Ridley Scott and written by Callie Khouri the film's plot revolves around Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise's (Susan Sarandon) escape from their troubled home lives, as they embark upon a lengthy road trip across America.

Louise is a single waitress working in a fast food restaurant, who appears organized and strong, with some unnamed trauma in her past. She has some problems with her friend Jimmy, who, as a musician, is always on

the road. Thelma is married to Darryl, the controlling husband, who likes his wife to stay quiet in the kitchen so that he can watch football on TV.

One day they decide to break out of their mundane but structured life and jump in the car and hit the road for a two-day vacation of fishing somewhere in the mountains. For each of them life is prison: prison of the house, prison of the Self they want to break loose and liberate. Their journey, however, turns into a flight when Louise kills a man who threatens to rape Thelma. The heroines, who escaped from home, from prison are still prisoners: they are no longer imprisoned in a house, but in the female body.

While men are *watching* them in bars, dance halls, restaurants, in all public places they are somehow provocatively *exposing* themselves to the male gaze. According to public opinion these women have tempted fate by travelling unprotected and mixing willingly with the clients of the honky-tonk truck bar. Under the influence of a few drinks Thelma exposes herself to the male gaze: she is in male territory, although resisting their boisterous game. The “girls” believe that under the circumstances they probably can’t even prove that the guy touched Thelma. When killing the would-be rapist they are afraid that nobody would believe them, since people saw Thelma dancing with the harasser and being nice to him. As there is no physical evidence, they can’t prove she was about to be raped. The reason they choose the illegal act of running away into the wilderness in the first place is because they are convinced that a male justice system will not understand why killing the rapist is justifiable. All of this takes place in the desert southwest as they head toward Mexico, the land of the wilderness, where women really have a choice except to say no. As Louise puts it: “You shoot off a guy’s head with his pants down. Believe me, Texas ain’t the place you want to get caught.”

What can be called a breakthrough in the history of movies is not the travelling woman having unladylike adventures, but the sight of two women without male supporters playing the classic outlaw roles reserved for men.

And while the literal plot is unfolding, so is another plot. Both women are discovering the terror and excitement of being on their own, outside the law, for the very first time completely, wildly independent and free. They have stepped outside not just of the legal structure and the social structure but of structure itself. They are letting go, and the experience is awful. They are on the run, and as they run, they get deeper and deeper into trouble hunted by the American police, the representatives of authoritative (male) power. It is the point when they cease to be “women”, having become fugitives, deprived of their gender identities. As Louise points it out: “Thelma, you gotta stop being so open. We’re fugitives now. You gotta start acting like that.” Having turned into fugitives they proceed into the wilderness, and get rid of the accessories, the emblems of femininity. Louise gives her earrings and watch away as easily as Thelma disposes her lipstick for good and all. There is no need for either labels of gender identity or products of artificial beauty in the Wilderness.

Parallel with the plot of outside travel, the heroines’ inside travel is unfolding. Both of them are discovering the terror and excitement of being on their own, outside patriarchal construction. While standing on a hill in the dawn watching the sun rise they pass through a kind of epiphany never experienced before. It is the moment of awakening, the joy of ultimate freedom, Thelma is happy to share with Louise: “I feel really awake. I don’t recall ever feeling this awake. You know? Everything looks different now. You feel like that? You feel like you got something to live for now?”

Thelma, being liberated by the experience of robbing the store says, has discovered her calling, “the Call of the Wild”. She tells Louise: “Something’s like crossed over in me and I can’t go back.” At the point of no return they give an example of female bonding and sisterhood while getting rid of the burdens of the past.

Finally, with their car facing the Grand Canyon and the police coming up the rear, they have to decide between social construction, jail, and freedom beyond all construction, over the edge. Thelma and Louise bring in a verdict: they sentence themselves to eternal freedom. They become liberated from the body, from the prison of the female body. They pass from the literal into the spiritual wilderness when they fire off over the edge of the Grand Canyon.

The last picture is frozen with the still-ascending green 1966 Thunderbird convertible. End of the road, beginning of the journey.

References

- Aschley, B. ‘Unconventional Explorer’. Marin Independent Journal 27 April 2003. Available: <http://www.idex.org/article.php?id=35> [2 December 2005]
- Koo, H. “Women Travellers: Physical and Narrative Boundaries” in *Mosaic : a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. Winnipeg: Jun 2006. Vol. 39/2; pp.18-19
- Mills, S. 1991. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*. New York: Routledge
- Moers, E. 1985. *Literary Women*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Showalter, E. 1985. *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York, Pantheon
- Siegel, K. (ed.) 2004. “Gender, Genre and Identity” in *Women's Travel Writing*. New York:

Peter Lang

www.imsdb.com/scripts/Thelma-&-Louise.html [15 June 2008]

The Conundrum of Gender

**THE WOOLF – CUNNINGHAM LITERARY TRAJECTORY.
FEMINIZATION OF TIME**

ELISABETA ZELINKA

University of the West, Timișoara

1. Time frame- the “DNA” book

Time plays a paramount role in both Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* and it becomes a landmark of their inter-relatedness. What is more, both literary works use the concept of time in a specific way: both of them present one apparently “ordinary day” (Cunningham 1998:163,154) in the life of the characters. Cunningham even underlines the present concept of “an ordinary day” in a 2006 interview, at the *Prague Writers’ Festival*: “Virginia Woolf had written this sort of epic story about an ordinary day in the life an ordinary person named Clarissa Dalloway [...] ah, I thought: Oh, I wanna do that!” (Cunningham, *Prague Writers’ Festival*, interview transcript [online]).

Nevertheless this day represents a far from “ordinary” day in the life of the characters. This very day chosen by the two authors proves to be the most important day in the life of each character: this day represents the climax of their lives, the turning point, the axis and the zenith of their ontological experiences. It is noteworthy to mention that in both novels the plot takes place in June, the sixth month of the year, the middle, the highpoint, the zenith of the calendar year, a possible symbol of the highpoint and of the turning point of the characters’ life as well. Cunningham only changes/feminises the day of the plot, not the month,

which is already a month related to a feminine goddess, *par excellence*, Juno.

The present span of approximately twenty-four hours in both novels catalyses the deepest changes in the lives of the characters, the most dramatic turnovers, the most tragic or the most intense upheavals. It is only during *this* day that the characters are able to discover and achieve their self-liberation, self-empowerment from the pressure of heteronormative patriarchy and thus become - to some extent - fulfilled and liberated. By taking over the same time span that he describes in the life of each of his characters, Cunningham pays his homage to Virginia Woolf, who built her novel on this temporal structure. A symbolic sample for the entire life of the character, this very day encompasses for each personage all his/her past, present and future: past memories, present gender-specific struggles and future plans and projects. It contains all the innermost character traits for each character, the deepest psychological features which shape and catalyse the life turning events of the day. That is why I argue that in both novels, the twenty-four hour plot becomes a metonymy, for the entire life and for the whole complex identity of the characters.

The main characters try to find some significance in every aspect of the world around them. By choosing to compress the events of a lifetime into one day, Cunningham reveals their thoughts, attitudes and perceptions through their small encounters with recognizable, everyday experiences. The women of *The Hours*, Clarissa in particular, cannot walk down the street without having a profound experience or revelation: the sight of a woman singing in the park makes her think about the history of the city she loves, while a glimpse of a movie star in her trailer causes her to pause and consider the ways that fame can make people immortal.

The perception of the world as meaningful is not a purely passive experience. Laura channels her restricted creativity into the domestic act of baking, treating the cake she makes for her husband as if it were a work of art. When the cake fails to live up to expectations, Laura feels not only the frustration of failing at the task but also her failure at finding satisfying outlets for her creative impulses.

Thirdly, Virginia Woolf as a writer has a thoughtful, evaluative eye that gives her an acute understanding of the world around her. Even small moments can bring on great revelations. While sitting with her sister Vanessa at tea, chatting informally about a coat for Angelica, Virginia has a profound appreciation for the simple intimacy of the moment and wells up with tears. While each woman's intense sensitivity allows her to feel deeply attuned to life, they also experience more acutely the heartaches and frustrations that come with minor setbacks. Though they cope with these setbacks with differing degrees of stoicism, each woman often feels overwhelmed by her life and the choices she has made.

Thus we have arrived to the very core of Michael Cunningham's auctorial standpoint on Time in his novel, the artefact as a DNA sample. In a 2003 interview, he explains:

there are no insignificant days, that there are no insignificant lives-- that any day in anyone's life contains most of what we need to know about all of life, very much the way the blueprint for an entire organism is imprinted on every strand of its DNA. (Cunningham, April 2003 [online])

This concentration of the psychological insights of characters, as well as the interest of the 20th century literature in the psychology of the individual, in the labyrinth of 'caves' of the human being may have been the

two major reasons that lead to the proliferation of the 24-hour-plot novel in the 20th century, especially in the second half of it.

The present method of manipulating time constitutes another of Cunningham's auctorial devices of feminisation. Cunningham shrinks his characters' entire lifetime experience into a 24 hour span of time; moreover he investigates time synchronically in the 1920s, in 1949 and in the 1990s. By shrinking time and by deconstructing its linearity, he implicitly deconstructs the mainstream traditional *male* canon (established over centuries by male canon representatives) of chronological time. According to feminist literary criticism, anything created/written from a different standpoint than the mainstream, *male*, normative standpoint consists in a feminine position; anything written from a non-male normative, non-canonical or counter-canonical position implies a feminine positionality (Kristeva, quoted by Moi in Belsey and Moore 1989: 111-112; hooks 2004: 153-156; Longino 1993: 106; Burkitt 1999: 87-88; Haraway 2004: 81-97).

It is paramount to mention that Virginia Woolf also applies this feminine auctorial device in her modernist novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Nevertheless Cunningham extends this feminising technique from one plane to three different narrative strands, from one *topos* to three different geographical *topoi*, from one continent to two continents, from one main character (Clarissa Dalloway) to three main characters (Clarissa Vaughan, Laura and Virginia), from one synchronic moment in the 1920s to three different synchronic instances: the 1920s, 1949 and the 1990s. That is why I argue that by applying the DNA artifact method, Cunningham not only applies a renowned feminising auctorial device, concerning time manipulation, but he also emphasises it in his pastiche, by extending it onto each of his three narrative strands.

As a conclusion, the span of twenty-four hours is of extreme importance to the author, when creating the plot of the novel. Thus the day itself takes up specific connotations, which in the case of *Mrs. Dalloway* – *The Hours* changes from a Wednesday to a Saturday, creating a web of intricate connotations.

2. Day of plot--feminisation: the clash of two mythologies

From Wednesday to Saturday, from Wodan to Saturn Cunningham's shift of plot-days from Wednesday to Saturday implies a veiled device of feminisation of the time frame. This is another paramount method that serves Cunningham as a central trope of his overall auctorial device of feminisation throughout his novel. He achieves the present feminisation of time frame, by moving the plot from a Wednesday in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) to a Saturday in *The Hours* (1998), most importantly in Clarissa Vaughan's narrative strand. It is a fact that this narrative strand carries the strongest resemblances to Woolf's novel.

It is necessary to mention that both days, as discussed above contain the characters' quintessence: their life-turning events happen during *this* very day, a day that engulfs their entire existence. Thus, the two plot-frame days (Wednesday and Saturday, respectively) shape the foremost connotations for the two novels, their characters and their two plots, respectively: the plot in Woolf's novel is placed on a Wednesday—thus coming closer to the masculine connotations of this day. In opposition to this, Cunningham's plot (primarily Clarissa's strand) is placed on a Saturday, thus approaching the feminine connotations of the sixth weekday.

Following this line of thought, I shall prove that Wednesday is

associated in culture and mythology with much stronger male/masculine connotations as compared to Saturday, which is endowed with connotations closer to the feminine. Within the analysis of these two separate sets of cultural connotations, I shall aim to show that Cunningham feminises Time/the time frame from the 1925 *Mrs. Dalloway* to his own novel *The Hours*, 1998, by shifting the central plot-day from the masculine-associated Wednesday to a much more feminine-associated Saturday. In order to start the present analysis of time feminisation, I will first investigate the masculine connotations of Wednesday and then the more feminine connotations of Saturday.

Firstly, I shall start to investigate the symbolic connotations of Wednesday. 'Wednesday' derives from the Middle English 'Wednes dei', further on from Old English 'Wēdnes dæg', literally meaning the day of the Germanic god Woden (Wodan), a god of the Anglo-Saxons in England, until about the 7th century. Thus 'Wēdnes dæg' derives from the Old Norse 'Oðinsdagr' ('Odin's day'). Having established that Wednesday, as Virginia Woolf's plot day, is directly linked to Wōden/Odin, a thorough investigation of the exclusively masculine connotations of god Wōden/Odin is necessary, in order to comprehend Cunningham's shifting and feminisation of Time.

Wōden, deriving from the Old Norse god Odin, represents a later development of the Proto-Germanic deity, Wōdanaz. Wōden, as the supreme god of Anglo-Saxon paganism, was associated with a series of exclusively male and masculine attributes (<http://www.vaidilute.com...>): absolute omnipotence, supreme physical power, omniscience, fury, war, bloodshed, death (as the carrier-off of the dead) and fierce, barbaric hunting, especially the notorious 'Wild Hunt' (a phantasmal group of huntsmen with the accoutrements of hunting, horses, hounds, in mad pursuit across the

skies or along the ground, or just above it. It was often a way to explain thunderstorms (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_Hunt). Thus Wōden is associated with typically masculine attributes, as a merciless, violent and tempestuous god, furiously galloping and trampling the seeds in the soil, thus symbolically destroying all the feminine fertility of the earth/Mother Earth (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1995a: 367). As Gloria Steinem clearly states in her book *Moving Beyond Words*, part 2 “The Politics of Muscle”, masculinity has always been necessarily associated with physical power, muscles, dynamism, sports and training. On the other hand, since the dawn of mankind, femininity has been defined as: feebleness, weakness, tenderness, altruism, filigree postures, “smiling and pleasing”, thin, soft - thus “all patriarchal cultures value weakness in women [...] women are supported to be weaker than men; that muscles and strength aren’t ‘feminine’” (Steinem 1995:94-95).

Horse riding represents yet another typically masculine pose and symbol, generally associated with almighty kings and male rulership. Moreover, certain mountains were sacred to the service of this god. The mountain as a symbol of the heavy, massive rock, of power, durability and toughness again serves as a masculine connotation for the eponymous day which Woolf chose for her plot.

This ferociously masculine symbolism is even more predominant in the case of Wōden’s original Old Norse pantheon ancestor: Odin/Óðinn (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books/guerber/guerber-02.html>). As the chief divinity, Odin is associated with an exclusively masculine symbolism: he is the god of physical and spiritual omnipotence, battle and death, bloodthirstiness (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1995a:367), residing in Valhalla, whence he transported the bravest of his slain warriors. Moreover,

Odin was regarded as the equivalent of the male Greek Psychopompos, “the leader of souls” (<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/o/odin.html>).

Another typical masculine attribute is Odin’s wisdom, knowledge and omniscience (<http://www.vaidilute.com...>), epistemological power and expensive education usually having been bestowed upon men and not women (Longino 1993:101-107; Haraway 2004:81-83; Cixous 1989:91; Irigaray quoted in Whitford 1991:414-420; hooks 2004:153). In addition to Wōden, Odin is not only the god of egoistical omniscience, but also the god of benevolent wisdom, forwarding his knowledge with his mortal subjects. First, he hung for nine days, pierced by his own spear, on the world tree, Yggdrasill, suffering immense pain and sacrificing (piercing) one of his eyes in order to acquire knowledge. Having traded one of his eyes for a drink from the Well of Wisdom he thus gained omniscience. Hence he has only one eye, which blazes like the sun (Iăzărescu 1979:266). Again, his association with the sun, gives him masculine connotations, in opposition to the moon, the typical feminine element (Cixous 1989:91, Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1995a:244). Thus, having acquired his incommensurable knowledge, he then taught the first runic alphabet to his faithful human subjects (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books/guerber/guerber-02.html>), once again proving his masculine-associated epistemological omnipotence and supremacy.

Further on, Odin’s magical artifacts are irrefutable symbols of masculinity and brute male physical power (Iăzărescu 1979: 266): the war-related spear Gungnir, which never misses its target, the omnipotent royal ring Draupnir, and his eight-footed steed Sleipnir and two ravens Huginn and Muninn (Thought and Memory), who fly around Earth daily and report the happenings of the world to Odin in Valhalla at night. He is accompanied

by the wolves Freki and Geri, to whom he gives his food for he himself consumes nothing but wine. The spear, the royal signet-ring, the supernatural horse, as well as the brutish wolves are additional masculinity-related attributes. Moreover, even his horse and his black ravens sometimes snack on the flesh of his dead warriors. When seated upon his throne or armed for the fray, Odin wears his eagle helmet, another symbol of masculine power and war (<http://www.vaidilute.com...>).

If we analyse Odin's family tree, we shall find little but again, masculine and ferociously masculinised gods and goddesses. He is surrounded by fierce and fierce-looking goddesses, tempestuous gods, devouring giants and monsters – unlike Saturn, surrounded by a much more feminine, friendly and solar (Mediterranean) family tree. Most importantly, Odin fathered Thor.

Thor is the absolute symbol of masculine-associated attributes (<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/thor.html>): brute physical power and size, savage mercilessness and brutishness. As the god of thunder, lightning, storm and rage, the red-haired and bearded god was widely feared for his remarkably great size and strength and for his terrible rage (Lăzărescu 1979: 267). His tools are again, most typical for brute masculine physical power: a red-hot, huge hammer called Miölnir (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books...>).

Freyja, the golden-haired and blue-eyed goddess, was Odin's concubine. She represents the Norse goddess of fertility, love, crops and (child)birth, thus symbolising the most typical and exclusively female attributes (Lăzărescu 1979:190). Nevertheless, even this most exclusively feminine goddess in Odin/Wodan's family tree bears the stamp of masculinisation: Freya was not tender and pleasure-loving only, she had very martial tastes, she often led the Valkyrs down to the battlefields,

choosing and claiming one half the slain heroes. She was therefore often represented in a typically masculinised way, with corselet and helmet, shield and spear, thus only the lower part of her body being clad in the usual flowing feminine garb (<http://www.vaidilute.com/books...>).

Finally, Thor's two sons Móði (anglicized Módi/Modi) and Magni are typical representatives of the range of masculine attributes that prevail in the Norse mythology. Their names mean 'Angry' and 'Strong' respectively. Rudolf Simek underlines that, along with Thor's daughter Þrúðr ('Strength'), they embody their father's masculine, brutish features (Simek, 1987 quoted in *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* [online]).

As a conclusion, the Norse mythology revolving around Wodan/Odin, the mythological originator of Woolf's plot-day, appears as a gallery of war-like, war-related, masculinised gods and goddesses. They bear overtly masculine and/or masculinised sets of symbols, references and meanings. These masculinity-stamped meanings are associated with the time frame (Wednesday) and with the plot of the Woolfian novel. Thus the entire Woolfian plot takes place under masculine/masculinised auspices.

In opposition to this cold-climate, Norse, warrior mythology, we encounter the Mediterranean Roman mythology, which, as I shall investigate, presents a much more feminine, warmer and solar set of attributes. The starting point in my analysis is Saturn, as the namesake for Saturday ('dies Saturni'), the plot day chosen by Michael Cunningham, in his novel, after shifting from Woolf's masculine-associated Wednesday.

Saturn, as the major Roman deity of agriculture and harvest, is also identifiable in this line of thought with fertility, birth and reproduction of plants. His rulership, "The Golden Age of Man", is a mythical age of fertility, agricultural plenteousness, abundance, copiousness, bountifulness

and abundant fecundity of the earth (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1995a:193). Moreover, Medieval and Renaissance scholars directly associated Saturn with the most feminine of the four ancient humours: melancholy (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1995a:193). Saturn intensifies feelings of isolation, sadness, depression. This can be traced back to Saturn (Greek Cronus), who spent the last part of his life as a prisoner of Tartarus, a dark, gloomy place that can be described as a pit of blackness. Depression is often a pit of darkness to those who suffer from it (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn...>).

Taking one step further from the feminine-related melancholy and depression, Saturn is also associated with yet another set of usually feminine connotations: shame, fear, guilt and humiliation which keep us psychologically confined as a result of melancholy (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1995a:193). These feelings are rarely associated with the masculine principle: self-confidence, stability, reason, man-above-woman, but rather with the feminine one (Cixous 1989:91-92).

It is especially important to mention that the central topic and the message in Cunningham's novel, *placed on a Saturday*, is precisely this existential empowerment of his characters. This empowerment is their paramount pivot which makes them understand and celebrate the life impulse that refuses to die out within these characters. As Cunningham himself explains, his characters are empowered due to their "hunger for life", in a constant celebration of life and of the vital force (Cunningham in *USA TODAY Book Club: Michael Cunningham* [online]).

Thus his characters achieve their liberation and existential fulfilment by fiercely deconstructing their limitations, dictated by the social codes of their times: Laura divorces and leaves her family in order to attain her personal freedom and self-empowerment, Richard has the courage to

assume homosexuality and to love beyond all social etiquettes, shattering social codes and mores, similarly, Virginia kisses her own sister twice, in quite an erotic way, fulfilling her androgynous nature.

In addition to these feminine connotations of Saturn, his family tree is also marked by purely feminine goddesses, who bore no mark of masculine connotations, unlike the masculine and bellicose goddesses in Wodan/Odin's family tree. Saturn's wife Ops/Opis, is the supreme goddess of feminine fertility, of earth/soil fertility who, like an Alma Mater, feeds all the human race with the birth crops of the soil she fertilises each year. In order to underline, Ops' overwhelmingly feminine nature, I shall briefly recall Wodan/Odin's mythology, where sacrifices were exclusively performed by male priests. What is more, only virgin men were sacrificed in the Temple of Uppsala. In contrast to this masculine-centred Norse pantheon, Ops' festival, called 'Opiconsivia', observed on August 25, involved both the official priests and priestesses. Nevertheless the paramount role in the sacrifices was performed by Ops' female Vestal Virgins, who were the only ones to have access to her holy altar in the Regia, on the Forum Romanum (<http://www.pantheon.org...>).

The highly feminine side of Saturn's family tree can also be observed in the feminine/feminised attributes of his children. Ceres (Saturn's first daughter and Demeter's Roman equivalent) is yet another goddess of agriculture and most importantly, of supreme motherly love and maternal self-sacrifice (<http://www.pantheon.org...>). Another set of her feminine attributes includes her divine sceptre, a basket with flowers or fruits, and a garland made of the ears of corn, as Ceres is an earth goddess, responsible for fertility, rebirth, birth and Nature—all feminine connotations (<http://www.pantheon.org...>).

Another exclusively feminine goddess in Saturn's Parthenon is his mother, Terra, Terra Mater or Tellus. She again personifies the fertile Earth, the birth-giving seed, the procreative principle and birth. Along with Ceres, she was responsible for the productivity and fertility of farmland.

It should be observed that in rewriting *Mrs. Dalloway*, Cunningham not only feminises Time by shifting from Woolf's Wednesday to Saturday in his novel, but he cunningly maintains Woolf's month: June. As a symbol of female and femininity-related tropes, (such as birth or pregnancy), June is present on only two of the three narrative strands. Clarissa Vaughan's and Laura's strands are clearly placed in June (Cunningham 1998:10, 42), but the reader receives no information about any plot month on Virginia's strand. This may be an accidental auctorial hypostasis. Nevertheless I strongly believe that there appears an overt connection between June/Juno's exclusive symbolism of motherhood and childbirth and the three characters. Clarissa Vaughan is the empowered postmodern woman and mother by excellence, strong, beautiful and resembling Mother Nature with her roses in her arms. Similarly, Laura, is the absolute symbol of motherly love, of female fertility and of female procreative potentiality.

It is solely Virginia who is completely barren. Moreover she suffers terribly due to her infertility, as compared to her fertile sister, Vanessa, who has given birth to three children. Juno/June's symbolism does definitely not apply to Virginia. This is what Cunningham is masterfully signalling to his readers, by omitting the month June only from Virginia's narrative strand.

As we may conclude Saturn, unlike Wodan/Odin is surrounded by solar, gods and goddesses strongly associated with exclusively feminine attributes such as fertility and birth, delivery and pregnancy, motherhood or

the feminine subconscious. These Mediterranean deities do not carry the mark of bellicoseness and aggressivity which is highly detectable in the Norse mythology. They appear as much more solar, joyful and peaceful. Most importantly they are evidently more feminine, more gentle, pacifying and more tender.

Hence Cunningham's feminised trajectory from Woolf's Wednesday to Saturday, considering the emergence of the plot day in his *The Hours*. Thus he completes his auctorial devise of feminisation of time and of the plot frame, in rewriting Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and switching from a Wednesday (bearing masculine connotations) to a Saturday (carrying feminine symbolisms).

3. Time frame feminisation: Saturnalia

Cunningham's masterly device of feminisation of time is also directly connected to the feminine connotations of Saturn's festival, Saturnalia. By switching from Woolf's Wednesday to a Saturday, Cunningham plays on the entire set of feminine symbolism of the Saturnalia festival, deriving directly from the plot-day he symbolically chooses for his novel.

On a close analysis, one can detect within Saturnalia an ample set of feminine connotations covered by feminist literary criticism: chaos and disorder, as symbols of female mental instability and of the mazelike feminine subconscious (Showalter 1985:121-140; Showalter 1998:4,9; Irigaray 1981:414-417, 418, 422; Grosz 1994:3; Moi quoted in Belsey and Moore 1989:112; Felman 1989: 117-119; Steinem 1995:39; Cixous 1989: 91; Kristeva 1986:128-131; Riviere 1929, <http://www.ncf.edu/hassold...>).

Also, Saturnalia carries the negative feminine attributes of corporeality, sexuality, over-sexuality, or debauchery, as pointed out by feminist literary critics (Daly 1995; Irigaray 1981:416-419,420,422; Yegenoglu 1998:23; Said 1978:206).

Following this line of feminine symbolism, one can observe the feminine elements within the scope of Saturnalia's symbolism: it was the celebration of farces, masks and masquerade, thus a celebration of identity changes and of multiple identities. Joan Riviere illustrates the exclusively feminine connotations of the mask and of the masquerade in her famous article "Womanliness as a Masquerade" (<http://www.ncf.edu/hassold...>):

womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask (...) What is *das ewig Weibliche*? The conception of womanliness as a mask, behind which man suspects some hidden danger.

Thus the (feminine) mask and the (feminine) masquerade are naturally attached to chaos, identity chaos and to social status chaos - feminine elements by excellence (Cixous 1989:91; Gilbert and Gubar 1984: 53). The *quid-pro-quo* symbol follows almost naturally, as during this festival social roles were completely reversed in a chaotic (feminine) manner: slaves and masters switched places in order to feel the downsides of each others' social roles. Thus identities were (symbolically) destabilised, dissolved, approaching the border-line of total havoc and chaos, a traditionally feminine hypostasis (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1995b:193).

Cunningham perfectly mirrors these feminine symbols in his novel. He emphasises his central characters, as compared to their Woolfian origins, as postmodern characters that are able to empower themselves and to shed their old masks (i.e. gender and socio-moral roles) and construct themselves

a new identity and a happier condition. The foremost examples are Laura Brown, Clarissa Vaughan and Sally or Richard. Also, Cunningham accentuates throughout his novel the evolution of his own characters from their Woolfian origin-characters, insofar as he highlights the new, liberated identities that his characters receive, compared to the 1920s restricted social code of the Woolfian characters.

During the days of Saturnalia, in order to further increase chaos (chaos, a feminine element in itself), moral norms were abandoned (a feminine element again) and moral restrictions were lessened. Moreover, sexual etiquette was ignored. Thus Saturnalia takes further feminine connotations, namely moral chaos and divergence from moral norms, oversexuality, debauchery and profligacy, again negative, feminine aspects. As an example of socio-moral chaos and abandonment of the norms (feminine attributes), gambling was condoned in anyone, even in slaves, unlike the rest of the year, so that during these days social, financial, moral and sexual chaos reined more strongly than during the rest of the year (http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/calendar/saturnalia.html).

Cunningham underlines all the above-mentioned feminine connotations of Saturnalia, as they become pivotal tropes in his 'Saturday-marked' plot. Firstly, his characters subvert the mainstream heteronormative rules and they diverge from the heteronorm. They evolve considerably on their trajectory of self-liberation, in order to substitute the heteronormative pattern with the homoerotic one, thus deconstructing the mainstream patriarchal moral code. Especially by Clarissa's and Laura's standard, moral restrictions are visibly lessened, while the sexual etiquette of the Woolfian 1920s is completely ignored. Cunningham's characters have come a long

way from the Woolfian etiquette, they have the liberty to enjoy any kind of sexual orientation (Clarissa, Sally or Richard), to live together with any partner or as many partners as they like (Richard), to enjoy the freedom of choosing to substitute the father figure with a numbered vial (Clarissa's *in vitro* fertilisation), to divorce and to abandon the family (Laura) or to allow the androgynous seed to blossom in homoerotic kisses (Virginia and Laura).

Secondly, in Cunningham's novel, the upheaval of the mainstream heteronorm (feminine attribute) plays a central role, the whole novel being based on this pattern of subverting and inverting gender-roles and evolving/changing the Woolfian model of social and sexual norms. Clarissa Dalloway's smothered androgyny and her heteronormative marriage are replaced by a set of symbols which deconstruct patriarchal heteronormativity: Clarissa Vaughan's happy, long term lesbian relationship with Sally, by her bisexuality with Richard Brown, by Richard's long line of gay lovers or by Laura's self liberation through divorce and abandonment of her family. All characters receive a greater liberty and self-empowerment to subvert the mainstream, masculine norm, in contrast to the less liberal *mores* of the Woolfian 1920s.

Lastly, the festival of Saturnalia acquires one further set of feminine attributes: it is also the festival of birth, of Nature's rebirth and procreation, again exclusively feminine elements. Saturnalia marks the day of the Winter Solstice in the Northern Hemisphere. It is on this day that nature's annual cycle of decay and degeneration gently (and almost imperceptibly) switches large portions of its energies to those of the opposite process: regeneration, rebirth, resurrection of life and the creation of new life (<http://homepage.eircom.net/~williamfinnerty/SATURNALIA>).

As a conclusion, Cunningham indeed feminises the concept of Time by shifting the day of his plot from Wednesday to Saturday. Thus he also shifts from the masculine connotation of the former weekday to the more feminine connotations of the latter. Thus he unfolds his entire gallery of feminised personages and feminised literary tropes under the auspices of a feminine Saturday.

References

- Burkitt, J. 1999. *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity and Modernity*. London: Sage
- Chevalier, J. and A. Gheerbrant. 1994. *Dicționar de simboluri. (A Dictionary of Symbols)*.
vol. 1. București: Editura Artemis
- Chevalier, J. and A. Gheerbrant. 1995a. *Dicționar de simboluri. (A Dictionary of Symbols)*.
vol. 2. București: Editura Artemis
- Chevalier, J. and A. Gheerbrant. 1995b. *Dicționar de simboluri. (A Dictionary of Symbols)*.
vol. 3. București: Editura Artemis
- Cixous, H. 1989. "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" in C. Belsey and J. Moore (eds.) *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. New York: Blackwell
- Cixous, H. 1997. "The Laugh of the Medusa" in R. R. Warhol and D. P. Herndl (eds.). *Feminisms. An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. London: Macmillan
- Cunningham, M. 1998. *The Hours*. London: Clays Ltd.
- Daly, M. 1995. *Gyn/Ecology. The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Aylesbury: BPC Paperbacks
- Felman, S. 1989. "Woman and Madness: The Critical Phallacy" in C. Belsey and J. Moore (eds.) *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. New York: Blackwell
- Gilbert, S. and S. M. Gubar. 1984. "Infection in the Sentence: The Women Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship" in *Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press
- Grosz, E. 1994. "Refiguring Bodies" in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*.

Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press

- Haraway, D. 2004. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in S. Harding (ed.). *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge
- hooks, b. 2004. "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" in S. Harding (ed.). *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge
- Irigaray, L. 1981. "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" in M. Whitford (ed.). *The Irigaray Reader*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell
- Kristeva, J. 1986. "A Question of Subjectivity. An Interview" in *Women's Review*, no. 12,
- Kristeva, J. 1989. "Women's Time" in C. Belsey and J. Moore (eds.) *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. New York: Blackwell
- Lăzărescu, G. 1979. *Dicționar de mitologie. (Dictionary of Mythology)*. București: Editura Ion Creangă
- Longino, H. 1993. "Subjects, Power and Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophies of Science" in L. Alcoff and E. Potter (eds.). *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York and London: Routledge
- Moi, T. "Feminist, Female, Feminine" in C. Belsey and J. Moore (eds.) *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. New York: Blackwell
- Showalter, E. 1985. *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*. London: Virago
- Showalter, E. 1998. *Hystories. Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*. London: Picador
- Macmillan
- Steinem, G. 1995. *Moving Beyond Words*. London: Bloomsbury
- Woolf, V. 1968. [1925]. *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Chatto and Windus
- Yegenoglu, M. 1998. *Colonial Fantasies. Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Web-references

Cunningham, M. "The years: as this month's hot Oscar contender, the hours, shows,

Virginia Woolf is still nailing life's moments better than anyone. Here, writer Michael Cunningham tells why", April 2003 available at:
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1285/is_/ai_99165059 [2008, 1 June]

Cunningham, M. *USA TODAY Book Club: Michael Cunningham*, "Interact with people in the news" in USATODAY.com, 01.21.2005 available at:
http://www.usatoday.com/community/chat_03/2003-03-20-cunningham.htm

Cunningham, M interviewed by Michael March, *Prague Writers' Festival*, The Prague Municipal Library, Prague, The Czech Republic, 16. 12. 2006,
available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ya7m35nSko>

Guerber, H. A. *Myths of Northern Lands*, American Book Company: New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, 1895 available at:
<http://www.vaidilute.com/books/guerber/guerber-word.zip>

Riviere, J. "Womanliness As a Masquerade", first published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis (IJPA)*, vol. 10, 1929, available
http://www.ncf.edu/hassold/WomenArtists/riviere_womanliness_as_masquerade.htm
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wednesday>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_Hunt
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn_%28mythology%29
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opalia>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ops>
The American Heritage Dictionary [online] available at:
<http://www.bartleby.com/61/48/J0084800.html>.

THE PUBLIC –PRIVATE DIVIDE

REMINA SIMA

“Millennium” High School, Timișoara

Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s opposed the unequal division of roles between men and women. The idea that motherhood and housekeeping were preeminently a woman’s destiny encountered opposition. Women who had other ambitions, who wanted to devote their lives to politics, business, art or science were considered to be unnatural. Women’s history has contributed immensely to the political critique of this view of women’s role by historicizing this specific division of labor. Many different studies have shown that historically, the housewife, who exclusively took care of her house and children, was the exception rather than the rule.

Research on the lives of women in the revolutionary movements of the 19th century has brought out the fact that in every historical period and society, women accomplished considerable tasks beyond those of caring for a family. It has been shown that housekeeping is anything but a static concept. As R. Buikema has stated, in pre- industrial societies housekeeping involved, besides the care of a house, husband and children, making clothes and implements, taking products to the market and the supervision of the household goods. But even if factory work came to conquer 19th century Europe and America, it seldom proved to be the

preserve of men. Women contributed to industrialization with their cheap labor.

The history of the unequal division of labor by gender has been related to the distinction between the public and the public sphere. According to R. Buikema, by historicizing this distinction, women historians have shown that it has been valid only in specific times and places; moreover women's history has revealed this distinction to be a hierarchical opposition. The author states that through industrialization women lost their traditional power over the production of goods. The status of women in agrarian societies derived from their ability to spin and weave, from their skill in making candles and soap for example, and from their knowledge of medicinal herbs, but it disappeared when factories took over these functions. From then on, women became merely consumers who bought clothes, food and medicines using money earned by their menfolk.

The modern nuclear family, as R. Buikema points out, is the result of a separation between the public world of production and the private sphere of consumption and reproduction, the bearing and raising of children. The work that women did in the service of reproduction was unpaid and had lower status than the work by which a man earned bread for his family. According to this interpretation, the division between the public sphere and the public life is a consequence of the capitalist industrialization of Western life. This process marginalised the work of women. On account of the fact that a woman was supposed to have no responsibility as a bread winner, her work outside the house was less well paid.

From this perspective women's role and labour are the product of social and economic factors, not the consequence of a biological tendency. In this context the term 'gender' has been introduced into women's history.

This concept has been used to indicate the social construction of the differences between men and women.

As J. Jaqueline has stated in her *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow; Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present*, the economic explanation of the inequality between the male public sphere and the female private one, is not unproblematic. Under this approach priority was given mainly to the history of the white middle and lower classes in Europe and the United States of America; the distinction between the public and the private sphere was meaningless for black Americans living in slavery. Hard, unpaid work on the plantation was assigned to men and women alike. Marriages between slaves were neither recognized nor respected and there was no question of a sacred private sphere. According to the same author after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery most African-Americans lived in great poverty without any civil rights; the ideal of a family with a housewife and a permanent male bread winner, remained for many an illusion.

B. H. Josine states that historians who have studied pre-industrial societies emphasize that patterns of asymmetry between men and women were not dependent on the advent of Western capitalism. Role divisions, whereby women have specially informal and men formal power date back much further.

‘Public’ and ‘private’ have always been defined and have taken on political meaning in relationship to each other. Aristotle, for example, in defining the public or political arena as the realm where free and equal citizens engage in striving together toward the common good, distinguished it from the private domain which, he argued, was characterized by relationships of inequality, dependence and concern for meeting the

necessities of life. Political philosophy, as he understood it, dealt with the public world of citizenship and equality; relations among unequals, that is, between free men and slaves, men and women, parents and children, were necessary conditions of politics but not properly the concern of political analysis.

Aristotle absorbs woman completely within the *oikos* (household), denies woman any possibility of a public voice or role and precludes the opportunity for female self transformation over time. Aristotle believed that everything and everybody is predetermined. The household constituted a nonpublic sphere within which the female was subsumed and which therefore defined her. Those women, children, slaves, Aristotle distinguishes from free men citizens, are the necessary conditions of the state. Although they are not integral parts in public life as men are, they provide the precondition upon which public life rests. (J. Elshtain 1993:41-53).

Taking into consideration Aristotle's view regarding the public and the private spheres, we could state that women's status was not a serious moral problem for the Greeks. In Antiquity the class or category *woman* was inferior to that of *man*. Women were debarred from citizenship. A citizen meant a man who took part in the public activities. So, the term *citizenship* could not be associated with women at that time. J. Elshtain has said: "Participation by the human person as *actus humanus*, ideally gives individuals the possibility to discover their own potentialities combined with moral responsibility for a wider human network, a responsibility inseparable from speech as discourse, which aims at shared purposes" (1993:54). Unless women are allowed to cross the boundaries of their

household, how can they assume responsibility outside it, and how can they discover the potentialities they have?

J. J. Rousseau, an inexhaustibly rich thinker, stated: “there can be no patriotism without liberty, no liberty without virtue, no virtue without citizens; create citizens and you have everything you need; without them you will have nothing but debased slaves from the ruler of the state downwards” (quoted in J. Elshtain 1993:147). Taking into account the fact that Rousseau established rigid barriers between the two sexes, it is clear that he also associates the word *citizen* with men. For him, women represented nature and men reason. Exchanging roles could lead to losing identity. Men, the representatives of public area, should have access to the private one as well, whereas women are confined to the private sphere without the possibility to discover their potentialities outside it. Rousseau’s chief hope for attaining a balance of public and private virtue lay in education. He devised different educational standards for his Emile and Sophie. For him boys have to train for citizenship and girls have to prepare for their roles as virtuous and noble wives. The education of Emile and Sophie is designed to equip them for the diverse purposes and obligations in life, which their biology does not dictate but to which it contributes. It is Rousseau’s view that divergences in the roles and responsibilities of males and females had a basis in the human bio-socio constitution and evolution. He believed that civil authority did not derive from familial authority, but instead that the authority of the familial head derived its principal force from the institutions of civil society. Rousseau argued that sex distinctions originate in nature prior to the pressures of civilization. Emile and Sophie’s education is built on a biological base; it is anchored in centuries of historic tradition. It is seen by Rousseau as the best means to preserve the public and

private spheres alike. He declared that a woman should not even for one moment feel independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural status of being a sweet companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax.

Women's resistance has often taken the shape of struggle over the restrictive boundaries set between public and private. In the United States of America such efforts included the antislavery movement, efforts at stopping domestic violence and welfare mother rights movements.

'Public' and 'private' are contested, highly political, terms. Not only is the line of demarcation between them socially, juridically and politically constructed, but determinations of what is public and private are significantly influenced by gender, race and class. Many of those who have addressed issues of privacy have rightly pointed out how, by relegating women to the private domain, they were excluded from the public world of political participation. Nevertheless, to think of either 'public' or 'private' as fixed categories, is misguided. There is no typology or set of procedures that will allow us to draw a line between the two spheres that will be valid for all times and circumstances.

References

- Buikema, R. 1995. *Women's Studies and Culture-A Feminist Introduction*. London: Zed Books, Ltd.
- Elshtain, J.B. 1993. *Public Man, Private Woman. Women in Social and Political Thought*. New Jersey: University Press
- Jacqueline, J. 1985. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow, Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present*. New York: Basic Books
- Josine, B. H. 1995. *The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth*. Leiden: Brill

Women Writers Subvert the Canon

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN AND THE *QUERELLE DE LA ROSE*

REGHINA DASCĂL

University of the West, Timișoara

“At long last the women’s issue had come to be: a woman had raised her voice.” (Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Including Women*, 1992)

Christine de Pizan has won her central place in the roll of honour of female authors not merely because she gained wide recognition in her own time but also because modern scholars have hailed her as the first woman to have attacked the medieval tradition of clerical misogyny for its portrayal of the female sex as intrinsically sinful and immoral.

Le Roman de la Rose was immensely popular in France at the turn of the fifteenth century both in the circles of the royal and ducal courts and in the circles of the chancellery and the University, and it was Christine de Pizan, society poet and widow of a secretary to the king, who brought the discussions of this romance in these two settings into contact with each other. Her merits have been fiercely contested on the grounds of her alleged social conservatism and moralistic stance and for her failure to advocate

reform of the social order or to demand equal rights for women (Delany 1990:88–103).

Yet, as Rosalind Brown-Grant warns us in her *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading beyond Gender* (1999:2), some modern scholars' arguments choose to ignore her original cultural context and judge her by criteria which are fundamentally anachronistic. In approaching Christine de Pizan one needs to have recourse to what I would like to call an 'empathetic', 'hospitable' phenomenology, an interpretive methodology that allows us to feed into the picture not only erudite, objective, scholarly knowledge but also an intense imaginative and emotional 'translation' of her world. Her context, her culture, her perception of authorial intent, responsibility and mission were not by any means the same as ours. Her choice of literary and rhetorical strategies with which to counter misogyny was circumscribed by a culture profoundly different from our own.

It is because of the fallacy of anachronism that so many accusations of social conservatism have been directed against Christine's literary legacy. In common with her male contemporaries, Christine saw her role as author as principally that of a teacher or advisor whose task was to provide her readers with much-needed lessons in ethics and morality. It is this emphasis on ethics, on her didactic role, that confers upon her works in defence of women a far greater unity than has often previously been thought.

Christine's feminism is predicated on a broader moral vision and it is this vision that informs her passionate pleas, found throughout her *City*, for virtue to be construed in the female gender; she refuses to see virtue as an exclusively male preserve and ultimately she seeks to prove that both sexes are capable of pursuing the universal goal of moral self-edification

(Brown-Grant 1999:3). It is only by hypostasising her work culturally that we will be able to understand and examine her peculiar interaction with the historical, philosophical and theological sources traditionally cited by anti-feminist writers and to appreciate how she managed to employ and harness these sources to novel and even subversive purposes of her own.

My purpose in the following pages is to analyse Christine's motives for launching a public debate on the defamation of women; to contextualize the debate socially, politically and culturally; and to unveil the gendered dimensions of the rhetorical strategies and manipulations of the debate.

The texts of the *Debate* were written during a key period in Christine's literary production which marks the transition between her early lyric poetry, written for the amusement of the Valois court, and her later political and pious works, composed in response to particular events such as the struggle between Armagnacs and Burgundians or the battle of Agincourt. The 'querelle de la Rose' (1401–2) gives us an opportunity to examine the theoretical underpinning of Christine's attack on anti-feminism, her vehement criticism of the negative representations of women and love and how this feeds into her defence of women in her other works. Christine was the key person involved in initiating, maintaining the progress of and collating the documents of the *Debate of the Rose* in which she constructs the moral foundation of her critique of misogyny, which she condemns both as a doctrine and as a literary practice. It is to this assumed role of moral edification that Christine's 'mirrors' for princes and courtiers can be related, as can her pragmatic advice to ladies and princesses. What gave her a firm foundation on which to build her defence of women was precisely her conviction that the two sexes were equal morally, if not socially or

politically (Brown-Grant 1999:6). It was this overarching aim that determined her concern with the issue of women's moral representation in literature, an issue that she was to address most directly in the *querelle de la Rose*.

We can only understand Christine's extreme boldness in engaging critically with Jean de Meun's masterpiece if we assess the general tone of the reception of his work at this period. Considered to be a work of great vision, of infinite erudition and literary value, *Le Roman de la Rose* was by the beginning of the 15th century a unanimously acclaimed canonical writing, a text that enjoyed great authority (see Fleming 1964; Hill 1991; Huot 1993).

Guillaume de Lorris, who wrote the first 4,000 lines of the *Roman* in around 1235, left his poem unfinished. He was followed by Jean de Meun, who completed the *Roman* between 1275 and 1280 by adding some 17,000 lines to it. Lorris's part of the work is entirely dependent upon the tradition of courtly love, complete with delicate metaphors and allegorical figures. In his dream vision the poet's love for the young woman, symbolized as a rosebud in a garden representative of courtly life, is thwarted by allegories of sexual morality which prevent the lover from touching his beloved; the poem ends abruptly when Jealousy locks Rose in a tower in order to secure her from the Lover's advances.

Meun's dream allegory completely alters the spirit of the poem, which now becomes a vehicle to convey a wealth of information about medieval society, a true *mappa mundi*. Despite its extreme prolixity and its endless excursions and digressions the poem was extremely popular and influential in France and also in England, where Geoffrey Chaucer translated about one-third of it. Jean de Meun wrote an *apologia* for the

crudeness of the poem in which he protests that he is only trying to teach the Art of Love, as did Ovid. He does not mean to contradict Church teaching, and expresses his willingness to make changes to the already completed and published poem in order to take account of criticism from the Church (ll. 15133-15302).

Few works have been able to equal the popularity and renown of the famous/infamous *Romance of the Rose* and the sheer existence of 300 manuscripts of the work bears witness to its canonical nature. As I have shown in my book on Christine de Pizan (Dascăl 2008: 89-131) the *Rose* was almost unanimously hailed as the literary masterpiece of the age, the ultimate authority in matters of courtly love, unsurpassed in its depiction of the art of love and the relation between the sexes, with a young man's initiation into the secrets of womankind, desire and frustration leading to the climax of the metaphorical conquest - the plucking of the rose. The work was also venerated for what Duby (particularly in *The Masculine Middle Ages*) would later call its encyclopaedic, panoramic character, for it represented not only an initiation into the art of love but also an intellectual initiation, a quest for knowledge - vast realms of knowledge that span the animal, vegetal and mineral worlds and lead towards a 'mappa mundi ideal' (Solterer 1999:114).

In the volume in which she documents and contextualises the *Debate over the Rose* and the reception of the *Roman* from 1340 to 1411, Christine McWebb mentions *opusculum gallicum* by Jean de Montreuil, a work which is directly or indirectly referred to by the participants in the debate but that is unfortunately lost. Jean de Montreuil was a lawyer working in the chancellery of Charles VI, a royal bureaucrat who prided himself on his literary knowledge and took Petrarch as his literary model. A

combination of civic activism and scholarship impelled him to write a treatise in praise of Meun's *Rose*. He did so out of pride and boldness, challenging Petrarch's contention that there were no real poets or orators outside Italy, and we know that his work was meant as a laudatory treatise on the *Roman*. The seminal text of the *Roman* stirred up a controversy that went far beyond the famous debate, i.e. the epistolary exchange which I am discussing here. The polemic as a whole lasted far longer, ranged more widely and involved many other contemporaries or near-contemporaries of Christine and her interlocutors (McWebb 2007, Preface: xiii).

In 1399-1400 Christine composed *The Moral Teachings Given by Christine to her Son* for her son Jean. In one of the 113 moral dicta that make up the treatise she says: "If you wish to live well and chastely,/ Do not read the *Book of the Rose*,/ Nor Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*/ Which is an example that incites reproach." (93).

Among the pre-*Debate* texts we should mention Christine's *The Love Debate*, a poem of over 2000 lines dedicated to Louis I, Duke of Orleans, the younger brother of Charles VI, who is called upon to serve as arbiter in a discussion of courtly love presented before him. Christine, two other ladies and a squire are debating the dangers of foolish love and the author/narrator is forced to intervene when they fail to reach a consensus and thus an outsider is invited to mediate. The golden days of courtly love are recalled: "And if in former times they were dying and languishing/ And even the happiest endured/any hurtful pains, [...] I think that now the pains are small [...] The *Roman de la Rose* spoke of them well/ At length, and detailed/ Such a love as you disclosed. [...] In the chapter of Reason, she greatly threatens/ The Foolish Lover who is entangled in such love,/ And

she says all too clearly that it is not worth much/ [...] and she tells of the path/ To use to escape it” (2007:95-101).

Christine first took issue with the text in some earlier poetic works in 1399, *Epistle to the God of Love* (see Dascăl 2008:89-131)), and indirectly in 1400 in the *Letter to Othéa*. However, it was only in 1401 that she became involved in a highly polemical exchange of letters with some notable intellectual figures of her day over the question of the *Rose*. This exchange, generally referred to as the ‘*querelle de la Rose*’, ultimately turned out to be the first campaign in a broader tradition of literary debates on women, known as the ‘*querelle des femmes*’, which continued into the Renaissance and certainly even later (Kelly 1984).

The ‘*querelle de la Rose*’ itself went through two distinct phases, the first beginning with a treatise written in 1401 in favour of the *Rose* by Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lille, and the second being initiated in 1402 by Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, who wrote a dream-vision in which the author of the *Rose* is indicted before the court of Christianity by the allegorical figure of Lady Eloquence, acting as Gerson’s mouthpiece. Christine’s own intervention was limited, in the first phase, to a critical reply to Jean de Montreuil’s original treatise and a sharp response to Gontier Col, First Secretary and Notary to King Charles VI, who was brought in by his friend de Montreuil to bolster the latter’s case. In the second phase, Christine’s role was to offer a lengthy condemnation of the views of Gontier’s brother, Pierre, Canon of Paris and Tournay, who had also been asked by Jean de Montreuil to intervene in the affair to defend the *Rose* against the attacks of both Christine and Gerson.

At the end of each of these two phases it was Christine who published the documents in the form of dossiers, although in both cases her

opponents' views were partially omitted. Modern scholars have therefore had to reconstruct the complete collection of documents that make up the 'querelle' by using manuscripts which contain the material left out by Christine, though Jean de Montreuil's original treatise, *opusculum gallicum*, has never been recovered.

There have been a number of occasions in its recent history when *querelle* scholarship has been in danger of turning it into a *querelle de Christine* (Brown-Grant 1999:9) rather than remaining an analysis of the 'querelle' documents themselves. Despite the attempts of its first translators into modern English - Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane - to defend Christine against patristic attack, scholars have often taken issue with Christine's alleged retrograde views with regard to authorial responsibility; they have recoiled from her generally censorious attitude regarding questions of free love, seduction, and gender relations and have deplored her failure to understand the author's delegation of moral responsibility to his characters for putting forward misogynist views. Marxist critic Sheila Delany has more recently condemned Christine's role in the 'querelle' as part of a broader attack on her political conservatism. In addition to bringing the familiar charge of puritanism, Delany inveighs against Christine's insistence that authors should be held fully responsible for the views expressed in their texts and that Jean de Meun's radical view of unmarried love, his slandering of the female sex and his unwillingness to admit the existence of female virtue should be condemned.

David F. Hult, in his "Words and Deeds: Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* and the Hermeneutics of Censorship" (1997:345-66), has gone so far as to liken Christine's stance as literary censor to that of contemporary anti-pornography campaigners such as Catherine MacKinnon

and Andrea Dworkin. What other prominent medieval scholars have offered as counter-arguments may be summed up as the necessary attribution of all such attitudes to Christine's ethical outlook that constitutes the foundation of her defence of women. It is Christine's belief that Jean de Meun's representations of love as conquest and his projection of women as passive victims and war booty do nothing but strengthen a scholarly tradition of anti-feminism that has existed for a whole century, the ultimate outcome of his work being 'disharmony between the sexes' leading to 'immoral and un-Christian behaviour'.

Besides this, it is interesting to examine how in the 'querelle de la *Rose*' Christine relates Jean de Meun's misogynist doctrine to his 'immoral literary practice' and how this can be instrumental to understanding not only her own position on misogyny in later texts such as the *City*, but also the theoretical and rhetorical underpinning of her own literary practice as a moral writer (Brownlee 1992: 243–261).

Throughout the 'querelle' Christine's strategy is one of shifting the ground of the debate to such a degree as to lay bare the way in which Jean de Meun's defenders have been affected in their language and overall behaviour by the 'poisonous' influence of the text under discussion. The *Debate* becomes, in her hands, a battlefield for the war of the sexes or the *querelle des femmes*, a rhetorical 'battle', with Christine drawing a parallel between the *Debate* and the agonistic trope of the *Rose* – the attacking Amant and the defensive Rose. Thus Christine turns the terms of the *Debate* into a forum that allows her to take issue with and refute both the misogynist views propounded in the *Rose* and those of Meun's defenders, particularly Pierre Col, whom she at times accuses of even outdoing his master in denigrating women.

In her letters to Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col, Christine sets out her objections to the views on women presented by various characters in the *Rose*. Later, in a longer reply to Pierre Col, Christine briefly reiterates these views but expounds more fully on the dangerous consequences of misogynist thought for love between man and woman.

For Christine, representations of women on the one hand and of love relations between the sexes on the other are inextricably linked, as they both pose important moral questions. It is no doubt with this goal in mind that she dedicated her first dossier of documents to Queen Isabeau of Bavaria. The frontispiece of British Library Manuscript Harley 4431 depicts the scene where Christine, in a humble pose, offers her manuscript to the queen. Christine explains that she has been moved to take a stand against “dishonourable opinions and where I defend the honour and praise of women which many clerics and others make a point of diminishing in their works; this ought not to be tolerated, nor is it sustainable” (McWebb 2007:109). Because of the inextricable link just mentioned, Christine believes that Jean’s negative conception of the female sex seeps through into his concept of love, contaminating it and ultimately leading to the moral perdition of both sexes (Brown-Grant 1999:11).

Badel writes of a decisive initiative taken by Christine de Pizan, without whose agency no *querelle* would have developed at all. On February 1 1402, Christine invited the queen of France to adjudicate in matters concerning the exchange of letters between herself and the royal secretaries Jean de Montreuil, provost of Lille, and Gontier Col. This transformed a private epistolary duel into a public affair with the whole Court to witness and judge (1980:411).

What were the motives underlying Christine's action? Why should the *Rose* become the subject of a public debate extending beyond purely academic and courtly milieus to the generality of Parisian society?

As she reads the words put into the mouths of the two female characters, Reason and the Duenna, Christine is shocked and repelled by the rude language of the former, "who calls the secret parts plainly by their names" (2007:121), and the dangerous, specious exhortations to young women spoken by the latter: "who could possibly find anything but specious advice in them, full of insults and baseness?" (123)

As might have been expected, Christine reserves most of her criticisms for the misogynist tirades of the Jealous Husband and Genius. She lashes out sarcastically against the supposed practical wisdom of the Jealous Husband's teachings, his "deceits, hypocrisies and lies that occur in marriage or any other state which can be learned from this treatise" (123), and in the end dismisses them as the musings of a character of limited authority in the text who merely functions as a mouthpiece for misogynous propaganda.

Genius, on the other hand, is a figure of authority in the *Rose* and as such he becomes the target of more acerbic attacks by Christine: "how can his excessive, impetuous and false accusations, insults and defamation of women – whom he accuses of several great vices and perverse habits – possibly be valid and purposeful? His appetite for such statements and examples seems insatiable" (125).

One of her strongest points, and an opportunity for her to revel in exposing the illogical and paradoxical nature of her opponents' arguments, is her attack on Genius' infamous exhortation "Flee! Flee! Flee from the venomous serpent" (Christine will reverse this, ironically, at the end of the

City: “Oh, my ladies, flee, flee, flee the foolish love they urge on you” (1998:256)) which clashes with his exhorting the male to relentlessly pursue the female for procreative purposes: “this is a flagrant contradiction, to command one to flee from that which one is supposed to follow and follow that from which he wishes one to flee. Since women are so perverse, he should command men not to approach them at all, because one should always avoid the risk of encountering misfortune” (2007:125). Christine thus proves Genius’ logic to be entirely fallacious and inconsistent and so disqualifies him from holding any position of moral authority. She also stresses his lack of any experience in the field he chooses to moralise about: “moreover, he speaks unnecessarily and defamingly of married women who terribly betray their husbands, though he cannot know about the married state from experience, and thus can only speak about it in general terms. What good does this do? And what can come of this?” (127) Moreover, she rhetorically turns on its head his other argument that women cannot be trusted to keep a secret, making light of any consequences that might befall men as a result of such action: “I ask all those who believe that this is true to tell me when they have seen a man accused or killed or hanged or reprimanded in the streets due to the indiscretion of his wife” (127).

Christine draws the strands of Genius’ misogynist logic together simply to conclude that he consistently shifts all responsibility for men’s actions on to women. Her only other - ironical - conclusion is that possibly all men’s suffering has come about because men have been pursued and harassed by women: “will they seek you out in your place of lodging, pleading with you or taking you by force? It would be nice to know how it is that they deceive you” (127).

This is of course an appropriate place for Christine to condemn the indignity of misogynist generalizations - one of the most insidious aspects of misogynist thought - and by the large number of counter-examples of virtuous married women that she invokes in defence of her argument she anticipates the broader scope of her *City*. As later in the *City*, examples are gleaned from the Scriptures (“the lives of Sarah, Rebecca, Esther, Judith”) and from the ancient world and also from recent French history (“the holy and pious Queen Jeanne, Queen Blanche, the Duchess of Orleans”) and even contemporary society (“The Duchess of Anjou, now Queen of Sicily”). In addition, with her alertness to the representation of various social strata, she includes “many courageous bourgeois ladies such as my Lady of Fete, wife of Seigneur Pierre de Caron [...] and others too numerous to mention here” (2007:129).

On a more general, ontological level such constant attacks on women do nothing but set them apart in the human realm as lesser humans with a lower ontological status, a “race apart from men” (Rogers 1966:17). Thus in its overall message Jean de Meun’s *Rose* is not dissimilar to Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, since they both uphold a common conception of women and they both recommend having recourse to aggressive, warlike methods for conquering the ‘wild’ female sex: “Who are they? Are they serpents, wolves, lions, dragons, vipers or ravening, devouring beasts and enemies of humans, that there must be an art to deceiving and conquering them? Then read the *Art*: learn to betray. Take them with force! Deceive them! Slander them! Attack this castle!” (2007:175). The teratological references in Christine’s text clearly recall Genius’ exhortation to men to flee venomous women as if they were snakes, but she also underlines references to their ontological separation and exclusion from humanity, the way they are cast

as “enemies of humans” (reminding one of Edmund Burke’s horror at having people think of a queen in terms of a mere woman since, as he explains, “a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order” in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* of 1789 (2000:119)), with human nature apparently being appropriated as the sole perquisite of men. Her points clearly lead the reader towards her chosen battleground, where she will amply document her argument in favour of the similarity of male and female nature: “And, by God, they are your mothers, sisters, daughters, wives and friends. *They are you and you are they*” (175, my emphasis).

For Christine, Jean de Meun’s opinion of women as ‘serpents, wolves, lions etc.’ forms the basis of his somewhat contradictory view of love. We have a twofold impulse at work here: the female being presented as both a desirable object in its otherness and exoticism but at the same time as a source of fear and dread. To prove how immoral and un-Christian this vision is, Christine will later turn to the harmful proverbial words uttered by Reason that “in amorous war [...] it is better to deceive than to be deceived” (2007:157). As a means to an end, the practice of deception is, as she points out, contrary to Christian precepts, and the words are particularly abhorrent in the mouth of Reason who for Christine is the highest authority, guide and advisor in her defence of women (as the allegorical figure of Lady Reason attests in her *City*, the *Treasure* and in *The Path of Long Study*): “You can say with certainty that Reason, daughter of God, never pronounced such a thing” (169). In the second stage of the ‘querelle’, she adds extra weight to this argument by illustrating it with the story of Troy, an example she had previously employed in *Letter to the God of Love* and in *Othéa* to the end of proving the disastrous effects of deception on a historical scale.

Christine remains permanently aware of her role of moral reformer and does not waver in her efforts to deploy examples of virtuous women to counter misogynist generalisations and to suggest alternative forms of love between men and women in which deception would play no part. Invoking the example of her own son, Christine declares that she would prefer him to love one good woman than to sin by deceiving several: “I have only one son, may God protect him; I would prefer him to fall in love - following the good sense which one hopes God gave him and which sensible men have - with a well brought up and wise woman who loves honour [...] than to be capable of deceiving all or many women” (159). The key words here are the lover’s good sense, his reason, and his choice of a wise and virtuous lady, since for Christine love ought to be based on honour, respect and, above all, the desire for a worthy object: “I tell you that in order to love well, it is not at all necessary to be foolish, nor to lose one’s sense, time etc” (161). It is up to the lover to find an honourable woman to love rather than blaming all women should one of them fail to meet his expectations. Christine’s view, which firmly refutes the misogynist tendency to lay responsibility for male chastity on women, is fundamental for her defence of the female sex, particularly in the *Othéa*, where this teaching is delivered to the princely reader (Brown-Grant 1999:15).

The lover, according to Christine, can be ennobled by his love, and here she pays ample tribute to her allegiance to the ideal of courtly love, an ideal that she had been staunchly supporting all her life. A chivalrous attitude, loyalty, honour and civility are the lover’s goal, not simply sexual gratification. In this way the lover has the option of moral Christian conduct: “many have loved loyally and well who have never bedded them nor deceived them, nor were deceived, and whose chief intention was to

increase the worth of their own morals and it is thanks to this kind of love that they have become noble and renowned, and even in their old age they praise God for having been in love” (McWebb 2007:161). Not only does she subvert the logic of Reason’s exhortation to deception in love, but she also condemns in fiery words Genius’ sermon that proclaims the desired end of love to be sexual intercourse in the interests of the perpetuation of the species. For Christine, Genius not only commits the sacrilege of expressing the sacred (“he promises paradise”; “paradise and the joys that can be found there”) in terms of the profane (“Nature’s works” (125)) but even appears to go so far as to propound lust as a virtue for both man and woman. She counters his argument first with the orthodox Augustinian notion that marriage is the only form of relationship in which sexual relations can be sanctioned: “to remedy the flaw you (trying to praise marriage and show that this was de Meun’s view) quote Augustine: ‘He who is without a wife thinks of divine things in order to please God but one ‘who is joined in marriage thinks of worldly things’”. Further on, she states that Genius’ exhortation may produce not only anti-Christian effects, since it will lead to revulsion towards the married state on the part of men, but also anti-social consequences, by destroying men’s wish to procreate within marriage: “yet he so excessively insults married life, in saying that there is so much strife in it, that there are not many who had enough will not to withdraw from marriage” (183).

Christine is also extremely skilful at turning the tables against Meun’s defenders who think they have a right to feel unfairly criticized by a disgruntled female reader of the *Rose*. By dedicating the first dossier of documents to Queen Isabeau and Guillaume de Tignonville, the provost of Paris, she aims at creating precisely the opposite impression - a strategy that

she very frequently deployed: “From being a debate centring on the defence of the *Rose*, the ‘querelle’ becomes the site of an energetic battle in defence of the female sex, an important reversal brought about by Christine herself” (Brown-Grant 1999:17). In her dedications, Christine constructs herself as the weaker, maligned party, the trope of the “weak woman” being employed here once again to add weight (in the reader’s perception) to the clout of her male opponents. However, her case once stated she expresses a newfound confidence in her right to champion the cause of women, convinced as she is of the justness of the cause and the value of her knowledge.

Christine’s rhetorical conjuring tricks encourage the reader to see the analogy which she herself has established between her position in the *Debate* and that of women in the *Rose*: both are beleaguered and in need of defence from misogynist attack. Similarly, her adversaries’ arguments are conflated with those of the male characters in the *Rose*: “Paradoxically, however, whilst accusing them of verbal sleight-of-hand in their dealings with her, she proves herself to be no mean manipulator of rhetorical arguments in her attempt to turn the debate round to the questions which are of principal importance to her” (Brown-Grant 1999:20).

The field of battle of this ‘verbal jousting’ was principally occupied by Christine and by Pierre Col, as Jean de Montreuil refused to reply to Christine directly and Gontier Col contented himself with demanding in an inquisitorial manner that she retract her statements on the *Rose*. His own tropes of humility aim at demeaning his female opponent: he claims to be unworthy to figure among Jean’s greatest champions, yet he feels emboldened by the weakness of Christine’s arguments and thus his refutation of her poses no difficulty.

The imagery of warfare features most prominently in Pierre Col's defence of the *Rose* at the point where he is criticising the logic of Christine's condemnation of Reason's proverb "it is better to deceive than to be deceived". On the question of correct male behaviour he makes no bones about his own opinions in matters of sexual politics - what he calls 'the war of love' - "In addition, I say that I would prefer - that is, it would cause me less pain to pretend that I loved you in order to enjoy your body than it would to waste my learning, 'sense, time, soul, body, and reputation' over it (as is written)" (2007:323) and thus he draws a parallel between the Lover's sexual conquest and his own rhetorical prowess, both of which show the woman to be an unworthy and weak opponent.

Yet Christine stands firm and refuses to be outwitted by Pierre's sophistries: they only serve to illustrate the influence of the perniciously misogynist teachings of the *Rose* on Meun's disciples and its generally harmful effects on the male reader. Moreover, she is able to produce further evidence of the methods of deception and brutal assault that her adversaries have borrowed from their master: "later you make the claim that in his book de Meun did not only borrow from Ovid's *Art of Love* but also from many other authors. Hence your reasoning itself proves that de Meun addresses the assailants, as did Ovid from whom he borrowed. Yet you say that 'the more he recounts the many ways of attack, the more he teaches the guards of the castle to defend themselves.' Indeed, this would be like saying that if someone attacked you with the intent of killing you (may God protect you), he would be teaching you how you should defend yourself!" (173-175). She therefore rebukes Pierre for his bad faith in choosing to expend so much effort in employing his rhetorical skills against her writings when many

other readers, more authoritative and worthy than herself, share her opinion of the dangers of Jean's work.

At the end of her reply to Jean de Montreuil's treatise, Christine tries to pre-empt a misogynist backlash against her on the part of her opponents: "I should not be accused of madness, arrogance or presumptuousness in that I, a woman, dared to criticize such a skilled author and to diminish the praise of his work, when he alone dared to defame and to insult, without exception, an entire sex" (2007:133). In this way she not only attempts to parry vilifying attacks on her words but also to justify her intervention in the *Debate*, as a woman, against a male author who had, in her opinion, slandered and maligned an entire sex. Christine never tires of implying in her replies to Gontier and Pierre Col that their treatment of both her and women in general reproduces much of Jean's own rhetoric of misogyny.

Christine responds with boldness to the charges laid against her by the Col brothers. She chastises Gontier for stereotyping her as an irrational, 'passionate' woman, which she rebuts as a gross generalization targeted at her sex "because I am a woman", but at the same time she finds him guilty of lack of moderation and rational conduct - 'impatience' conducive to 'poignant errors' (137). Moreover, she re-affirms the desirability of her female standpoint, reinforced by the example of so many virtuous women (again anticipating the *City*), and thus more convincingly vilifies his contempt of female *logos*: "If in fact you so despise my arguments for my lack of intelligence (which you attribute to the fact that "I am a woman", etc), know that I consider precisely that point an insult to the memory of all noble women, past and present, educated in all virtues, and deserving of praise. *I would rather be compared to them than to receive all the wealth of*

this earth” (2007:137, my emphasis). It is this last sentence in particular that best illustrates Christine’s efforts to reinvest femininity with value and worth; it is this rational capacity, the rational validity of their discourse, that she asserts so vigorously and insistently here: a common human characteristic that she sees women as partaking of, a rational capacity which enables them to adopt virtuous forms of behaviour, to rule and to advise. This is the main argument that undergirds her refutation of misogyny both here and in her later texts in defence of women, most notably in the *City*. Thus Christine unequivocally identifies her own stance as being motivated by the moral and rational imperative of the pursuit of virtue.

Secondly, in answer to Gontier and Pierre’s charge of ‘effrontery’ in attacking a male author/authority, a charge predicated on her alleged lack of learning as an unschooled female, Christine underscores once again the criterion of her moral virtuousness. She considers that so long as she is armed with her virtue any attack on her erudition can easily be deflected or rendered powerless, and she therefore turns Pierre’s attack to her own advantage. Christine even thanks him, tongue in cheek, for his backhanded compliment that she sings like the over-enthusiastic crow: “you attribute more praise to me than you should” (2007:187), and retorts ironically with an animal image of her own whose effect is strengthened by the humility *topos* it is based on: “you attack me, who am no stronger than the voice of a little cricket which does not cease flapping its wings and making a lot of noise, which nevertheless can never rival the delightful song of the great noble birds” (185). In so doing, Christine effectively pre-empts the one charge that her opponents can safely lay against her, her lack of formal schooling, something that she herself laments in various works of hers. She then moves on, capitalizing in fact on this acknowledged inferior clerkly

status, and further builds on the image of her diminutive role in the scholarly world by remarking on the effectiveness of the little knife that successfully deflates a big sack by piercing it, as she points out to Gontier: “again, if you absolutely wish to weaken my strong opinion, you should remember that a small knife can rupture a large bag filled with goods” (2007:137), while to Pierre she intimates that “it often happens that a great boil is cured by a small needle” (189). This latter image, as has been pointed out by many scholars, represents the culmination of Christine’s attack on the *Rose*, conceived of here in terms of an infection, a poisonous and dangerous text which has contaminated its disciples with its misogynist doctrine (Ferrante 1988:213–29). It also gives her the opportunity to highlight once again the public benefits of her campaign against the *Rose*, conducted with conviction and taking the great risk of opposing a work that had been sanctioned by the Church: “your argument is unfounded, that the Holy Church – where there have been many noble men since the book’s composition – has for so long tolerated it without reprimand and was waiting for me and others to refute it, because you know that everything ripens at a certain moment and nothing is long in relation to the passing of time” (189). This, to my mind, is a very important point in the *Debate*, since the suggestion that a challenge can be mounted against any authoritative discourse is another characteristic feature of the sapiential or vatic writing that Christine de Pizan seems to have initiated in women’s literature. However when describing the venomous effects of the work on Pierre in particular and when hinting at the way in which his illness might be cured, as almost everywhere else in the texts she contributed to the *Debate*, she invokes the greatest authority of all - that of the Church: “O offended intelligence! O perverted knowledge blinded by one’s will, believing

terrifying venom to bring restoration from death, perverse doctrine to be an example for salvation, bile to be sweet honey, and horrible ugliness to be charming beauty! A simple little woman, with the help of the holy doctrine, is able to criticize your erring ways” (2007:165).

Besides the therapeutic imagery employed, Christine manages to suggest that her attackers’ infected will could be prone to heresy, a strong and risky indictment that is also implied in the words which follow this passage: “flee and avoid the perverse doctrine which could lead you to *damnation*” (165, my emphasis). She also parallels Pierre’s own words to her (“O speech uttered too soon and without counsel from the mouth of a woman” (325) by using invocation and apostrophe, and she specifically employs the corresponding gender marker (“O man”) in order to point out how Pierre should see himself as a male victim of the misogynist deceptions perpetrated by the *Rose* rather than as a willing disciple and ally of Jean de Meun in attacking the female sex: “O man deceived by capricious opinion! Of course I could but will not reply harshly despite your ugly reproaches accusing me of being a person of little renown and devoid of reason” (2007:163).

We see that Christine not only deploys rhetoric to counter her opponents’ criticisms of her ‘presumptuous’ and ‘foolish’ attack on the *Rose* but also suggests ways of ‘curing’ her opponents’ misogynist infection. It is again on moral grounds, in the name of rectitude and justice, that she undertakes the role of the moral instructor, thus transcending her seemingly lacking-in-authority position as a woman reader of lowly intellectual status.

On the other hand, Christine’s ‘flaming’ words (a term used to describe the bouts of insulting banter that regularly break out on the Internet; see Dery 1995) were a reaction in kind to a damaging language

practice that was already in existence. The whole of the *Debate* offers a wealth of instances of inflammatory language in an indefinite struggle where Christine was challenging Jean de Meun's text and its defenders word for word.

As the incendiary language of the *Debate* emphasises the uses to which words are put, we have here an exemplary illustration of the theory of speech acts.

Although we are accustomed to concentrate on the referential, representational capacities of language, i.e. what words say, in the wake of J.L. Austin linguists have focused their attention on the importance of performative functions - *what words do*. Words can incite to action, but they can also be events and deeds. This performative potential of words should not be taken too literally, for a verbal act is not absolutely identical and equal to a physical act. No matter how inflammatory the language, we can still distinguish it from physical assault or the act of being consumed in flames. Although most of us are familiar with Austin's theory, few would have expected that in early fifteenth-century Paris a neologism would emerge that spoke directly to this question of speech acts: *mos actisans* ('activating words'). The phrase was coined by the philosopher-translator Nicole Oresme, someone whom Christine admired and often quoted in her works. Helen Solterer tells us that Oresme invented the term in the course of translating Aristotle's *Ethics* (1995b:356). The collocation was adopted in the *Debate* by Christine de Pizan, seemingly to designate a kind of speech that possesses the force of events, of deeds.

In Christine's rendering of the dynamics of the *Debate*, the final letters boil over with seething fury, even with insults and violent accusations. As Helen Solterer has made very clear, the verbal exchanges

'locking all the opponents into position' suggest the power of aggressive public language in such an affair. The force of Col's and Christine's rhetoric betrays a purpose that goes beyond that of merely winning an argument or eliminating an opponent. After all, as Duby puts it in his *Masculine Middle Ages*, verbal exchanges, *disputatio*, verbal duels as the equivalent of jousting, illustrate on the one hand the medieval allegiance to the power of reason and to a vision of knowledge based on clarification and rigour and on the other hand are indicative of the combative, polemical character of culture (Duby 1992:118). The *Rose* opponents all frequented milieus such as aristocratic courts of love (that of the Duke of Orleans, for example) or other circles of humanists where they practised their polemical skills. What is at stake here is who is entitled to speak authoritatively in public and thus legitimately influence the opinion of a readership. In these verbal contests the likes of Col and Montreuil found themselves encouraged to let fly with injurious language. *Ad hominem* attacks were the rule. Violent as the words were they were hardly gratuitous. Yet what the participants in the *Debate* were all experimenting with was a Roman model of rhetoric whose aim was to identify what was beneficial or damaging to the community and to subordinate writing to the public good. Denouncing injury and moral damage to the public good was part of that process and the greater the threat to the common weal, the more vehement the denunciation. The reason why Montreuil resorted to such extreme language in his responses in the controversy was that he was convinced of his mission to confront and condemn *blasphemy*. This kind of verbal force targeted figures in the public domain. Typically, it worked against individuals and regimes that were seen as promoting harmful activities. Hard-hitting and unyielding, this violent rhetoric assaults its adversaries by responding with equal power. According

to the Roman example adopted by the humanists, in order to correct delinquent public figures one must fight force with force. Yet here again, compared to contemporary instances of violence in language, the verbal violence of the *Debate*, vehement and injurious as it often is, served the professed purpose of didacticism, of moral reform and of clear reasoning. This is what Earl Jeffrey Richards means when he stresses the “gracefulness” and the non-harmful character of the *Debate*, which Christine herself referred to as being nothing short of “amicable”. In an article published in 2001 entitled “I’ll break your arm and bang you on the head with it” Tatiana Slama-Cazacu drew a distinction between *violent language* and *violence perpetrated through language (acting on violent language)*. The first concept refers to shocking language that is not perceived as an immediate, direct threat and does not attack *in ovo* (13); it is however often assimilated to a rebellious assault on normalcy, convention, accepted normal codes. The latter, however, is a direct incitement to aggressive action. Its vehemence and aggressive charge are translated into insults, curses, invective. In her article “Flaming words: verbal violence and gender in premodern Paris” Helen Solterer advances the view that the verbal violence of the participants in the *Debate* marks the transition from a reactive form of linguistic violence to a proactive one (1995b:355-367).

Gontier Col does not hesitate to accuse Christine of ‘invective’, thus misconstruing her intention to hold an ‘amicable debate’: “you recently expressed yourself in the form of an invective against *The Roman* composed and compiled by my defunct master, teacher and friend Jean de Meun” (McWebb 2007:115). Col was challenging Christine’s assumption of the role of denouncing what was damaging to the community. She was unmoved. Like a Roman orator, she turned to violent language in order to

confront existing patterns of injurious language. She was following an honourable tradition here, for Cicero had recommended the harshest words, the language of denunciation and vituperation against those who jeopardised the body politic (see Dascăl 2008:89-131). Likewise, for the Parisian debaters, blaming was a civic act whose rationale was, by definition, a matter of public good, of general welfare. They attempted the mobilisation of the public as a whole and demanded the attention of ruler and people. In the polarised *Debate of the Rose*, speaking blame functioned so as to expose vice. The attaining of a well-balanced body politic was the participants' ultimate goal. Seen from one point of view, blaming is a perverse and hostile speech-act that is often disruptive and unsettling to the social order, yet here it is called upon to right the wrong, to restore order and to defend the body politic. Christine is bound to stand out in this exclusively male company, because as a woman and as a professional writer she was poorly equipped to substantiate her claim to authority on blame and invective. But what Christine lacked socially and even culturally she made up for rhetorically. Ascribing blame enabled Christine to block Montreuil's claim to the role of public judge. By labelling his praise of the *Rose* ungrounded, Christine implicitly represents the King's secretary as a faulty orator. He who was reputed to be the voice of Ciceronian oratory and the leading humanist in Paris is portrayed as lacking in oratorical skills. It is a very ingenious rhetorical strategy: contesting Montreuil's act of praise adds weight to her own act of blaming (2007:123).

The principal target of Christine's blame remains *The Romance of the Rose*. Above and beyond denouncing Montreuil's work, she seeks to judge the *Rose* on its own terms. To do so, however, she must transform herself into a public advocate. Her model is taken from Cicero's *Republic*:

“let us consider the example of the victorious Romans, who in former times attributed no praise or honour to something which did not serve a public purpose” (2007:131).

By appropriating to herself the mantle of the famous orators of the Latin world of the Roman Republic, Christine shows herself to be a match for her opponents, who bolster their arguments with the authoritative learning of antiquity. By attacking the *Rose*, she places herself in a high, judgemental position, and, by following Cicero, she legitimises her judgment. The logic of polemics, however, makes her move equally vulnerable to reversal. It too is upended, converted into an unwarranted attack: “Those [people] who like hungover drunks who say whatever they please at table, and placing it in the scales consider it hardly more weighty than some actor’s song composed in one day” (209). Montreuil’s trope of villainous people stigmatises the righteous violence of her language. Her criticism is recast as an inappropriate consequence of capricious behaviour: unreliable, excessive, even out of control (133). As Montreuil’s counter-attack centres on bad emotion and the unreasoned, the irrational, it sparks destructive action: vituperation becomes a hateful outpouring of wrath. He lashes out angrily at Christine with negative energy that turns to slander. Montreuil describes Christine’s blame as tearing or ripping, thus associating her actions with those of a predatory beast: “such a work, such a man [...] are torn apart by the claws of detraction” (345) that needs to be tamed: “that you will doubtlessly turn them [...] into mild lambs, and that you will render them mute on everything as though they have been amputated” (209). Amputation and muteness call to mind the archetypal gestures of the violent erasure of the feminine in the paradigmatic Tereus-Philomela relation (cf. Dascăl 2001:163-175). But apart from the teratological and

erasure connotations of the attack, we have here a gross case of gender prejudice – the stereotype of ‘femme passionnee’ that would if accepted viciously impair Christine’s claim to be giving fair judgement. By categorising his ‘adversary’s language as an irrational, overemotional outburst, Montreuil invokes another type of verbal violence. Thus by labelling his adversary’s language irrational and ruled solely by emotion, he launches a particular *ad hominem* attack. Accusing Christine of *lèse-honneur* amounts to a serious charge, since the master’s dignity represents a prestigious symbolic property that belongs to all the master’s disciples. Thus by acting in this way she is attempting to dis-establish a whole intellectual community. Montreuil’s portrait corresponds, in fact, to the contemporaneous etymology of the English theologian Thomas Wyclif, who defined this most heinous verbal sin by referring to women’s language: “blasphemy is the foolish detraction of the Lord’s honour. And it is called *blas* because it is insipid and ridiculous, and *femina*, because they blather on interminably, and in an excessively stupid way” (quoted in Solterer 1999:127).

Montreuil tries to turn Christine’s rhetoric of blame around by denouncing her overemotional and passionate rage, her attempts to dismantle the welfare of the kingdom. In a word, he associates her launching of the polemic with blasphemy. Although this charge against Christine is never made explicit in the *Debate*, the degree and extent of the charges brought against her suggest this form of verbal violence. Blasphemy certainly represented, for all those involved in the debate, the most vicious and perverse act of language.

As the ultimate violent speech act, blasphemy threatens the process of verbal and social articulation. For the pre-modern world, blasphemy

awakens a primordial fear – the vulnerability of ensuring the well-being of a community through the protection of the Lord’s sacred name. Blame and blasphemy evince their rhetorical symmetry. One positive act of language is matched with its negative. Blame is a justified form of verbal violence, while blasphemy is its perverse and harmful double, yet the two speech acts create comparable effects. They cannot be categorized as antithetical and contradictory, because they have much in common. As we have already mentioned, gender places this symmetry in sharper relief. Montreuil consistently rants against Christine’s exaggerated emotion and lack of reason - both qualities stereotypically assigned to the female sex. We should make an effort to understand the extreme vulnerability of Christine’s position in the society of her time. By attributing immoral intentions to Meun’s work and by casting blame on his disciples Christine is pursuing twin objectives: countering a century-long literary tradition of misogyny and clearing her own name as a woman author and moral instructor. In a closed society structured in intricate hierarchies, such as was the Parisian court, any attack on reputation was of great consequence. A person was nothing without their reputation. In the absence of the recognition of your peers or your betters your social existence was called into question. This reputation was the sum of many shaping forces, including among others acts of language. In the pre-modern world, reputation originated in a public name which could be diminished by one’s being defamed, bad-mouthed in the city square. Murmurs, rumours, cries of sedition: the many hostile voices were notoriously effective. They could ruin reputation with a slip of the tongue. What fame creates, defamation eliminates. Defamation is habitually described as a type of theft since it divests a person of his or her reputation; in Vincent of Beauvais’s definition, “it is the diminishing of a

person's reputation through biting and hard words" (Solterer 1999:129-130). Yet Christine understands that her own goals are so inextricably linked that she cannot defend herself against defamation without mounting a strong refutation of the overall disparagement of womankind in the clerical tradition. The ritual of reputation-making was especially charged for women. It is well known how in pre-modern Europe a woman's name signified far more than her individual dignity. It was the emblem and the ornament of family honour. *Femme/di famer* had a strong ring to it. The Latin/French couplet drew attention to the peculiar link forged between women and reputation. Christine, for one, recommended that women break out of the circle of fear created by the alleged proneness of womankind to defamation. Finding fault with the *Rose* is ultimately a grappling with the problem of diminishing women's fame. Once Jean's aesthetic means are exposed as 'such horrible evil, treachery, and devilish trickery' and their pernicious force revealed, the next step involves confronting their damaging consequences. In Christine's argument, their impact on the public becomes the focus of attention. *The Romance of the Rose* constitutes poetry that is less dishonest than vilifying. It hits at the public name of women; it strikes at their honourableness.

In the *Querelle*, Christine underscores the fact that her intervention is "a gracious and non-hateful debate" "an amicable debate" (191) and thus attempts to avoid her writings being pigeonholed as examples of destructive language. Christine feels that since her *mos actisans* are directed toward a beneficial end, a common good, the creation of a new and gender-inclusive body politic that is more cohesive and better balanced, they are the very antithesis of damaging but rather constitute at best a righteous form of chastisement (what the Greeks and Romans called 'vituperation'). She

constructs her position as that of a public witness and defender and sees herself as duty-bound to adopt a civic stance, the rationale of which is, by definition, a matter of public welfare.

Christine's use of invective and her acts of finding fault are sharply distinguished from those of fellow writers such as Chartier or Gerson and they form part of a long-running 'campaign of gynocentric *mos actisans*' (Solterer 1995b:365).

Christine exploits a violent type of *mos actisans* in order to construct a heterogeneous image of community and uses them to shape an image that entertains and incorporates difference, including difference of gender. Her language employs violence constructively on behalf of a variety of social groups, women among them.

References

- Badel, P.Y. 1980. *Le Roman de La Rose au XIVe siecle: Etude de la Reception de l'oeuvre*. Geneva: Librairie Droz
- Brown-Grant, R. 1999. *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading beyond Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Brownlee, K. 1992. "Discourses of the Self: Christine de Pizan and *The Romance of the Rose*" in Brownlee, K. and S. Huot (eds). *Rethinking The Romance of the Rose: Text, Image Reception*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 234-61
- Burke, E. 2000. [1789]. *Reflecții asupra revoluției din Franța, (Reflections on the Revolution in France)* București: Nemira
- Dascăl, R. 2001. *Feminist Perspectives*. Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest
- Dascăl, R. 2008. *Christine de Pizan Essays*. Timișoara: Edtura Universității de Vest
- Delany, S. 1990. "'Mothers to think back through': Who are they? The Ambiguous Case of Christine de Pizan" in *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp 88-103

- Dery, M. (ed.) 1995. *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press
- Duby, G. 1992. *Evul mediu masculin. Despre dragoste și alte eseuri*. București: Editura Meridiane
- Ferrante, J. 1988. "Public Postures and Private Manoeuvres: Roles Medieval Women Play" in Erler, M. and M. Kowaleski (eds.). *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, pp 213–229
- Fleming, J.V. 1964. "The Moral Reputation of the *Roman de la Rose* before 1400" in *Romance Philology*, 18 /5
- Hill, J.M. L. 1991. *The Medieval Debate of Jean de Meung's Roman de la Rose*. Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press
- Huot, S.J. 1993. *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hult, D.F. 1997. "Words and Deeds: Jean de Meung's *Romance of the Rose* and the Hermeneutics of Censorship" in *New Literary History* 28/ 2, pp. 345-366
- Kelly, J. 1984. *Women, History and Theory. The Essays of Joan Kelly*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press
- Lorris, G.de and J. de Meun, 1971. [1280] *The Romance of the Rose*, transl. Charles Dahlberg, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- McWebb, C. (ed.) 2007. *Debating the Roman de la Rose. A Critical Anthology*. New York London: Routledge
- Pizan, C. de. 1998. [1405]. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. transl. Earl Jeffrey Richards. New York: Persea Books
- Richards, E.J. 2007. "Introduction: Returning to a 'Gracious Debate': The Intellectual Context of the Epistolary Exchange of the Debate about the *Roman de la Rose*" in McWebb, C. (ed.). *Debating the Roman de la Rose. A Critical Anthology*. New York London: Routledge
- Rogers, K. 1966. *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press
- Slama-Cazacu, T. 2001. "Îți rup mâna și îți dau cu ea în cap" ("I'll break your arm and bang

you on the head with it”) in *România literară*, /41/ 17-23/October 2001,
pp.12-13

Solterer, H. 1995a. *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Solterer, H. 1995b. “Flaming Words: Verbal Violence and Gender in Premodern Paris” in *The Romanic Review*, 3/1/1995, pp 355-374

Solterer, H. 1999. “Fiction versus Defamation: The Quarrel over the *Romance of the Rose*” in *The Medieval History Journal*, 1999, 2/1, Sage Publications, pp 111-141

Visions of Power/Powers of Vision

**GENDERING OF THE EYE: REPRESENTATION OF VISUAL
PERCEPTION IN *HAMLET***

MONIKA SOSNOWSKA

University of Łódź

O heat, dry up my brains, tears seven times salt
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye.
(*Hamlet*, 4.5.153-154)

Everybody (and every body) ‘sees’ in *Hamlet* but it is the woman who is most often deprived of her own independent visual perception. For this reason the literary representation of seeing, as it emerges in Shakespeare’s play, cannot escape the gendering of this sense experience. Gendering of the eye seems to be appropriate and inevitable for the exhaustive explanation of different representations of vision, presented in

Shakespeare's most interpreted drama. Perhaps one of the keys to the 'mysteries' of the play lies in deciphering the 'sensory code' of the 'Mona Lisa of literature'. Perhaps the 'sensory code' is not to be decoded by the mind's eye of a reader/critic but rather empirically sensed through their physical eyes.

The desire to investigate the status and the role of vision in culture haunted the literary imagination of the early modern period. In those transitional times, an important paradigmatic shift in understanding human subjectivity occurred. As David Hillman states in *Shakespeare's Entrails. Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body*: "Shakespeare inhabited a world in which the attempt to understand and reconceive the connection between matter and spirit was particularly strenuous" (2007:4).

Although *Hamlet* was 'born under the pressure' of the pre-Cartesian paradigm, which relied on a mode of 'open embodiment', one that depended on the body and allowed the bodily boundaries to be crossed, the categorization of the play as reflecting a purely pre-Cartesian concept of the self, should be eschewed. In *Hamlet*, the idea of the open self is challenged by another concept of embodiment. The latter is fuelled by the fear of losing bodily integrity, leading to anxieties about unwanted penetration of the psychological self. According to Hillman:

Shakespeare was writing at a crucial moment in this transition, at the juncture of two profoundly heterogeneous notions of embodiment – and thus modes of subjectivity – and the tension between these modes seems to have been profoundly creative for him and for his contemporaries. Working both against and with the notion that the 'dull substance of [the] flesh' is indissoluble from thought, Shakespeare's plays thrived upon the radical instability at the core of the notion of the embodied self in the period (5).

For the purposes of this article, it is the eye that is subject to scrutiny in order to demonstrate how *Hamlet* heralds the transition from conceptualization of the body/mind problem in the Renaissance period.

The chosen quotation from *Hamlet*, heading this article, contains two combinations of words, using 'eye' in both collocations. In this particular citation the 'eye' is characterized, by 'sense' and 'virtue'. Moreover, if the eye stands for sight, it fulfills a synecdochical function as an eye that substitutes its doubleness, demonstrating its ability to work as a pair of eyes. Considering the two phrases, which are drawn from Laertes' lament over Ophelia's madness, it is possible to distinguish between 'the sense of the eye' and the 'virtue of the eye'. While the latter pertains to perception through intellect, indicating the tragic effect of what Laertes recognizes through the eyes while looking at his sister's insane behaviour, the first reveals the bodily aspect of the eye. Its sensibility and passiveness in the process of observing becomes unbearable for Ophelia's brother, who wishes to be blinded in sight rather than see her madness. These two faculties of the eye: intellectual and corporeal, integrate in that particular line, spoken by Laertes, and manifest a twofold nature of perceiving. 'Virtue' and 'sense' could be interpreted as different aspects of sight, one providing Laertes with objective theoretical knowledge, something that is strictly connected to and arises from his mind's eye, while the other, meaning that the subjective feeling he obtains from the 'spectacle of madness' results from what his bodily eyes perceive. Burning out Laertes' eyes would make him blind in two senses of the word: sightless and without reason. The representation of visual perception reaches its critical point at that point in the play when Laertes faces his sister's insanity. Confrontation

with such frightening and touching view, causes confusion of vision, both in its somatic and reasoning dimensions. Laertes seems to desire the loss of his eyes, both as sensible organs of perception and as a source of rational knowledge.

Distinguishing between the mind's eye and the body's eye is a modern concept, which seems to be found within the textual dimension of the play. The article expands on this dualistic concept of vision, paying attention to the gendering of the sense experience in *Hamlet*. In one of the introductory paragraphs of his book, Hillman claims that: "Shakespeare's plays have an important stake in the history of embodiment, both as markers of the changing times, and as themselves instigators of historical and cultural change" (3).

Before developing and substantiating the main claim of this article – which comes down to the statement that the representation of visual perception in *Hamlet* differentiates in respect to gender– a 'small sample' of linguistic study of the word 'perception' is offered. As a polysemous word and according to context, perception means either awareness, an act in which what is noticed becomes translated into knowledge: "the act of perceiving; cognizance by the senses or intellect; apprehension by the bodily organs, or by the mind, of what is presented to them; discernment; apprehension; cognition;" or perception denotes a feeling strictly connected with the body: "the quality, state, or capability, of being affected by something external; sensation; sensibility" (<http://www.ling.pl>, accessed on 10.06.2008).

The first meaning emphasizes a more complex form of perception, stressing its cognitive aspect, while the latter refers to the process of passive receiving of stimuli from the outside world. To distinguish visual perception

from other faculties raises questions about its literal or figurative significance, as well as about its status in the realm of senses.

Seeing belongs to the body in its literal sense, which finds its linguistic confirmation with expressions, emphasizing eye-witnessing, such as: ‘to see with one’s own two eyes’, ‘to keep one’s eye open’, ‘to keep one’s eye on something’. The corporeal dimension of visual perception remains bound up with the realm of somatic senses. More than any other sense, vision permeates language. It finds its confirmation in Karen Jacobs’ words, that it is human sight from which ‘we derive our most powerful cultural metaphors for knowing’ (2001:7). Likewise, Jay, who is himself exploiting many visual metaphors in the following excerpt, assures the reader that:

Even a rapid glance at the language we commonly use will demonstrate the ubiquity of visual metaphors. If we actively focus our attention on them, vigilantly keeping an eye out for those deeply embedded as well as those on the surface, we can gain an illuminating insight into the complex mirroring of perception and language (1994:1).

Seeing as expressed by the powerful metaphor – the mind’s eye – suggests that visual perception cannot be confined to the organ of sight. The activity of the mind attempts to intercept the eye for its own solitary (or even solipsistic) uses, that is, for mental purposes. This “splitting of the eye” between the mind and the body influences the way visual perception exists in (dis)embodied terms. Connected in part to the material dimension of the self, the eye is forced to share its existence with the incorporeal ego. The division of the eye lies behind such pivotal dualistic polarities foundational for modern Western culture as mind/body, knowledge/feeling

and reaching even further, it becomes responsible for the subject-object position.

Ancient Greek philosophers were almost moved to write eulogies on vision, although they were also suspicious of its illusionist capacities. A case in point is provided by Plato's praise of vision, which evinces, when a textual scrutiny is made of his other works, an ambivalent attitude towards sight. To prove Plato's ambiguity in regard to the power of the eyes, Martin Jay in his magnificent and elaborate study of vision in Western culture, entitled *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, contends as follows:

For in his philosophy, 'vision' seems to have meant only that of the inner eye of the mind; in fact Plato often expressed severe reservations about the reliability of the two eyes of normal perception. We see *through* the eyes, he insisted, not *with* them (1994:27).

The question of whether Hamlet is portrayed as perceiving through or with the eyes, seems crucial for the analysis of the predominant model of vision within the play. Solving this 'vexing problem', would also demand an explanation of the cultural circumstances under which Shakespeare created *Hamlet*. At this point, the unfolding of the sensual dimension of Renaissance culture is unavoidable. Its analysis demands explanation of what is understood by Marshal McLuhan's term 'order of sensory preferences' of each discrete culture. In order to expand on this term, he describes a shift that occurred under the innovations of the early modern era, namely the development of the printing press:

Any culture is an order of sensory preferences and in the tribal world, the senses of touch, taste, hearing, and smell were developed for very practical reasons, to a much higher level than the strictly visual. Into this world, the phonetic alphabet fell like a bombshell, installing sight at the head of the hierarchy of senses. Literacy propelled man from the tribe, gave him an eye for an ear and replaced his integral in-depth communal interplay with visual, linear values and fragmented consciousness. As an intensification and amplification of the visual function, the phonetic alphabet diminished the role of the sense of hearing and touch and taste and smell, permeating the discontinuous culture of tribal man and translating its organic harmony and complex synaesthesia into the uniform, connected, and visual mode that we still consider the norm of “rational” existence (McLuhan & Zignrone 1995:241-242).

What happened to the people of early modern times during this paradigmatic shift, was a social change in the practices of communicating. These people were half-immersed in non-literate practices, stressing the role of oral/aural communication, while the other half was involved in visually grounded practices, depended on the eye. The controversy surrounding the ‘sensory determinism’ of that transitional period, has divided scholars into those who back the idea of the prevailing orally-oriented early modern era, and those who adhere to its even more ‘noble’ sensitivity-visibility. To exemplify this controversial issue, Jay refers to Lucien Febvre’s opinion on the status of vision in the history of the senses, derived from his work *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (1982). Febvre notes that “The Sixteenth century did not see first: it heard and smelled, it sniffed the air and caught sounds”, and vision remained in this third position until the seventeenth century: “It was then that vision was unleashed in the world of science as it was in the world of physical sensations, and the world of beauty as well” (432). Another espouser of the

belief that early modern culture was predominantly oral, is Robert Weimann who makes the following argument about Shakespeare's dramas:

Even when deeply indebted to the humanist poetics of inscribed language, these plays remained close to the culture of voices, a civilization of oral signs and practical privileges where blindness itself and the unliterary spectator could be told to 'look with thine ears' (1985:276).

In response to supporters of aurally/orally-embedded early modern period, the 'opposite block' purports that:

Not only did Renaissance literature abound in ocular references, not only did its science produce the first silvered glass mirror able to reproduce the world with far greater fidelity than before, not only did some of its greatest figures like Leonardo da Vinci explicitly privilege the eye over the ear, but also the Renaissance saw one of the most fateful innovations in Western culture: the theoretical and practical development of perspective in the visual arts [...] (Jay, 44).

Another scholar, Mark Robson, investigates the relationship between Shakespeare's plays, which were written for the eye of a reader, but also performed for the ear of the audience. He comes to the conclusion that the scholars who firmly state that early modern culture was an oral one, should take into consideration the fact that: "The senses of the activity of ear and voice come from the texts which are primarily perceived through the eye" (<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/07-1/robsears.htm>, 10.06.2008). On the basis of the abovementioned arguments, this article claims that the early modern culture, in which *Hamlet* was created, might be termed a 'liminal culture', one suspended between the late acoustic and early visual order of sensory

preferences. Since the article is preoccupied with visual perception, aural and orality of Renaissance period are only signaled as concurring with visuality.

Presumably, the 'Hamlet phenomenon' grows out the extraordinary quality of Shakespeare's plays, which is said to be their 'timelessness', yet in fact it is the susceptibility of his works to different cultural interpretations and appropriations. In other words, this 'timelessness' means belonging to the 'temporality' of (m)any culture(s). Considering the 'temporality' of the Renaissance culture and finding the appropriate location for *Hamlet* in that culture, requires defining its character, with respect to dominant perceptual practices. Representation of such sensual experiences in literature somehow reflects the tendency to favor one of the senses in a particular culture. By availing oneself of Stephen Greenblatt's methodology of New Historicism, also known as the Poetics of Culture, it is possible to exploit his idea of a text, being a product of certain culture, yet simultaneously the same text (along with other texts) is considered to generate the "nature of that culture". This phenomenon of the interrelation between culture and product needs to be put into context, otherwise the functioning of any literary composition loses its historicity. If text are pivotal, both as cultural products of their times and constitutive elements of the 'cultural climate', then it becomes more obvious that the analysis of the senses in *Hamlet* purveys information about the practices of seeing/hearing/touching/tasting/smelling in the Renaissance, rendering it possible to make an assumption as to whether the cultural climate remained linked primarily to vision, or other senses.

Given the frequency with which expressions, that include the words 'eye(s)' and 'see' occur in the text, respectively 38 and 82 times in

the whole play, the simple conclusion derived from these figures is, that they outnumber other phrases, associated with sense perception. What needs stressing here, is the fact that the words 'eye(s)' and 'see' are not the only words, which attest to the play's permeation with visual connotations and denotations. Since the scope of words pertaining to vision in *Hamlet* is wide, this might raise questions about the usage of combinations of words, related to sight, be it in a metaphorical sense, or in a literal sense. Thus the usage of expressions such as 'look' and 'watch' or 'think' and 'believe' to a similar degree as the words 'eye' or 'see' reinforces the important function of visual perception in the play.

If we were to read Shakespeare's plays from our contemporary perspective, then we should heed Hillman's warnings about the pitfalls of such interpretation, such as losing the early modern way of apprehending. Specifically, he contends that 'the period's resolutely materialist habits of thought' (2) blurred the boundaries between the spiritual inwardness and somatic outer layer. He also has in mind that the production of meaning in Shakespeare's times, as in the case of *Hamlet*, was carried out under 'an emergent psychology of somatic inwardness' (3). Thus the line between the figurative and the physical in Shakespeare's works is very often so thin, that we cannot be assured if the meaning belongs to the psychical or the corporeal realm. The uncertainty about the nature of the eye is of pivotal importance to this article. It is this doubting, double significance and doubleness of the eye, that provides sufficient material for the gendering of visual perception in *Hamlet*.

As it has been noted by some critics, Hamlet's activation of his mind's eye distracts him from the 'real accounts' of his bodily eyes. This overwhelming engrossment in thinking establishes the dominant perspective

of the play – Hamlet’s visual imagery. What emerges from his mind’s eye ‘cuts off light from’ the bodily eye, which engenders the domination of male vision. Since light renders objects visible or luminous, it is necessary to mention a dualistic conceptualization of light, which dates back to ancient Greek philosophy, but which remains intensively present in Western thought up until today. Its twofold quality consists in different relationship between sight and light, that is, how the latter influences visual perception. Jay’s juxtaposition of the two visual experiences demonstrates seeing, on the one hand, as a natural act, in which light is perceived by the bodily eyes, deprived of illuminating capacities. Here, Jay informs that this version of light became known as *lux*, and since then it has been referred to as “the actual experience of human sight” (1994:29). Light, however, took another form, celebrated as *lumen*. This non-sensory brightness reaches the mind’s eye, regardless of its contact with the body’s eyes. With regard to *Hamlet*, the dualistic system of perception finds its literary representation in the way Shakespeare portrays the male and female processes of gaining knowledge and the processes establishing orientation in the world through seeing.

Firstly, gendering of the sense experience in the play pertains to the linguistic representations of vision, in which the text abounds. The textual analysis of Shakespeare’s language, locates *Hamlet* among the plays which are preoccupied with finding ‘ocular proof’. Secondly, the text simultaneously reflects and generates certain ‘sensory preferences’ of early modern culture, demonstrating what position the visual perception occupied, and how it was itself influenced by contrasting early modern ideas of embodiment, with an emphasis put on the (non)corporeal eye.

Although Hamlet’s mind’s eye cannot literally prevail over his somatic eye, the superiority of psychic capacities of perception over

physical ones involves situations in which the main protagonist ponders over and comments on both the accounts he witnessed with his own eyes (for example Claudius's behaviour during the 'dumb show'), and those he creates in his mind's eye, such as the image of Gertrude. The feminine point of view, which refers to the way women's eyes of Ophelia and Gertrude produce knowledge, becomes subordinated and mastered by the male system of representation. Thus the eye in *Hamlet* is hardly ever a pre-Cartesian somatic one, since it encompasses the attributes of the eye split between the body and reason, having either its masculine or feminine attributes. In other words, if – as Sergel Lobanov-Rostkovsky suggests – knowing is seeing in the Renaissance (1997:197), then it is the power of the male eye which establishes that knowledge, which would support a notion of subjectivity, founded on the privilege to observe and speculate. As has been stated before, the division of the eye flows from the dualistic foundations of Western culture such as mind/body, knowledge/feeling and subject/object.

What Shakespeare presents in this, his wordiest play, is the world of emerging early modern subjectivity, which came before the Cartesian dualism of body/mind. The eye as flesh had to be tamed and investigated by the higher form of sight, that is the mind's eye. The scopic economy in the play appropriates vision for the purposes of disembodied thinking, objectifying and subordinating the 'corporeal'. Male visual perception is represented in *Hamlet* by such attributes as: the privileged source of information, having power to investigate and speculate, the capacity for apprehension, reliability as eye-witness, being active as participant. Whereas female eye is mostly characterized by its material ability to accept stimuli from without, consisting of pure sensation, deprived of speculative

power and therefore unable to transform observation into knowledge. Its passiveness becomes clear when for example, Ophelia's judgment and reflection on her relationship with Hamlet is verified by Laertes' and Polonius' opinions and speculation. She is left with pure observations but not allowed to transform it into confirming knowledge. When Polonius asks his daughter 'Do you believe his 'tenders', as you call them?' (1.3.102), her only response is: 'I do not know, my lord, what I should think' (1.3.103). Another illustration of a different representation of visual perception in *Hamlet*, where the 'perceiving mind' encounters the 'obedient flesh', is the meeting between Hamlet and Gertrude in her closet. The Queen, whose eyes led her astray, in a way that they non-cogitatively absorbed images from the outside world, is faced with her son's perspective of what happened to Old Hamlet and who the true murderer was. Gertrude is depicted as if she was blinded in a figurative and literal meaning of the word. Hamlet's question: 'Have you eyes?' (3.4.63) aims at undermining any reliability in Gertrude's visual perception. But does it mean that Ophelia and Gertrude were always marginalized within the scopic regime of the play? Does Shakespeare leave any agency for the female eye?

Shakespeare portrayed male and female visual perception largely according to the strictly patriarchal demands of the emerging early modern society. In *Hamlet*, the pre-Cartesian paradigm that could allow for non-dualistic corporeal vision, is somehow overwhelmed by another concept of the self, one which is separating flesh from thought. Therefore, the representation of masculine vision is congruent with the Platonic conception of the eye as penetrative agent, while feminine visual perception remains a passive receptor, dominated by male visual representation. Yet the transgressive moment of a 'countervision' might be found within the play.

The 'oppositional eye' of women in *Hamlet* empowers them to reject the masculine perspective. A case in point is mad Ophelia's illuminating perception. Another example is disobedient Gertrude, who is firstly enchanted by what her bodily eyes communicate about the world outside and follows the passionate scopic drive, which leads her into 'incestuous sheets'. But at the end of the play the same eyes cause another transformation of the Queen – she does not obey the command of Claudius, but decides to produce knowledge independently of any masculine point of view. Gertrude's eyes express her motherly love for Hamlet and disappointment with her relationship with men. Both Ophelia and Gertrude, whose visual perception is to a great extent effaced within the course of action in the drama, seem ultimately to challenge the dominant mode of seeing in *Hamlet*.

The shift in understanding subjectivity is demonstrated in *Hamlet* by means of the literary representation of different forms of visual perception. Shakespeare was definitely not gender-blind. The scopic regime of the play relies on the notion that masculine vision belongs to the mind's eye, which produces objective knowledge about perceived objects (including the body's eye). If the latter provided pure immediate sensation, it had to be tamed by reasonable thought and disembodied ego. Within such a 'sensory order', the eye remains 'split' between masculine and feminine perceptions. *Hamlet* heralds the transition in conceptualization of the body/mind problem in the Renaissance period, emphasizing the forthcoming dualism of vision. Not only does Shakespeare's drama reflect the 'nature of the early modern culture', which was at the same time suspended between late acoustic and early visual 'sensory order', but it also generates the

ensuing anxieties which occur within the 'visual climate' of the Renaissance period.

References

- Calbi, M. 2005. *Approximate Bodies Gender and Power in Early Modern Drama and Anatomy*, London & New York: Routledge
- Hillman, D. 1997. Mazzio, C., *The Body in Parts: Discourses and Anatomies in Early Modern Europe*. London & New York: Routledge
- Hillman, D. 2007. *Shakespeare's Entrails. Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Jay, M. 1994. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. California: University of California Press
- McLuhan, E., Zignrone F. (eds.). 1995. *Essential McLuhan*. New York: Basic Books
- Robson, M. "Looking with Ears, Hearing with Eyes: Shakespeare and the Ear of the Early Modern" [Online] available: <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/07-1/robsears.htm>, [10.06.2008]
- Thompson, A., Taylor N. (eds.). 2007. *Hamlet. The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series*. London: Thomson Learning
- Weiman, R. 1985. "Mimesis in *Hamlet*" in Parker, P., Hartman G. (eds.). *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. London & New York: Methuen, pp. 275-91

Gender, Culture, Society

**VICTORIAN FATHERHOOD IN AMERICAN GENRE
PAINTING**

IRÉN E. ANNUS

University of Szeged

1. Introduction

From the late 18th century onwards, a series of marked changes appeared in the US, in politics, economics, and social and cultural life which led to a set of shifts in gender roles. Deeply influencing family life as well, these shifts also appeared in the concept of motherhood and, consequently, of fatherhood, too. Recent research on the Victorian period has revealed that fatherhood as actually lived was in fact quite different

from the stereotypical descriptions commonly conveyed in literature up to the late 1980s. This paper proposes to contribute to this process of re-assessment by mapping the ways fatherhood was depicted in contemporary genre painting.

2. Fatherhood in Victorian culture

Changes affecting Victorian family structure and roles may perhaps best be detected through the family home. The Victorian home reflected “the broader historical problem of adapting the values of a deferential, hierarchical patronage society to the values of an increasingly contractual, individualistic society” (Mintz 1985:5). In the preceding colonial model, family was an economic unit, with all members, adults as well as children, working, and contributing to the survival and upward mobility of the members. Ideal fatherhood of the era was “grounded in the patriarchal, hierarchical, deferential and community-based traditions of the corporatist social order [...] the father [was] in the position of undisputed religious, social and economic preeminence in the family” (Carroll 1999:277), with powers regarded as part of a hierarchical authority descending straight from God.

This traditional structure, however, came to be challenged in a variety of ways during the last quarter of the 19th century. An “emotional revolution and a domestic revolution in family relations accompanied the American and market revolutions, producing ideologies of affective individualism and the democratic family” (Carroll 1999:277). Women assumed more influence in the home: they were entrusted with caring for the children and providing their basic education, as well as being viewed as moral guardians of the family and, by extension, of society (Welter 1966).

At the same time, economic changes shifted productive economic activities out of the home: the father became the breadwinner who had to leave the domestic premises to make money in the outside world, often depicted as hostile, dangerous, cruel and lonely. His presence in the home, therefore, became more symbolic, typically limited to late evenings and Sundays.

This, however, does not mean that the father's "family status and involvement" declined, argues Carroll (1999:278). The physical absence tied to money-making granted the father a new type of economic significance that served as the foundation for his continued authority in the family. Changed realities had elevated the father as the key economic figure who was essential in financing the proper existence of the whole family. This was perhaps most prominently marked in the emerging middle class where women, limited to the realm of the home, were expected to perform certain duties as well as to pursue leisure-time activities, which eventually operated as life-style markers of socio-economic status. In preparation for a successful future, boys had to receive proper education, often away from the home, which was quite expensive. Moreover, since it was only the father that was involved in the new economic structure, only he could prepare boys properly for success in adulthood. The father, therefore, remained an essential and powerful instrument within the family, eliciting obedience, respect, and even admiration.

Moreover, resulting from popular sentimentality, the ideal father figure was defined as a caring and loving Christian father, who found haven in the home, far away from the brutal outside world, turning toward his loved ones with special sentiment and devotion. The father, therefore, remained a central figure in the family during model Victorianism: due to a new division of labor, mothers could assume more power in the home, while

fathers assumed other powers under the new socio-economic circumstances. But how much of this is reflected in contemporary genre painting?

3. Fathers in genre painting

Johns proposes that genre painting reflects “a systematic cultural phenomenon that develops in certain economic and social circumstances and meets social needs peculiar to a specific audience” (1991:xi). Moreover, she argues, a successful genre painter could be viewed as “an entrepreneur of the viewer’s ideologies” (1991:xii). These ideologies, it seems to me, can most often be located at the intersection of model ideologies located in what translates as valued cultural capital, often prescriptive in nature, and of ideologies that are also reflective of the complexities of social positionings. As a result, these images are scented with realism and are descriptive in nature, but in fact they also represent an idealized state of existence – in our case the model Victorian family – and are therefore prescriptive at the same time.

3.1 Portrayals of the nuclear family

Traditionally, the genre of group portraiture was selected in depicting families: these were quite formal portrayals with characters posing, artificially grouped together in an arrangement that reflected their hierarchical relations and positions. They emerged as popular conversation pieces in 18th-century England, as illustrated by the art of Francis Hayman and Arthur Devis, becoming perhaps less pretentious and depicting middle-class families in domestic settings, either in the parlor or in the open air setting of their rural gardens (Gaunt 1988:66-86). This tradition found its way to Colonial America, as illustrated by John Smibert’s *The Bermuda*

Group: Dean George Berkeley and His Entourage (1729) and Robert Feke's *Isaac Royall and Family* (1741).

3.1.1 Early Victorian sentimentalism

Genre paintings of families by the mid-19th century, however, stood in stark contrast to these pictures. Treuherz regards genre portraits as depictions of “homely sentiments”, showing “the sitters in their natural attitudes”, expressing the “bourgeois [...] ideal of domestic bliss” (1993:17). One possible conveyance of a sentimental model of the ideal Victorian family is offered by John Sartain's little-known painting, *The Happy Family* (1843). The painting depicts a middle-class family, as indicated by the physical environment: they are gathered in the parlor of a two-story house – presented as the ideal family home by contemporary designers such as Andrew J. Downing – with classical style furniture, a large clock, art on the wall, a fireplace with a Persian rug in front – all markers of ideal middle-class homes. The picture depicts a moment of tranquility, when the family gathers before the warmth of the hearth for their afternoon tea.

The composition centers around the figure of the father, who is relaxed and finely dressed, with a youthful face and gentle, white hands, neither darkened nor hardened by physical work. He is signified by the open book in one hand and by the young daughter resting her head on his lap while he is stroking her head with the other hand. The girl's happiness and total admiration for the father as she is looking up to him are reflected by the loving care with which the father is looking down at her. Interestingly, the father is surrounded by the children – and not the mother – and even the poodle on the pillow is yearning for his attention. His older daughter is

standing by his side: unlike her younger sister, her hair is tightly arranged, implying that she is already on the way to proper womanhood, as also symbolized by the bouquet of flowers she is holding.

The figure of the mother is totally insignificant: she is the only character not facing the viewer, and only her tiny profile can be seen. Through this depiction, her presence, and thus significance, is reduced: she is included in the composition primarily not as an individual, but as a function. She is sitting with her body turned towards her family, currently pouring tea, but also looking up at her baby, who demands her attention. Symbolically, she is presented as taking care of the family's needs and therefore fulfilling traditional female roles. She is sitting on the right hand side, in the darkest segment of the room, with her back to the light that is filtering in through the window. She is the furthest away from the door, which is blocked by the figures of the husband, the house servant and the little baby. The baby is the only person who acknowledges the presence of the mother, expressing his desire for her company by reaching out for her.

This painting well represents the separate gender spheres of Victorian culture, physically expressed by the table and the robust wall clock dividing the two realms. In this happy family, as the title suggests, the father figure dominates the scene: he is the point of contact with the outside world through the open door; he turns lovingly to his children and takes responsibility for them; he represents knowledge and education; and his affectionate protection establishes the peace that brings about happiness.

The painter singled out for her paintings of domestic bliss is Lilly Martin Spencer. Her painting *Domestic Happiness* (1849), originally entitled *Hush! Don't Wake Them*, invites spectators to the intimate sphere of the nursery. This is a self-portrait of Spencer and her husband looking at

their beautiful sons sleeping late at night. They are also wearing their night attire, preparing for bed after one last glimpse at their children.

In this case, the interior – the heavy upholstery, the soft, warm colors, the slight contours, and the curving lines – establish the background to the strong sentimentalism the parents convey. This was in line with contemporary cultural expectations often advertised in handbooks and manuals to express status and refined taste: “*The Illustrated Manners Book* agrees that curves are key in demonstrating social ease and affection: “a gentleman or lady of true polish and self-possession” has “no sharp angles, but all is easy, rounded, simple and graceful like a statue” (Katz 2002:49).

The circular lines also help in establishing the intertwined nature of the relationships: the two sons, highlighted by the light, bright colors, sleep connected like Renaissance angels on their bed, with bold, golden curly locks, innocent round faces and milky-white, soft skin as if on a stage. This idyll evokes joy and pride in their parents, who stand by their side, looking down at them lovingly. The father in this composition shares in this bliss with his wife, as he does in parenting, too. However, the mother seems to be in command of the situation: her raised hand is used to assure that the husband, overpowered by joy, stays quiet and does not wake the children.

Masten proposes that this painting “represents the democratization of marriage and the family that characterized the early republic [...] the period saw the rise of the sentimental family, in which love, harmony, mutuality, and equality between parents and their children displaced the patriarchal authority of the father over the mother and children” (2004:358). In this depiction of the new egalitarian family, the mother has authority over the father, as a guardian angel of the children, which is the result of the implied agreement between the parents that the children’s needs take

precedence in the given situation. As Lubin concludes, this painting glorifies the Victorian sentimental family (1993:141).

In fact, most of Spencer's pictures reflect happy homes, where the father is able to relate to his children lovingly, but the mother always seems to be in control, ensuring a calm, protective warmth in the home. Her painting *Fi! Fo! Fum!* (1858) shows the father figure telling the tale of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Lubin claims that this is a folk tale about market capitalism and that it, therefore, evokes fears in the father as much as in his children: "the husband is an overgrown boy, appearing no less frightened by the spooky tale he recounts than his children" (1993:157). I regard it as quite a proper illustration of how the father figure was fundamental in linking the home to the outside world and its perceived dangers. At the same time, the mother is placed in an ambiguous situation: while Lubin sees her as the sensible one presiding over the scene, sweetly looking over the characters and the situation, embodying permanence, safety, kindness and love, her figure may also be read as ignorant, not aware of the realities of the outside world and the dangers it may represent to the male. And again, the ambivalence on the face of the older girl standing by the father's side reflects her stage in being socialized to becoming oblivious to anything outside of the domestic realm – just as her mother is.

3.1.2 High Victorian parlor paintings

By the 1860s, conversation pieces started a new phase in the US, often referred to as parlor portraits. These synthesized two traditions, group portraits and genre paintings, by depicting families in their home parlor, often during a particular event or holiday. These were typically renderings of upper-class families, located in the elegant, richly decorated, art-filled

parlors of their homes in such large cities as New York. The parlor by this time, as noted in a number of studies, was a signifier, “a constructed ‘portrait’ of the taste, morals, and character of the family who created it [...] both an outward reflection of the family and an inward, nurturing space” (Davis 1996:54).

One popular type of depiction in the US was a peddler visiting the home, offering various items for sale. These are often paintings staged in modest homes, where peddlers would pay a regular visit. Francis Edmonds’ *The Image Peddler* (1844) captures the visit of an image peddler, invoking “the widely decried practice of promoting political candidates with persuasive images that bore little relation to reality” (Johns 1991:54). As we could see from the scene opening up from the window, the peddler – symbolizing the businessman/entrepreneur in rural areas – is in a cottage, offering figurines for sale, mainly bust portraits of well-known political figures, such as Napoleon Bonaparte and George Washington, along with other household items.

He is surrounded by members of three generations of the family. The peddler’s figure in the middle divides the composition into two spheres: the left is the domain of the males, the right that of the women. The mother holding her youngest is looking at the goods with excitement, as is the grandmother seated in the front, with her back to the viewers. Besides child-rearing and consumption, the female realm is also signified by domestic labor: in the far right, the door opens to the kitchen, where a young maid is drying dishes, looking longingly towards the living room. The objects, such as a plate, a cot, a basket and a jar placed in this segment, are also symbolic of female activities of the period.

The other side, however, is marked by objects such as a horn, a sword, a clock, and a document hanging on the wall – all items associated with contemporary masculinity, such as political activity, military action, and intellectualism. The grandfather is involved with the young boy, who is dressed in a Continental army uniform: he is showing him a bust of Washington and probably also educating him on his greatness as military leader and first president. The father is sitting close by, looking at the scene approvingly. Otherwise, the father figure is placed in the periphery: he is distanced from the excitement that women engage in as they look at the merchandise and perhaps buy something. He is sitting on the table by the window, which connects him to the world outside of the home, which remains a female sphere. He is not only placed at the very edge of the painting, but he also has his back to us, turning with his whole body towards symbols of the male realm, including the book he has been reading. The father is present in this painting, but as a distant figure, at home away from home. Another frequent visitor was the fiddler, who provided a cultural experience for rural residents. Eastman Johnson's *Fiddling His Way In* depicts a black fiddler entertaining a family in a poor cottage. The structure of the composition is quite similar to that of the previous painting: here again, the father is sitting at the side, away from the action, and although he is turning attentively towards the musician, the wife in the middle and the children are far more energized by the sound of music.

4. Conclusion

The paintings discussed would tend to support Walker's statement that "[a]lthough the Victorian home was feminized and endlessly depicted as a 'woman's place,' it was nevertheless heavily patriarchal in terms of

territory, control and meaning” (2002:826). Paintings depicting activities associated with the female space, such as shopping or light entertainment, placed the father figure at the periphery, as a distant and dissociated onlooker. As a result, he appears as the gazer, but as such, he is in fact in command of the view. This command, signifying power over the view, by extension also implies power over the objects and characters within the view, and thus over the home and the family as well.

Some paintings, such as the ones by Spencer, capture the new, somewhat sentimental Victorian father figure as well, offering examples of the “new and domestically involved family man” produced by “traditional patriarchy combined with new paternal ideals” (Carroll 1999:277). The involvement of the father, however, seems far more restricted than that of the mother. For example, these new fathers rarely come in physical contact with the children: they tend not to touch or hold them, but be present in their environment. This in fact supports what Finger has found to be characteristic of Western art in general: “Paintings of children supported by male figures are not very common, and such works would appear to account for fewer than 4% of the paintings by major artists in which a child is being held (1975:269).

The genre paintings above, therefore, indicate that the figure of the father during the Victorian period remained central to the family and maintained authority over the family as a whole. They also reveal that the figure of the loving father had emerged, being more involved in family life and bringing up the children than earlier conversation pieces allowed one to think. Naturally, this was also tied to changing concepts of the child during the period. Nevertheless, the fact that children were typically depicted with their mothers in genre painting strengthens the overall conviction that

mothers, while acknowledging the patriarchal position of the father, assumed a great deal more power in the family as part of their daily domestic responsibilities.

References

- Boettger, S. 1992. "Eastman Johnson's 'Blodgett Family' and Domestic Values during the Civil War Era" in *American Art*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Autumn 1992), pp. 50-67
- Carroll, B. E. 1999. "'I Must Have my House in Order': The Victorian Fatherhood of John Shoebridge Williams" in *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 24, No. 3. (July 1999), pp. 275-304
- Davis, J. 1996. "Children in the Parlor: Eastman Johnson's 'Brown Family' and the Post-Civil War Luxury Interior" in *American Art*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 50-77
- Finger, S. 1975. "Child-Holding Patterns in Western Art" in *Child Development*, Vol. 46, No. 1. (March 1975), pp. 267-71
- Gaunt, W. 1988. *English Painting*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Johns, E. 1991. *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press
- Katz, W. J. 2002. *Regionalism and Reform: Art and Class Formation in Antebellum Cincinnati*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press
- Lubin, D. 1993. "Lilly Martin Spencer's Domestic Genre Painting in Antebellum America" in *American Iconology: Approaches to Nineteenth-century Art and Literature*. D. Miller (ed.) New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 135-62
- Masten, A. F. 2004. "'Shake Hands?' Lilly Martin Spencer and the Politics of Art" in *American Quarterly* Vol. 56, No. 2 (June 2004), pp. 349-93
- Mintz, S. 1985. *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture*. New York: New York University Press
- Treuhertz, J. 1993. *Victorian Painting*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Walker, L. 2002. "Home Making: An Architectural Perspective" in *Signs*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Spring 2002), pp. 823-35
- Welter, B. 1966. "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860" in *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1. (1966), pp. 151-74

**ISTANBUL – THE PALIMPSESTIC CITY IN CORNELIA GOLNA’S
CITY OF MAN’S DESIRE AND ANTONIO GALA’S *THE TURKISH
PASSION***

ADRIANA RADUCANU and CATHERINE MACMILLAN

Yeditepe University, Istanbul

To a certain extent, the *city* can be said to have shaped people’s cultural destiny ever since the appearance of works such as Plato’s *Republic* and Augustine’s *City of God*. Although some authors maintain that the focus of such ancient texts is not the *space* itself, but its relevance to the ‘pursuit’

of a good life (Lehan 1998:6), the fact that the city is indeed depicted as a locus of development and self-development argues for its relevance. Urban historians, such as Weber, Simmel but most importantly, Durkehim, have claimed that each and every city can create a state of mind, a set of “established norms that regulated behaviour” and that such “norms were internalized as part of the individual’s personality” (Lehan 1998:7).

Undoubtedly then, especially in the case of modern men – and even more so in the case of women, the urban existence and the individual functioning within a rather limited range, very often impedes the smooth flow of becoming, causing instead self-destructive ‘adjustment’. The present study focuses on the concept of *space* read via the lenses of modern literary theories, such as those informing gender studies and Orientalism. In the two novels analyzed, the city of Istanbul is rendered and depicted as both canvas and protagonist, with a particular but not exclusive, relevance for the female character.

The years covered by Cornelia Golna in *City of Man’s Desire* witness tumultuous changes during which the ailing Ottoman Empire, “the sick man of Europe”, saw its territories decrease and its population alter, as it shifted into the modern nation state that is today’s Turkish Republic. The tumultuous changes occur both externally, at the level of political and social life, and internally, within the psychological realms of the characters involved. More often than once, in Golna’s novel, the Turks’ dreams of liberty and subject peoples’ yearnings for freedom find themselves at odds. Moreover, the issue of regulating the behaviour of female members of an empire on the brink of collapse is either completely overlooked or characterized by intolerance and sexist prejudices. Seen from this perspective, Constantinople, in its capacity of the city at the heart of the

empire is depicted in the novel as both *object* and the *subject* of metamorphosis, its volatile becoming relatively facile to assimilate to issues of *gender*. This part of the present paper therefore, focuses on the depiction of *space* as closely intertwined with the category of *female gender*, with the aim of arguing for their interchangeability.

Constantinople as setting and *space* occupies a central part in the constant redefinition of women and men as individual problematic identities. Characters in the novel are what the frictions and sparks of different experiences and perceptions make them into, i.e. a sum of subjectivities weaving a multiplicity of apprehensions of urban reality. Thus, the book opens with a glimpse of one of the most controversial sites of the metropolis, the Grand Rue de Pera, in the author's words "the most sophisticated street in the city" (Golna 2004:7-8). Its controversiality resides in the variety of gazes directed at it. To Theodora, the area is "an enclave of European finesse" (Golna 2004:8), with the freedom and the rootlessness of the Levantines enviously perceived as an asset, an idealized dream, out of reach for the young girl of Greek and Romanian descent. When reading the testimonies of the period centered on this European enclave, one is confronted with a completely different image of its inhabitants. According to Mufty-Zade and K. Zia Bey, this very cultural hybridity of the inhabitants of Pera invites accusatory glances and villifies the Levantine dimension invading and reclaiming its share of the Turkish space:

[...] the narrow, crooked streets [of Pera] are the playground and dwelling place of a nondescript people which, for lack of a better name, people have agreed to call 'Levantines'. The Levantine is the parasite of the Near East. He has no country, no scruples, no morals, no honesty of any sort – in business or in private life. He is the descendant of foreign traders who have settled in the Near

East at some period and have intermingled, not necessarily intermarried, with Greeks and Armenians or other non-Turkish elements of the country (1994:168).

Thus, from the very first pages, the instance of disagreement between one of the character's perception of a specific area of the city and the historical writings focusing on the same, renders the image of Istanbul as a *palimpsestic*, multi-faceted space, holding its diversified grip onto its inhabitants. Even in the immediate vicinity of this mini-European city-within a larger Oriental area, the presence of three unescorted and unveiled women (Theodora, her mother and her sister) attracts attention:

As they passed, curious heads turned to watch them; sporting fezzes, bowler hats,

or turbans, they looked after the unescorted women and took their measure, making no attempt to hide their curiosity. Some stared provocatively, others whispered suggestive, if unintelligible, phrases as they brushed past Theodora's shoulder (Golna 2004:9)

At the narrative level, the unequivocal value of such stares invites a parallel reading of relationships male-female, focusing on purist musings on *fitna*, on the part of conservative males of the empire, confronted not only with the dissolution of their world as they know it, but also with the more delicate issue of preserving the *gender* limitations. According to Lewis, preventing *fitna* represents the social ability to overcome "the chaos and disorder threatened by illicit sexual thoughts and/or relations – which could be sparked by the seductive presence or visibility of women" (2004:203).

On the other hand, there is no alternative, for even the Ottoman woman, the veiled one, still cannot escape objectification and transformation into a sexualized public spectacle. In spite of Clement's

idealization of the itinerary of a woman of affluent means, covering Sweet Waters on a Friday, the cemetery at Scutari on a Tuesday, shops in Pera and Stamboul, prayers at mosques and tombs (1895:249-250), women's spatial behaviours around 1908 (the historical period covered by the novel) raise concerns. Golna's book obliquely echoes such concerns when presenting the itinerary of the three female characters in her novel, through the harbour square, an extremely crowded area of Constantinople. There male voyeurism gains momentum and female bodies are depicted, as a "legitimate object of surveillance, to activate in Muslim men a mode of behaviour which rendered women – veiled or otherwise – a spectacle in both Islamic and Western terms" (Lewis 2004: 203).

As stated before, one of the aims of this brief study is arguing for the juxtaposition of *space* and *female gender*. There is a particular instance in the novel, highly relevant to this purpose. During the leisure walk, Theodora's irresistible attraction to jewelry carries her away to the small shop of an Armenian seller. On the way, 'her height' [. . .] singled her out, so she 'shrank and averted her eyes from leers and whispered impertinences', feeling 'vaguely ashamed' at her own audacity to penetrate public space as a single, unaccompanied woman (Golna 2004:12). In the Armenian jeweler's shop, Theodora experiences a temporary but all the deeper plunge into the timelessness of Eastern sensuality, reminiscent of the archetypal *yin* and *yang* pair. The ring she tries on is made of "two circles", "an ancient motif [. . .] the sun pursuing his beloved, the moon; she has donned wings to flee from him who would rob her of her innocence" (Golna 2004:13). Our suggestion here is that the city of Istanbul can be read via the paradigm of the *moon*, as a feminine space, mythically assimilated to this classic symbol of maidenhood. Throughout all its convoluted history,

translated even in the avatars of its successive names: Byzantium-Constantinople-Istanbul, this city, the only one in the world which straddles two continents, has been by many madly ‘pursued’, managing, nevertheless, to remain true to its ineffable essence:

Constantinople, object of men’s desire, embellished and adorned by its masters through the ages, like a queen. Coveted and despised in turn by those outside its gates. Constantinople: the queen, the temptress. The object of fervid adoration and fury [. . .] Yet the city remained indifferent, a jutting crag, a promontory, mute and impassive, upon which humans inflicted their activities, indifferent to covetousness, to passions and purposes and machinations, to dogmas and faiths,

to religious rage. To bravery and pettiness, joys and sorrows, lives and deaths. To tragedy and triumph. To history itself. (Golna 2004:384-385)

Similarly, Theodora’s striking, majestic appearance, with a ‘sparkling peacock collar and its hundred turquoise eyes’ draws greedy comments from the Armenian. Although not voiced, but expressed via persistent gazing, such ‘verdicts’ nevertheless stand for male desire, hardly able to contain itself when confronted with the breath-taking potion of carnality and magic embodied by a woman far above the usual standards of beauty, in the same way as “Istanbul is the city far above the standards of average urban ‘delights’”:

Imperceptibly, the Armenian inventoried her slender form. What beauty she must be hiding underneath that modest dress! White shoulders, milk-hued breasts, small and round; a slender waist, smooth hips swaying before him, inviting his caress. Naked before him, adorned only in jewels – cold metal against warm skin, the hundred eyes of blue and silver, sparkling, tinkling above her breasts to the rhythm of her dance – a silver girdle about her middle,

bracelets above her wrists and ankles, heavy and wide, like manacles (Golna 2004:14).

As stated before, the categories of *space* and *gender* are finely juxtaposed, to the point of one character becoming the city, and the city impersonating the character. Theodora, *is* the metonymic character of the novel, marvellous, incredibly proud and vulnerable, queen-like, ‘*the woman of man’s desire.*’ As the novel progresses, we see her coveted by a diversity of men. The opportunist Panaiotis, the American dreamer, John Townsend, Vlad – the very quintessence of the romantic and self-destructive Slavic soul, they all fantasize about possessing her unearthly qualities. Theodora’s affective availability misleads them all, and although she seems to allow them all, she nevertheless retains her most disconcerting to men, untouchability. On her journey towards self-discovery, she plays the *anima* woman, ‘the woman who is all things to all men’, who ‘adapts herself to their wishes and makes herself beautiful in their eyes’ (Shinoda 2004:201).

John Townsend is depicted in Golna’s book as the idealist Westerner for whom the interaction with the city and its people is a means of healing self-inflicted spiritual and affective wounds. In this he is one of the many, for all the characters are one way or another engaged in a voyage of self-discovery and a process of mastering obsolete pain. Professor Townsend chooses to displace his intellectual affinities, uproot them from the Western realm and centre them around the Eastern *site*. His *histoire d’amour* with the city and Theodora may be said to parallel the trajectory of Pierre Loti’s female characters in *Desenchantées*. Madly in love with the *giaour*, they nevertheless do not kill themselves when the affair is over, any more than Townsend after being rejected by Theodora and crushed by his

own misplaced idealizing of a space which he attempts to mould according to his own map of the mind.

His perception of the city is rendered via a fondness of and a comprehension of a dichotomising perspective, lacking in hierarchic attempts: “Constantinople was an inextricable tangle of beauty and rot [. . .] grand hospitality alongside thievery and beggary.” (Golna 2004:18) Moreover, when engaged in a dialogue with a revolutionarily inflamed Theodora, Townsend disarms her fervour with the grace of a true post-modernist. “In answer to your question, Miss Vlachos [. . .] what I love here are the colors, the sounds, the music, the smells: One has another kind of freedom – the freedom of diversity. There is a fullness here that only a great expanse of time can create.” (Golna 2004:92) For the American professor, Constantinople is a career, in the sense that Disraeli used the phrase in *Tancred*. Lost in a web of sensations, feelings and rationalizing attempts, Townsend constantly creates and re-creates the city, so as to echo his own contradictory states of mind. He is so remote from anything that does not support his *idea* of Istanbul, that he even contorts space to squeeze glimpses of divinity, in an attempt to force the city to provide him with a new God, while erasing the one stemming from his own culture:

He had been a dreamer before that war, drawn to the priesthood. For a short time he had even enrolled in a seminary, there coming into contact for the first time with the ancient Greek philosophers whose ideas had intermingled with Christian

teaching [. . .] On his return from Cuba, John Townsend could no longer believe in the Christian God. Yet, robbed of his faith, he found himself frantically searching for another [. . .] At the back of the book he found a diagram of Plotinus’ universe, showing the levels from which a soul must pass, shedding its

early bonds until at last it could fly unencumbered and weightless to its beloved Source. Union with the godhead; the spirit's ultimate goal. Gradually the dismal thoughts that had gathered in his mind scattered, and he remembered his interview that morning with the master of the Dervish lodge. Today he was happy, he wanted for nothing. The sheer beauty of the world filled him with wonder and love (Golna 2004:20)

America, his motherland, far from stirring melancholic longings in the Professor's soul, merely serves as a historical counter-example intended to emphasize Istanbul's superiority. At a time when the New World was regularly invaded by immigrants willing to mould themselves into Americans, Townsend's perceptions of the Oriental city confess a desire to shed the 'old' identity of *Homo americanus* and assume that of a citizen of Istanbul. Thus, Golna's male character enthusiastically embraces fatalism as an approach to life and betrays the Westerner's stereotypical scientific attitude when analyzing existence, people and surroundings. In an unequivocally Pygmalionesque manner, Townsend is softened by Istanbul and becomes the Orientalized Westerner, the scientist falling for the object of his study, refusing to perceive anything stretching beyond his romanticized dreams.

Theodora and Townsend are but two of the many characters whose literary life can be said to be subsumed to that of Istanbul. Golna peoples this Oriental space with an impressive gallery of inhabitants, ranging from the flamboyant Russian exile Natalya Petrovna and her brother to the reclusive Poet and the revolutionary Murat, the cruel representative of the Young Turks. Their lives intertwine at a moment of extreme crisis and transformations which more often than once escape the very designs of men. For the scope of this brief study, only two characters have been discussed in

their relation to the city. Otherwise an arbitrary selection, since this is a novel without a protagonist *per se*, both the female character and the male one support the argument with the first metonymically embodying the city whilst the latter largely attempts to re-create it. Thus, although Istanbul *palimpsestically* offers itself to Thedora and Townsend as a background for personal growth or annihilation, the city nevertheless breaks down short of meaning, and we are left with the sense of the mysterious and the uncanny:

Against the backdrop of the setting sun, Constantinople was transformed into a fortress, an inked outline, its face hidden from them. Despite its forbidding facade, its proud, impenetrable wall, it appeared tenuous – a shadowy city, a silhouette, its domes shadow mountains, its minarets phantom spires. Yet even as they watched, the darkening sky blotted it from view (Golna 2004:422).

In contrast to the late Ottoman, multicultural city of *City of Man's Desire, The Turkish Passion* is set in the modern, supposedly monoethnic society of the contemporary Turkish republic. The city, however, still retains its palimpsestic quality, which can be appreciated by any visitor who takes the time to explore the city outside the tourist centre of Sultanahmet as Goytisoló, for instance, discovers (1990).

The novel can be read on two levels: on one level, it is a love story between Desi, a Spanish tourist stuck in a boring marriage in a dull provincial town who, on holiday in Istanbul, falls in love and has an affair with Yamam, her Turkish tour guide. The relationship is passionate and disastrous for Desi; leaving her husband and country for Yamam, her overwhelming obsession and his contempt and ill treatment of her eventually drive her to suicide. In this way, Desi's Istanbul *is* Yamam, and

the evolution of her relationship with him is mirrored in her changing perceptions of the city.

On another level, however, the story can be read through the lens of Said's Orientalism. In this way, then, it is the tale of an Orientalist's passion for and eventual disillusionment with the East. Thus, Desi's 'Istanbul of the mind' is strongly coloured by the evolution of her Orientalist attitudes. At first 'the Orient' represents a dream world of luxury, passion and sensuality. As the novel progresses, however, this turns to a disillusionment with everything Oriental and, more specifically, Turkish. Thus, Istanbul in *The Turkish Passion* also represents the Other: in this case, however, it is not a feminine but an Oriental Other.

As Said argues, the change from a fascination with the East to a disgust for it is common among Orientalists:

Many of the earliest Oriental amateurs began by welcoming the Orient as a salutary *derangement* of their European habits of mind and spirit. The Orient was

overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its longevity, its primitivity, and so forth. Schelling, for example, saw in Oriental polytheism a preparation of the way for Judeo-Christian monotheism. Abraham was prefigured in Brahma. Yet almost without exception such overesteem was followed by a counterresponse: the Orient suddenly appeared lamentably underhumanised, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric and so forth. A swing of the pendulum in one direction caused an equal and opposite swing (Said 1995:150).

Desi is fascinated with the 'Orient' even before her first visit to Turkey. In a way she is comparable to Flaubert's heroes and heroines. Just like Emma Bovary, at the beginning of the novel Desi is married to a man, Ramiro, whom she finds boring, who does not satisfy her sexually and who

lives what she insinuates is a drab bourgeois life full of routine and pretension. She dreams of the 'Orient', which she explains to herself as a call of her Andalusian blood. As Said points out;

In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy. Emma Bovary and Frederic Moreau pine for what in their drab (or harried) bourgeois lives they do not have and what they realize they want comes easily to their daydreams packed inside Oriental cliches: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherberts, ointments and so on (1995:190).

The 'Orient', then, for Desi represents, at least at the beginning of the novel, an escape from her humdrum life, an exotic promised land full of excitement, luxury and mystery. Indeed, her visits to Egypt and Syria do not disappoint her. In Egypt, for instance, she perceives and is attracted to the chaotic energy of the Orient noted by other Orientalists:

I felt a strange pull which attracted and attached me to those people with their deep, sparkling eyes and their thick eyelashes; to those colossal women who stormed along the pavement like bulldozers which would crush you to death if you didn't get out of their way; to those smiling, begging children and to those rustics who came from who knows where to Cairo to get either cured or permanently lost there. Surrounded by the chaos of the city I held the beat of its intimacy in my hands as if it were the little heart of a bird which, after flying round in the sky, had somehow fallen into my power (Gala 1993:65-66).

In her early days in Istanbul, the city both represents and lives up to Desi's Orientalist dreams. Looking out of her hotel window Desi is

enchanted by the view across the Golden Horn, a view which for her is full of exotic minarets and painted in the soft, feminine colours of the Orient:

When I looked out of the window again it was getting dark. From my bed I saw that the sun still overpowered the minarets and the domes to the right, while it had deserted the Blue Mosque which I recognised by the exception of its six minarets, Saint Sophia, Saint Irene and the Topkapi Palace which emerged lonely and pensive from the water and the surrounding woodland. This water is the convergence of the Sea of Marmara, the Golden Horn and the Bosphorous, which finishes in the Black Sea: I had done my homework. The Golden Horn was pink and grey: a green path up to the Galata bridge and silver afterwards: a pink path up to the Ataturk bridge which then darkened. I was happy. I never wanted to forget this moment (Gala 1993:125).

In addition, at first Desi perceives that Istanbul connects her with Yamam, that he is her guide and her accomplice in navigating this palimpsestic city which would otherwise devour her:

From that very instant Istanbul started to spin around me like a large carousel whose centre was Yamam. Or like a toboggan on which I slid watching mosques, landscapes, streets, mosaics and everything skid past me on both sides, hoping that Yamam's arms would be waiting for me at the end of the fall (Gala 1993: 99).

Moreover, Desi's Istanbul *is* Yamam. He is her reason for returning to, and staying in, the city. As Desi's relationship with Yamam deteriorates her friends and acquaintances such as Paulina, Ariane and Pablo Acosta continuously advise her to leave the city and return to Spain; they are actually counselling her, of course, to leave *Yamam*. Thus, Yamam is

symbolic of the city. Like Istanbul, Yamam is palimpsestic; his ethnic origin (Turkish, Central Asian, Georgian or Kurdish) appears to vary with his mood, as do his political opinions and even his life story (Gala 1993:172). For much of the novel Desi's relationship with Yamam determines her relationship with the city: as the emotional distance between her and Yamam grows, so Desi's physical isolation from the city increases.

As Desi's Orientalist sunglasses are gradually removed, the exotic charm of her surroundings is transformed into the reality of living in a sometimes down-at-heel big city. Yamam's apartment, which she gradually notices is in a block populated by poorly dressed neighbours whose flats stink of cabbage and cumin, does not look onto an Ottoman palace or even a Turkish bazaar but an ordinary car park: 'Who would have thought that my daily view in this city of dreams, so full of an aura of majesty and mystery, the most coveted of all cities in history would be a car park?' (Gala 1993:73).

Another example is her second visit to the cafe in Sirkeci station, which has lost its exotic appeal for Desi in the two years since she first visited it with Yamam. The cafe, which two years previously had struck her as exotic, now appears tacky and kitsch, reflecting both the increasing alienation in her relationship with Yamam and, more broadly, her disaffection with 'the Orient':

We were in luck: the table from two years ago was free. We sat holding hands across it but reality imposed itself: the flowers that surrounded the fountain are artificial, and the fountain, which had seemed exotic to me, is excruciatingly horrible (Gala 1993:193).

For Desi, then, the city is now the enemy: like the Turkish language and culture, she begins to see Istanbul as something that separates her from rather than unites her with Yamam. In addition, she realises that she is increasingly physically isolated from the city: in contrast to the exploration of the city which characterise her earlier visits, her days, like those of a passive ‘Oriental’ woman, begin to revolve around the shabby apartment where she waits in the company of her crossword puzzles for the Sultan to come home. As she says: “My life is like that of a harem woman except for my trips to the Baazar, which don’t even amount to half a dozen” (Gala 1993:170)

In the novel the Grand Baazar, where Yamam has his carpet shop, is a symbol of the chaos, raw energy and violence of the East. In fact, Yamam himself compares it to a jungle. Like a jungle, however, the baazar is ruled by its own timeless laws, which ensure that everyone knows his place (Gala 1993:170). For Desi, the Baazar is a kind of Eastern hell populated by tortured, unfortunate beings; the blind, the physically and mentally handicapped who try to beg a meagre living from the shopowners; she, in turn, is a guardian angel sent from the Occident in order to rescue these poor creatures (Gala 1993:219).

As time passes the Occidental in Desi becomes dissatisfied with her relative isolation and she wishes to be thrown back into contact with the city, this time on her own terms. As she points out to Yamam: “I can’t spend all day waiting for the Sultan [...] am not a Turkish woman who is happy just to get fat while her man goes around the world” (Gala 1993:189). Given the job of delivering cards advertising Yamam’s shop from hotel to hotel, she eventually begins to negotiate her way around the city without Yamam, thus seemingly building her own independent relationship with it.

Her new job puts her into contact with Ariane, an elderly resident of Pera, who introduces Desi to a new aspect of Istanbul. Born of a Yugoslav father and a Greek mother she represents the multicultural nature of Pera in the late Ottoman Istanbul of *City of Man's Desire*, a multicultural city which, like the ancient Ariane herself, is dying. For Ariane, despite the fact that her Turkish citizenship was granted by Ataturk himself and that she is a long-term resident of the city, Istanbul has also become 'the Other' since the advent of the Turkish republic. Ariane's Istanbul is also very much an Istanbul of the mind, particularly as she is no longer able to venture out into the city physically, paralysed perhaps more by fear and disgust than by arthritis and old age. An Orientalist *par excellence*, for Ariane Istanbul is a city now dominated by lying, cheating Turks, where she no longer feels safe, where even the bottled water is dangerous (Gala 1993:215).

However, as Reina Lewis argues, even in Ottoman times many Istanbul Greek women had a complex attitude towards the Muslim Turks, vacillating between a certain degree of identification and Orientalisation on the one hand and repugnance on the other. Indeed, for Grace Ellison, an English traveller in early 20th century Ottoman Istanbul, Perote ladies such as Ariane who had little actual contact with Muslim Turks were a prime source of negative, Orientalised views of 'the Turk'. Reina Lewis cites the example of Demetra Vaka Brown, an Ottoman Greek inhabitant of Istanbul:

For Vaka Brown, identity oscillated between alliance with and difference from the Turks and the Greeks and the Oriental. But though she embraced the label of Ottoman, she was more reticent to name herself as Oriental, often using the term to refer to the differences between herself and her Muslim friends: 'I the Greek with the instinct of the Merchant, [...] she, the Oriental fatalist [...]' (Lewis 2004:77).

In this then Ariane, like Desi, represents a culture which is torn between identification with, and disassociation from, the Orient. This similarity endures despite the fact that the two women are from the opposite ends of Europe, Desi from a country where mosques have been turned into churches and Ariane from a land where churches were converted into mosques.

Another character who Desi is thrown into contact with as a result of her work in Yamam's shop is Denis, a suave, attractive Frenchman with whom she has a loveless affair. Her relationship with Denis is, for Desi, a failed attempt to assert her emotional independence from Yamam. Importantly, Denis introduces her to Paris on a week-long break; although Desi had previously visited the city Denis's affection for Paris makes her see it in a new light;

Nobody had ever shown me the city, which in any case I had not visited that often, with this much affection. I explored it alone and we explored it together. Sometimes in the mornings I went to the squares, the gardens and the monuments which Denis had shown me the night before, and how different they were [...] If I didn't know who I was in love with, I would have imagined it was my love for Denis that garlanded the buildings, the trees, the domes, the bell-towers and everything [...]. Oh, if Istanbul didn't exist I would have stayed here in Paris. How strange that I couldn't stand it before (Gala 1993:285).

Denis, and Paris, thus represent for Desi the safe world of the Occident, which is beginning to look increasingly attractive to her. In contrast to the chaos and minarets of Istanbul, Desi's Paris is dominated by familiar symbols of Christianity and of domesticated nature in the form of gardens and tree-lined avenues. Tempting as both the city and the man may

seem to Desi, for her they still cannot compete with the primal passion of the Orient, however problematic, as represented by Yamam and Istanbul.

However on her return to Istanbul she is rejected both by Yamam, in all ways apart from the purely physical, and by the city itself. When crossing the sea of Marmara by ferry on the way back from a trip to Bursa she is oppressed by the sea, which appears to be dead in its winter greyness. Desi herself compares the rain to her own tears. This passage, then symbolises the death of Desi's Istanbul and of her love affair with Yamam, which foreshadow her own death. Just like Desi's tears, the rain over the sea seems useless; her crying too is useless in that it is not therapeutic and cannot ultimately prevent her suicide (Gala 1993:287-288).

In conclusion, therefore, in spite of the fact that Istanbul has changed greatly from the multiethnic Ottoman capital depicted in *City of Man's Desire* to the supposedly provincial and monoethnic contemporary Turkish city of *The Turkish Passion*, it is in both novels a palimpsestic city with a multiplicity of realities and possibilities. In *The Turkish Passion*, the city remains palimpsestic on a historical level, indicated by its setting in a combination of Byzantine, Ottoman and modern Turkish architecture. In addition, the novel hints that the Turkish characters who populate the city are far from monoethnic; the reader is introduced to Ariane, with her Greek/Yugoslav ancestry, to her Kurdish cleaning lady Harife, and to Yamam himself, whose ethnic origin varies from Georgian to Central Asian Turkic to Kurdish as the mood takes him.

Thus, in both novels, the characters are both shaped by the city and they shape the city in that they have to create their own metropolitan space from the palimpsest, and these 'cities of the mind' inevitably reflect their mental worlds. In both cases the city is identified with one of the main

characters; it represents (and is represented by) Theodora in *City of Man's Desire* and by Yamam in *The Turkish Passion*. However, both of these characters, and therefore the city, are symbols of 'the Other', with all of the fascination and repulsion that that implies, according to the masculine and Occidental gaze respectively.

Thus, while it is tempting to compare the female characters of the two novels, Theodora and Desi, it is more appropriate to draw parallels between Theodora and Yamam on the one hand and Desi and John Townsend on the other. Both Desi and Townsend approach Istanbul as Orientalists desiring to submerge the humdrum banality of their Western lives and marriages in the quintessential Oriental dream of passion and desire. This dream is personified in Yamam for Desi and Theodora for Townsend, and their experiences of the city are coloured by their relationships with these two characters. In *City of Man's Desire*, the city is a masculine dream of a beautiful whore/queen. In *The Turkish Passion*, by contrast, the city is a Western woman's dream of a passionate yet dangerous Oriental man.

In the end, however, the dream in each case becomes a nightmare as both Townsend and Desi are, in different ways, rejected by their objects of desire and, therefore, by the city. The rejection is more violent in Desi's case and in the end Yamam and Istanbul literally destroy her by driving her to suicide. Townsend's rejection by Theodora and the city is subtler but he is rejected nonetheless by both, leading to a spiritual if not physical death.

References

- den Boer, Pim. 1993. "Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea" In K. Wilson and J. Dussen (eds.) *The History of the Idea of Europe*. Milton Keynes: The Open University

- Gala, A. 1993. *La Pasión Turca*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- Gilmour, N. 2006. "Turkish Delight: Antonio Gala's *La Pasión Turca* as a Vision of Spain's Contested Islamic Heritage" in *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 10.1 (2006) pp. 77-94.
- Golna, C. 2004. *City of Man's Desire. A Novel of Constantinople*. The Netherlands: Goe-boss Press
- Goytisolo, J. 1990. "La Ciudad Palimpsesto" in *Aproximaciones a Gaudi en Capadocia*. Madrid: Mandadon
- Lehan, R. 1998. *The City in Literature; An Intellectual and Cultural History*. The University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, California
- Lewis, R. 1996. *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Expression*. London: Routledge
- Lewis, R. 2004. *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*. London: I.B. Tauris
- Rosen, L. 2007. "Orientalism Revisited: Edward Said's Unfinished Critique" in *Boston Review*. Available: <http://bostonreview.net/BR32.1/rosen.html> [2007: 20 August]
- Said, E. W. 1995. *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient*. London: Penguin
- Shinoda, J. 2004. *Goddesses in Every Woman*. San Francisco: Harper and Row
- Trotman, T. G. 2006. "Orientalism in Antonio Gala's *La Pasión Turca*" in *IXQUIC Revista Hispanica Internacional de Análisis Literario* (Dec 2006)
- Wheatcroft, A. 1993. *The Ottomans: Dissolving Images*. London: Penguin.
- Yeh, A. *Said's Orientalism*. Available: http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism_/postcolonialism/orientalism.html [2007:25 September]

BLACK AND WHITE LIVES IN TEHRAN

ANDREEA PELE

University of the West, Timișoara

1. Introduction

Over recent years, we have become inured to news items, documentaries, films and propaganda which have Islam as their subject. They all seem to paint the same picture: that of a never-ending conflict and stark incompatibility with Western principles. Furthermore, not only do the

information and the images we receive generate more suspicion and opprobrium, but they are also one-sided, since when they are presented by Western media. Muslim voices tend to be either disregarded, presented in a negative light or treated with an exaggerated deference.

In an attempt to discover more than the media broadcasts, this paper discusses two novels, by two Muslim writers, which have garnered serious attention in the West because of their insider insights into life under one of the most controversial religious regimes of the modern world.

2. The novels

The two novels are Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. These two very different pieces of writing reflect similar aspects of life in fundamentalist Iran as experienced by these two women writers.

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* is an autobiographical comic book, a graphic novel telling the coming of age story of its main character, Marji, from the age of 10 until her twenties. It was first written in French and published in four volumes between 2000 and 2003, bringing its author worldwide recognition. The English version grouped the four volumes in two, one dealing with her childhood and departure to Austria, while the other is focused on Marji's return to Iran.

Reading Lolita in Tehran is a self-styled "memoir in books" penned by an Iranian academic and university professor of English literature. Published in 2003, the novel has drawn a great deal of attention, having been translated into more than thirty languages. However, much in the same way as Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* has sparked controversy, leading to severe criticism and accusations from

some Muslim scholars and academics, due to its author's manifest stance towards the current regime in Iran.

The novel revolves around Azar Nafisi and the illegal literature workshop of seven women students. For two years, between 1995 and her departure in 1997, these women gathered at Azar Nafisi's house, every Thursday to discuss literature and its importance in a totalitarian regime. The novel comprises the author's own story, as well as that of her students, the Western classics they discuss and their relevance for the condition of women, and on a larger scale, that of Iranian society as a whole, under its theocratic Islamic regime.

As mentioned before, the two novels include a substantial number of aspects that show to what degree society was affected by the divisive fundamentalist regime and, finally, how they managed to cope with its constant, encroaching presence in their public as well as private lives.

2. The Islamic Headscarf

Unsurprisingly, the most powerful and immediate presence of the religious, fundamentalist regime, shared by the two novels, is the Islamic veil. The landmark move of the Islamic Revolution, which swept Iran between 1978 and 1979, was to reinstate the Islamic dress code, which was tantamount to reintroducing the compulsory headscarf for women in public. It is a running theme for both novels. This happened in 1979, when Marji was 10 and Azar Nafisi was already teaching at the University of Tehran.

It is how Marjane Satrapi chooses to open her novel, with a black and white drawing of herself as a 10-year-old schoolgirl wearing the veil. Right next to her picture is that of her schoolmates, all girls, all sitting one

next to the other, wearing the same black headscarves tightly wrapped round their faces.

Azar Nafisi also chooses to open her novel with a description of a very similar photograph of seven women against a blank wall, wearing their black scarves and robes. The only distinguishing features are the oval of their faces and that of their hands. Comparing the description with Marjane Satrapi's picture, we can easily understand that one draws what the other writes.

Another feature emerging from the two pictures is what the headscarf meant for the women who found themselves compelled to wear it. It is an instrument of power intended to achieve uniformity. Marji's schoolmates look almost identical in that first picture, until you deliberately look for the shape of the eyebrows, the mouth or the eyes. Azar and her students look undistinguishable one from the other.

The wearing of a head veil is mandatory in public, thus shaping women's public persona. At the same time, however, it strips these women of an identity and colour. It is Azar Nafisi who points out that, after the Islamic Revolution, the veil will be forever tainted by the political, anti-Western significance it has acquired but also by its constrictive use after the Revolution. Even some of her students – who had worn the veil as a revolutionary act of defiance – find wearing it to be cumbersome and, more importantly, devoid of any meaning over a decade after the victory of the Islamic Republic.

Moreover, both Satrapi and Nafisi admit to their clumsiness when it comes to wearing the veil correctly. Marjane Satrapi actually presents a little guide on the proper way of wearing the headscarf and to the Islamic

dress code, as well as different, subtle manners of defying the code and, thus, the system (Satrapi 2004:78).

For Azar Nafisi, the veil represents a constant source of friction and aggravation. She was actually expelled from the University of Tehran for refusing to wear the veil.

Both books present darker aspects of how the veil was imposed in Iran, the rhetoric behind the veil but also the manner in which Islamic guards patrol the streets to check for propriety, subjecting women to harassment, abuse and even violence, if they were found wanting.

It soon becomes apparent that the veil is a mere curtain between the private and the public lives of women in Iran. Nafisi deplors the disappearance of what she calls an intermediary space between these two dimensions of society. In both novels, the transition between these women's private and public lives is always so stark, so violent that it leaves them feeling schizophrenic (Satrapi 2005:151), dislocated, torn between their public lives, which are a sham, and their private lives, which are illicit, and, therefore, under constant threat.

In *Persepolis*, Marji identifies the true motive behind this totalitarian system, namely someone who is too worried about how they look and how they are supposed to behave when they leave their house will not recall that they are not free. (Satrapi 2005:148)

It is in this paranoid world that the "black and white" reveal their true significance. There is no colour, no separation, no intermediary between the private and the public, the political and the personal in a fundamentalist regime. As a consequence, Satrapi's novel is entirely drawn in black and white, with black proving to be the actual colour of the illustrations, while the white serves as a mere contrast substance, to bring

our the intensity of the black even more, in much the same way as the blank wall in Azar Nafisi's photograph.

Azar Nafisi also mentions the "black and white days of the revolution" (Nafisi 2004:117) when, in her own words, people "appeared and disappeared like characters in a cartoon" (Nafisi 2004:91).

The political connotations of this "black and white" motif are an underlying presence in both novels. The two writers present in detail what happened in Iran after the rise of the fundamentalist Islamic regime: the persecutions, the prosecutions, the tortures, the executions. Marjane Satrapi, in her cartoon, makes a point of naming many of her family and acquaintances who became victims of the fundamentalists in their efforts to stamp out any opposition.

In this bleak world, Azar Nafisi and her students yearn for colour. There is a second picture Azar Nafisi describes in her memoirs, a picture of the same seven women against the same white wall, in the same positions as the first picture. However, this time they have taken off their veils. Colour separates and identifies the one from the other.

3. Women Storytellers

In this repressive and schizophrenic reality, where women's roles in society are restricted to the private dimension and their presence kept under constant scrutiny in public, there is one role that gives them the power to choose differently for themselves and, thus, create a dent in the "absurd fictionality" that rules their lives (Nafisi 2004:26). This role is that of storyteller.

Azar Nafisi confesses to having an overwhelming urge to reinvent herself, to narrate herself (Nafisi 2004:23) and, through this, separate herself

from the black and white mass of everyday society. In an article about Iranian women, former political activists, in exile, called *Shifting and Conflicting Identities* Halleh Gorashi, herself an Iranian refugee, speaks about the manner in which Iranian women refugees are:

able to see the self as a narrative [...] to understand the world around them and to construct their identities [...] It is then not so much about making an integration of selves within a single self, but rather about keeping a narrative in mind which makes sense to the person. (Gorashi 1997:287)

In other words, both Azar Nafisi and Marjane Satrapi respond to the urge of extricating themselves from someone else's fiction of how women should look and behave in a theocratic Iran.

Azar Nafisi mentions Scheherazade as the archetype of a Muslim women storyteller. She is important for two reasons. Firstly, she is a foil to the two other types of women in the *Arabian Nights*, namely the Queen and the virgins. The Queen embodies the type of woman who betrays and is killed, whereas the virgins are the faceless, anonymous victims who are killed before they even have the chance to act, let alone make the choice to betray:

They do not quite exist, because they leave no trace in their anonymous death (Nafisi 2004:19)

The plight of the virgins in the *Arabian Nights*' frame story can be extended to Iranian society as a whole, which is forced to yield to the power of the regime. This is the reason why Scheherazade is so important as a role, because she chooses to act and she does it by establishing "new terms of

engagement” (Nafisi 2004:19), ones which she can control. She creates a whole new world through imagination.

This brings us back to Azard Nafisi’s two different pictures and Marjane Satrapi’s black and white graphic novel. The images in white and black represent women who are misshapen by someone else’s absurd dream of a perfect society, while the photograph in colour shows the women how they imagined themselves (Nafisi 2004:26).

4. Escaping Tehran

Both writers arrive at a point when they have to escape Tehran in order to survive.

Marji’s escape is physical and not of her own choice. At the age of fourteen, worried for their daughter’s future in a fundamentalist society, Marji’s parents send her away to study at a French college in Vienna, Austria. For four years, far from flourishing in this democratic, Western context, Marji experiences a series of setbacks – from cultural shock, to adjustment problems, questionable entourage, and heartbreak – that leave her in the throes of a suicidal depression. Eventually, after almost losing her life, she returns to Iran.

There are two interesting aspects here. Firstly, she realizes she cannot separate her identity from her nationality, even if she equates going back to Iran to going back to the veil (Satrapi 2005:91). There is a picture of her in the airport ladies’ room looking forlornly at herself in the mirror, with the scarf back on after four years, just before embarking on the plane to Iran, grasping what she is about to return to. Secondly, she consciously accepts that going back means the end of the individual and social liberties she purportedly enjoyed in the West. The choice of returning, however,

seems to coincide with Azar Nafisi's acknowledgement that leaving Iran is never fully possible: "I left Iran, but Iran never left me" (Nafisi 2004:341). Moreover, when Marji returns home she realizes that, while to Westerners she was an Iranian, to her own people she will remain a Westerner.

Azar Nafisi's escape is more personal, it is a purposeful withdrawal "from a reality that had turned hostile" (Nafisi 2004:11). Hungry for a space where she can actively create and give voice to her thoughts away from the censoring eyes of the government, she cuts off her ties with her former public life, anchoring herself in an illicit literature workshop. Together with seven other women students, she creates the colour of her dreams (Nafisi 2004:11), this class where they discuss a series of Western classics and how significant they are for women in Iran, and Iranian society as a whole.

The first writer Azar Nafisi and her students discuss is Nabokov and two of his writings: *Lolita* and *Invitation to a Beheading*. Both novels are germane to the circumstances Iranian society, and Iranian women, find themselves in, because they evince the intimate relationship between jailer and victim, between tyranny and the individual (Nafisi 2004:37).

Lolita is relevant for Azar Nafisi and her students since it is the story of a twelve year-old girl misshaped and eventually destroyed by her jailer's fantasies of what she should be. The parallel between *Lolita* and Azar Nafisi's students is more than pertinent, as Azar herself points out that everybody in fundamentalist Iran, and especially the women, is forced into a straitjacket of how they should act, behave, and most importantly think.

Invitation to a Beheading adds another dimension to the relationship between jailer and victim. It is a world where you can no longer differentiate between your saviour and your executioner (Nafisi 2004:23), a

nightmarish world of arbitrariness where Cincinnatus C, the main character, is denied even the right to know the time of his death. For him, just as for Azar Nafisi's students, every day is an execution. This perverse relationship is augmented by the fact that the victim eventually participates in his imprisonment, by agreeing, in a critical scene to waltz with the jailer. The victim is, thus, implicated in his own execution.

One positive aspect that Azar Nafisi finds in this novel is Cincinnatus C's stubborn refusal to believe in his executioners or his death. Just like this character, who becomes a hero simply by refusing to comply with the false world he lives in, Azar Nafisi and her girls find the possibility of freedom even though all their options were taken away from them by the regime they live with.

Another important book studied in the workshop is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The magnitude of this novel's implications for Iranian society stems from its underlying theme of the all-consuming dream that eventually ends up either destroying the dreamer or the object of the dream. The dream is of course that of an ideal and pure Islamic society which has become the obsession of Iranian society and its leaders, threatening to implode on its makers.

At the same time, the discussion around *The Great Gatsby* evinces another important element, a totalitarian, theocratic society purging itself of any opposing element, paradoxically seized by the "American dream". Much like the Communist totalitarian republics, Islamic Iran cannot resist the pull of the myth of America. In both *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Persepolis*, black markets are flooded with illegal American contraband, from cigarettes to books, music and films, proving once again that prohibition fails due to its very nature.

An important episode linked to this chapter of the novel is the trial of *The Great Gatsby*. In the period after the Islamic Revolution, while still working at university, Azar Nafisi and her students staged a trial of Gatsby as a direct response to some of her students' fundamentalist rhetoric against the poisonous imperialist values of the American novel that should not be taught in an Islamic society. Soon, it becomes apparent what is actually on trial is teaching and understanding literature. Azar Nafisi, as a stand-in for the book, eventually points out how much the Islamic Republic and *The Great Gatsby* actually have in common: the above mentioned theme of destructive dreams.

Dreams [...] are perfect ideals, complete in themselves. How can you impose them on a constantly changing, imperfect, incomplete reality? You would become a Humbert, destroying the object of your dreams; or a Gatsby, destroying yourself. (Nafisi 2004:144)

A third noteworthy author discussed by Azar Nafisi and her seven students is Henry James, as a direct consequence of an arbitrary world purged of illegal dreams. James's *Washington Square* and *Daisy Miller* resonate with the students because of their heroines, Daisy Miller and Catherine Sloper. The underlying theme here, uniting Azar Nafisi's students, Marji and the two characters, is that of the hero as someone who safeguards their integrity at almost all costs, paying dearly for their choice (Nafisi 2004:224). This idea is in close connection with Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, where, while waiting for his execution, the protagonist, Cincinnatus C, obstinately clings to his defiant rejection of the sham world of his jailers, creating his own ideal world in his writings. Integrity plays an important role in Marji's life. It is her grandmother's only

demand when she leaves for Austria: to stay true to herself (Satrapi 2004:150). Her crisis stems from the fact that she sacrifices integrity in her attempt to integrate, to assimilate.

At the same time, in James's novels, the hero, or heroine, in our case, is always an outsider. Marji confesses that she "always wanted to remain on the margins" (Satrapi 2005:166), whereas Azar Nafisi also realizes that the real protagonists of her classes at university were not her regular students but the outsiders, who were not part of the course, who came because of their commitment to the books. It was these outsiders who would later form her secret class.

Another common aspect linking Azar's seven students and Marji to Henry James's female characters and their destinies is that of "perfectly equipped failures" (Nafisi 2004:201). As an extension to the idea of safeguarding integrity mentioned in the previous paragraph, perfectly equipped failures "consciously choose failure in order to preserve their own sense of integrity" (Nafisi 2004:202). Nevertheless, the term can also be approached from another perspective, when applied to Azar Nafisi's seven female students and Marji. These are women with education, aspirations that overflow the prescriptive roles ascribed to women in an anachronistic Islamic society. They themselves have dreams but they have nowhere to fulfill them. Azar Nafisi ponders over how at least her generation pines over memories of past things that are now prohibited under the fundamentalist regime: "we had a past to compare with the present" (Nafisi 2004:76). Yet her girls speak of and long for something they had not experienced firsthand.

Finally, Azar Nafisi and her students discuss Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which proves to be an opportunity for discussions on love,

marriage, divorce and seduction. A few of Azar Nafisi's students are married, or seeking to get married. Others, including Azar Nafisi, have already been divorced and remarried. Marji, too, gets married and divorced. All these characters can identify with Elisabeth Bennet and her tribulations.

However, the main reason behind choosing *Pride and Prejudice* for the workshop is not limited to these aspects stereotypically linked to women's fiction and lives. The theme they discuss in relation to this novel is that of dialogue. It is the dialogue that carries the tension between the characters, and it is through dialogue that conflicts are solved. The antagonists in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, just like those in any totalitarian state, are incapable of genuine dialogue; they rant, they lecture, they impose. In order to have absolute control, a totalitarian state replaces dialogue with monologue, thus eliminating, the possibility of difference, disagreement and, in the end opposition.

It is dialogue that Azar Nafisi unwittingly longs for when she starts her illicit class, because dialogue is deficient in a society like Islamic Iran. Narrating herself, in *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi is also in constant dialogue with herself, her characters and her readers.

In the end, both Azar Nafisi and Marjane Satrapi leave Iran, for good.

For Nafisi, it becomes apparent that the class and the retreat into her private life is not a sufficient substitute for her disenfranchisement. She decries the fact that being a writer in Iran means "having so much to say but not being allowed to say it" (Nafisi 2004:336). She dreams about a new article added to the Bill of Rights, namely one that guarantees the right to free access to imagination, which she believes is paramount in separating

the political from the personal and, thus, ensuring that intermediary space between public and private.

Similarly, for Marji, who becomes an illustrator, leaving Iran means liberating her imagination from the constrictions and dangers of censorship, but also abandoning a place where “all the laws are on their side” (Satrapi 2005:183).

5. Other Aspects

There are several other elements that the two novels share, which could help shed light on simply what it is like to be a woman, a Muslim an Iranian and live in a totalitarian society.

Both authors mention the protests against the Shah which were crucial in toppling the West-backed system, with Marjane Satrapi giving an extensive coverage to this episode of Iran’s history. The victory of the Islamic Revolution is treated with suspicion and apprehension by both writers.

The ensuing repressions carried out by the fundamentalists against any possible opponent are also present in the novels. Marji’s uncle Anoosh occupies an important place in the first volume of *Persepolis*. She does not leave any doubt over the fact that, as a former dissident and a Communist, her uncle was murdered by the current regime.

Both *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Persepolis* show how the new government went about transforming Iranian society and putting its vision into practice. The imposition of the scarf is an example of such a coercive measure. In another move, familiar to those of us who have lived under a totalitarian government, the fundamentalists proceeded to pack the education system with “usurpers”, as Azar Nafis calls them, people admitted

to university because of their ideological affiliations (Nafisi 2004:251). There are pressures on teachers to tailor what they teach and how to teach to the new, Islamic model, which is one of the reasons Azar Nafisi quit her teaching career.

Facets of every day life converge in the two novels: the black market, gas shortages, furtively listening to the banned BBC, contraband, empty stores, covert parties under constant threat from the ever-present guards, the illegal satellite dishes smuggled into the country during the 1990s relative respite.

The war with Iraq holds a prominent place in both novels. They describe the constant terror Iranians lived with for eight years, under attack from American-made Iraqi missiles, and manipulated by their own government who seized on the situation to further their cause and toughen their control over society.

Another interesting aspect that separates the two novels this time is the conspicuous absence of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, from *Persepolis* and his prominent presence in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. On the one hand, it is speculated that Satrapi did not want to provoke the mullahs in Iran, therefore Khomeini's name is never mentioned. The regime is never individualized. The only antagonists Satrapi is comfortable naming are the Shah and Iraq. On the other hand, Azar Nafisi closely associates the straitjacketing fantasy of the Islamic Republic with its creator. His presence is inextricably intertwined with the process of creating the ideal Islamic society. The parallel with Nabokov's Humbert is unambiguous. On the occasion of his death, Azar Nafisi equates his passing with the death of a dream:

He had been a conscious mythmaker, and he had turned himself into a myth. [...] Like all great mythmakers, he had tried to fashion reality out of his dream, and in the end, like Humbert, he had managed to destroy both reality and his dream. (Nafisi 2004:246)

6. Conclusions

What I believe is the most important contribution of these two novels is that they manage to present the background and the means by which a fundamentalist, totalitarian regime can take hold of an entire society, as well as the destructive effects it can have in its attempts to keep absolute control. Moreover, these are voices from within Iran, people who have witnessed the events and the aftermath firsthand.

At the same time, however, I believe that these two pieces of writing manage to reveal something the news makes little effort to do anymore, namely the humanism that survives beyond the grip of theocratic dictatorship, the propaganda and the tirades. The two authors, as well as the characters that populate their stories, have devised ways to circumvent the totalitarian forces that dictate their lives. It is the humanism with which they deal with what is happening around them that makes *Persepolis* and *Reading Lolita in Tehran* stand out.

References

- Nafisi, A. 2004. *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. New York: Random House
- Satrapı, M. 2004. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Pantheon
- Satrapı, M. 2005. *Persepolis: The Story of a Return*. New York: Pantheon
- Ghorashi, H. 1997. "Shifting and Conflicting Identities: Iranian Women Political Activists in Exile" in *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 4:283-303 [Online], Available <http://online.sagepub.com/>

The Problematic Mother-Daughter Bond

**IN THE NAME OF MY DAUGHTER
FEMALE BONDING IN STEPHEN KING'S *DOLORES CLAIBORNE***

CSETÉNYI KORINNA

“Juhász Gyula” Teacher Training College, Szeged

I have to admit that I might be accused of plagiarism for the title of my paper: I was inspired by Jim Sheridan's film entitled *In the Name of the Father*, a film about the IRA, where a son sacrifices himself for his father. I am focusing on a similarly huge sacrifice, this time occurring along female “lines” within the family: this is going to be the story of a woman who is driven to murder her husband in order to save her child from further molestation.

Dolores Claiborne is the title of the novel, written by Stephen King, who is more noted for his special brand of horror fiction than for mainstream literature. “Although critical and academic audiences for the most part ignore, denigrate, or otherwise declare King’s fiction as unworthy of serious consideration, the vast popularity of this body of popular culture suggests an area for investigation by the social scientists as well as the literary critic.” (Burns 1990)

I think this quotation applies well to this book, which reflects very accurately the society and the times during which it takes place (especially the social restrictions imposed upon women). Two years ago I published an article about another King novel, *Gerald’s Game*, which was written just prior to *Dolores Claiborne*: in fact, these novels were part of a conscious effort on King’s part to answer the negative criticism which he had received regarding his female characters. He was blamed for not being able to create believable women, so, to rectify the matter, he wrote three novels where the central character was female.

Dolores Claiborne is the second novel, and the primary focus of the book is the mother-daughter relationship. The novel is a departure from King’s usual style, not just because of its topic (no supernatural happenings, “just” worldly horrors: domestic and child abuse, alcoholism), but because of its narrative method. King breaks away from his usual third person singular technique and lets the heroine dominate the fictional landscape: there are no chapter divisions, just a single, uninterrupted monologue where no other voices intrude. Dolores is the narrator for 368 pages in a 372-page-long book.

She is a 65-year-old woman when we meet her in the first chapter. She is brought to the police station to be questioned in connection with the

suspicious circumstances in which her employer, Vera Donovan, died. Actually, Dolores finds herself at risk of being accused of murder, because the postman found her sitting beside Vera's dead body, at the bottom of the stairs with a rolling pin close by. She has to make a statement and, while she denies having had a part in Vera's death, she admits having murdered her husband, Joe St. George, some 29 years previously, during the eclipse. In a certain sense, she has lived an "eclipsed life" ever since: the actions committed on that day cast their shadows upon her life. Now that she boldly faces the truth and confesses her sin, she might bury that dreadful past completely. The novel consists of a series of flashbacks; she jumps backward and forward in time, trying to clear herself of the accusation regarding Vera's death and she explains why she was forced to take the extreme measure of killing Joe.

They had three children, two boys, and a girl, Selena. They are a working-class family, and Dolores finds work beside Vera, a rich city lady from Baltimore, who comes to spend her summer vacations on Little Tall Island, the small, close-knit, island community where Dolores has lived all her life. Vera employs her as a maid, but, later, a very special relationship develops between these women. Although they are divided by class in a stratified society, they still share a common fate, being restricted by their gender. In fact, both women are victims of the patriarchal society in a sense, relegated to a secondary position within their respective households.

Dolores works very hard and satisfies Vera's every whim; she is a very demanding boss and hard to please. The novel is full of instances of housework being done; the sight, the sound, the feel of hanging sheets, ironing or vacuum-cleaning run through the entire text, showing how Dolores is connected to home, to the earth, to the duties and sacrifices made

for the family. She is putting away every hard-earned cent for Selena's education, thus assuring that she will have a different sort of life: "[...] she ain't gonna end up like me, old 'n damn near used up at thirty-five." (King 1993:194)

Her marriage with Joe is not without problems, since he often resorts to violence. Joe is an alcoholic and a coward, and by belittling Dolores and her work, he desperately tries to regain his own self-worth and masculinity. Dolores stoically accepts his behavior, having had a mother who was also beaten by her husband. "I put up with it because I thought a man hitting his wife from time to time was only another part of bein' married." (King 1993:87) We are in 1963 and, for Dolores's generation, it was a depressingly masculine world where women had little power and where domestic violence was referred to as "home correction" (King 1993:89).

However, Dolores refuses to be a victim, and after an especially cruel beating, she decides to resist and stand up to Joe: "I decided right then he wasn't never going to hit me again [...]" (King 1993:94). That night, she smashes his head with a pitcher and threatens him with an axe: "Your days of hitting me are over, that's all I want to say. If you ever do it again, one of us is goin' to the hospital. Or to the morgue." (King 1993:100)

Joe does not hit her again after this confrontation, but, unfortunately, something even more tragic ensues. He becomes impotent and so his attention turns towards his teenage daughter, noticing her budding sexuality. Selena has been a witness to her mother's attack on Joe (but not to the previous one, where Joe hit Dolores) and so it is easy for her father to win her sympathy and take advantage of the child's kind feelings since she has no idea why her mother harbours negative, aggressive feelings

towards her father. Dolores, completely occupied with her backbreaking work, does not realise, at first, what is going on. The first telltale signs are Selena's changed behaviour and style of dressing (she is at pains to hide her femininity), but Dolores is ignorant of the real reason behind these. She decides to assume the role of a detective, and dedicates her time to finding out the reason for the change in Selena.

She goes to the girl's school to catch up with her and, while they are travelling on the ferry, she has a heart-to-heart talk with her daughter. While they are crossing the reach, an in-between space, belonging neither to the mainland nor to the island, Selena first resists her mother's probing questions, but then reveals her terrible secret. Being an unsophisticated, plainly-spoken and forthright woman, Dolores gets down straight to the heart of the matter: "Has he had his penis into you, Selena?" (King, 1993:132). After the girl tells her mother that Joe taught her how to masturbate him, Dolores immediately decides to flee, along with her children.

The following day, she goes to the bank to withdraw the money she had put aside for the children's education only to discover that Joe, claiming he had lost his savings account passbook, had already transferred all that money into his own account. Dolores is speechless when the bank manager discloses this information to her, and, here, she is clearly shown as the victim of patriarchal society. She boldly challenges the banker: "If it'd been the other way around, if I'd been the one with a story about how the passbooks was lost and askt for new ones [...] wouldn't you have called *Joe*?" (King 1993:165)

As pointed out by Carol A. Senf (Lant, 1988:101), this scene proves that standing up to Joe and resisting him does not eliminate the

power he has over them: patriarchal institutions give legal power to “the man of the house” (King 1993:165). Dolores returns home desperate, not knowing how to deal with the situation, having lost her faith in the official institutions.

Vera is quick to notice the change and wants to know the reason. Dolores confides the secret to her and from that moment on, their relationship changes for good. Up to this point, Dolores has always addressed her as Mrs. Donovan, but now Vera remarks: “I insist that all women who have hysterics on my bed call me by my Christian name thenceforward.” (King 1993:183)

In that rare moment of shared intimacy, Vera reveals that she herself was involved (whether directly or indirectly, we never know) in the death of her husband, who died in a car crash. “Husbands die every day, Dolores. [...] An accident is sometimes an unhappy woman’s best friend.” (King 1993:189) Here we might point to the fact that Vera’s motive for murder was jealousy, not something noble such as a desire for independence. So we might say that it is Vera who instigates the murder of Joe.

Vera’s revelation clearly shows that unhappy marriages are not solely the lot of working class families. In a sense, the domestic sorrow is an element which connects these very different women (regarding their class position) into a common sisterhood. Both are independent and strong women who are willing to take their lives into their hands and make painful decisions.

Months later, a very special event keeps everyone busy on the island: a total eclipse is coming. Dolores knows this is a golden opportunity which she should not miss: the entire town is going to watch the eclipse and

she might have the seclusion necessary to implement her murderous plan. She buys whiskey for Joe and after she gets him drunk, she provokes a fight with him which results in his chasing her across the fields where he falls into an old, disused well, to which Dolores led him on purpose. He does not die immediately and Dolores eventually has to smash his head with a huge rock.

His death coincides with the surreal moment of the eclipse, and, since the sun is overshadowed by the moon (always a feminine entity), this clearly has resonances with Dolores's moment of empowerment; it illustrates her triumph over Joe. The investigation into Joe's death is inconclusive and while the medical examiner suspects Dolores of foul play, he has no evidence against her. Shortly afterwards, Dolores takes back her maiden-name, again a sign of how matrilineal connections are emphasized in the book. According to Senf (Lant 1988:103), Dolores regains her sense of personal identity with this act. Already, at the beginning of the book, she identifies herself as "Patricia Claiborne's daughter Dolores" (King 1993:52), thus attributing more significance to the maternal role than to the paternal one, and emphasizing some kind of a sisterhood extant among women.

Her figure could be seen as a monstrous hero, a mother destroyer, who calls motherly love "the strongest love there is in the world" and "the deadliest" (King 1993:365). Her maternal instincts prove to be stronger than the wifely obedience and submissiveness which were expected from women. In fact, this was the only role in those days which permitted women to step out of their socially conditioned passivity, as pointed out by Friedan (1963:39).

There begins, however, a slow process of estrangement from Selena, who has doubts about her mother's innocence. She does not yet understand that "What I did was mostly done for Selena" (King 1993:285). Dolores somehow realizes that this is the price she has to pay for what she did: to be able to provide Selena with a better future, she forfeited her love. "It was mostly for Selena that I led him on to his death, and all it cost me to protect her from him was the deepest part of her love for me." (King 1993:286)

She goes back to work for Vera and as the years pass, they get closer and closer to each other. In a sense Dolores transfers her love to Vera, the love that was not wanted by Selena. Later Vera has a stroke and becomes an invalid. Eventually, Dolores moves in with her because she does not have the heart to send her to a nursing home. "[...] I felt *somethin* for that bitch besides wanting to throttle her. After knowin her for forty years, it'd be goddam strange if I didn't." (King 1993:65) This relationship is singled out in the text as one which is peculiar to women alone. "[...] her and me was used to each other. It's hard to explain to a man." (King 1993:29) There are two policemen and a woman listening to her confession, and Dolores points to Nancy, the stenographer, as the only person who could understand the nature of a bond like that. Dolores never mentions love or friendship, but their common bitchiness counted a lot more than that. As Vera remarks: "Sometimes you have to be a high-riding bitch to survive [...] Sometimes being a bitch is all a woman has to hold onto." (King 1993:215) In Terrence Rafferty's view (Badley 1996:71), there is something heroic about women's suffering and about the hard shells they develop to protect themselves. As Magistrale remarks (2003:82), Vera and Dolores succeeded in creating a social realm without men, an alternative to what the society

offers as an example for its citizens (marriage). Even though Vera had a lover after becoming a widow, it was clear she had a low opinion of him: not so much because of his personal qualities but simply because he was a man. “Well, go do something manly,” she says. “Pound something in or push something over. I don’t care which.” (King 1993:282)

Both women know about the other’s private hell and the ghosts of the past which continue to haunt them: after all, both had had a part in their husband’s deaths. In fact, Vera often had panic attacks after her stroke, and Dolores was the only person who could soothe her. Vera imagined that wires and dust bunnies were coming to get her, and it was her guilty feelings concerning her husband’s death that made her imagine such horrors. We might venture to say that her guilt overcame her because she never dealt with her past; she never confessed it to anyone. In her weak condition, she is tortured by her memories and her guilty conscience preys upon her constantly. As Sharon A. Russell remarks (1996:151), she is not just physically, but spiritually paralyzed by those past actions. The book shows that anyone using violence becomes inevitably contaminated by it.

Dolores, when she is nursing Vera, becomes, in a sense, a mother to the older woman, thus reassuming the maternal role after her children do not need it any more. Vera has always been some kind of a role-model for her; she admired her for her strength and style and often, when Dolores feels weak or threatened, she imagines she can hear Vera’s voice in her head. When the medical examiner investigating Joe’s death questioned Dolores, she summoned up Vera’s image in her mind, trying to figure out what Vera would say and how she would behave, and this helped her regain her poise.

Though King uses telling names only rarely, I think we might interpret the name of the heroine. Dolores is connected to the Latin word

“dolor”, meaning pain and suffering, which, according to Collings, suggests that suffering is the foundation of human experience (Beahm 1995:299). Claiborne is pronounced “clay-born”, born from clay, so it connects her to mother earth, as a primal material, out of which all existence was created.

She is the pivotal point in her family, the glue holding them together, without whom it would just fall apart. She becomes just as important for Vera, her new family, since she has no one else apart from Dolores. When, during a fit, Vera throws herself down the stairs but does not die, she begs Dolores to put an end to her miserable life. Dolores kisses Vera’s hand and goes to the kitchen for the rolling pin to grant her request but by the time she returns, Vera has already expired. It is a testament to Dolores’s love for and loyalty to this old woman that, for her sake, Dolores would have committed murder again. Fortunately, there was no need for that, but she becomes a suspect. She is finally cleared of the blame and the case involving Joe is not reopened.

The last four pages of the book are excerpts from newspapers, reporting various events in the lives of the island community. One tells us about Dolores’s acquittal and the other about a positive change in her life: after twenty years of absence, Selena finally comes home for Christmas. The novel closes on this optimistic note: might the daughter’s return to her native land mean the beginning of reconciliation, some kind of a healing process which might bring the two women close to each other again? Since Vera’s death leaves Dolores on her own, without anyone to care for, and she is, first and foremost, defined as a caregiver, a person who sacrifices herself for others, then perhaps Selena’s coming back might fill the void in her heart. King does not give us a sugary ending, but looking at the

interrelatedness of these three generations of women, I think we can read hope between the lines.

In the final part of my paper, I would like to dedicate a little space to the film version of the novel, directed by Taylor Hackford (1995), bearing the same title as the book. Tony Magistrale, in his *Hollywood's Stephen King* called my attention to how hands were used in a fine, symbolic way in the movie. Since I am not aiming at a comparative analysis of the two works, I restrict myself to the exploration of that symbol.

All in all, the film devotes much more time to the depiction of the estrangement between Dolores and Selena. When Dolores is taken into custody because of Vera's death, Selena comes home after years of absence, and we are to understand that she fled from the island to escape the painful memories of the past. Her way of dealing with past injuries was to repress the memory of what her father had done to her. She only has a partial recollection of the past and she cherishes an idealized picture of her father in her heart. Dolores is shocked when she learns that Selena remembers nothing of those events and decides to make her daughter confront her unpalatable past. She makes this painful decision because she sees the self-destructive urges in Selena: she drinks a lot, she is a chain-smoker and she is hooked on prescription pills. She is also a very ambitious, successful career woman (a journalist), but without a family or a stable man in her life. Dolores thinks that Selena might start her journey toward recovery only after confronting her childhood trauma.

When we first see Selena, she is wearing tight black leather gloves, which signal her difference from the rest of the community (she is the only character in the film who wears gloves). Of course, on a concrete level, they serve to protect her from the winter cold and they could also be seen as an

outward sign of her being a rich, fashionable, urban woman. But, as suggested by Magistrale (2003:75), on a metaphorical level, the gloves could be interpreted as the means by which she tries to insulate herself from what happened in the past. After all, it was with her hands that she “committed” the sin, she was taught how to give sexual pleasure to her father with her hands. If she is not wearing gloves, she is either shown holding a cigarette or a shot of liquor in her hands. She is also often shown putting cream on her otherwise smooth hands or washing them: she seems to be obsessed with them, protecting them, caring for them. This is her way of dealing with the pain that she never faces consciously. In light of the exaggerated attention paid to her hands, it is interesting that at one point during the film Dolores remarks that if you want to know about someone’s life, you just have to look at their hands.

Finally, Selena remembers her molestation and hopefully will be able to overcome her addictions: at the end of the film we see her hands without gloves or a cigarette, waving goodbye to her mother. She is on board the ferry, starting her voyage back home. Of course the journey could be easily interpreted as a life, so she might be seen as beginning a new phase of her life, where no eclipse overshadows her.

References

- Badley, L. 1996. *Writing Horror and the Body*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press
- Beahm, G. 1995. *The Stephen King Companion*. Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel
- Burns, G. E. and Kanner, M. 1990. “Women, Danger and Death: The Perversion of the Female Principle in Stephen King’s Fiction” in *Sexual Politics and Popular Culture*. Raymond, D (ed). Available:
<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/LitRC?vrsn=3&OP=contains&locID=nlw2007> [2007, April 19]

- Friedan, B. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing Co.
- King, S. 1993. *Dolores Claiborne*. New York: Signet
- Lant, M. and T. Thompson (eds.) 1988. *Imagining the Worst*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press
- Magistrale, T. 2003. *Hollywood's Stephen King*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Russell, S. 1996. *Stephen King. A Critical Companion*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press

**MATRICIDE – VIOLATING THE SACRED MOTHER-DAUGHTER
BOND IN *THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE***

HILDEGARD KLEIN
Málaga University

The Beauty Queen of Leenane (1998) is the debut play of Martin McDonagh, of Irish origin but born and brought up in London. He belongs to the “new breed of angry young men” who started to write in the nineties and revolutionized the English stage, both in its subject matter and form. The play was first presented at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway (Ireland) on February 1, 1996, as a Druid Theatre Company/Royal Court co-production, and subsequently opened at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, on March 5, 1996. It then successfully toured Ireland before returning to London to the Duke of York’s Theatre in December 1996. It won three

major awards and met with box-office success and critical acclaim all over the world.

As the title indicates, the play is set in Leenane, a small town in Connemara, County Galway, on the west coast of rural Ireland. Significantly, McDonagh himself was the son of a Sligo mother and a Galway father, who emigrated to London. Martin and his family used to spend regular summer holidays in those two counties. Most critics have referred to the tensions created between McDonagh's Irish identity and his rootedness in London, tensions that are dramatized in his plays. He has been assimilated into the tradition of Irish theatre, in particular Synge and O'Casey. However, McDonagh cannot be placed within a single generic or national tradition, as Diehl (2001:99) has observed, because he "creates a generic hybrid, blending elements of classic realist, Irish nationalist, and angry young man drama", which "determines and is determined by a complex, historically-contingent, postcolonial Irish experience marked by exile, diaspora, and internal strife".

McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is disturbing and problematic in its subject matter and innovative in its dramatic structure. The play is a domestic tragicomedy that explores the antagonistic, dysfunctional relationship between mother and daughter leading to revenge and murder. While the first act adheres to the classic realist form, the second act breaks the expectations of a realist play due to its open ending and the want of a moral judgement. The first scene is a "model in exposition and characterization" (Diehl 2001:99) in that it presents the two major characters, Mag and Maureen Folan, and their hostile relationship. Mag is a shrewdly tyrannical mother, who has been resentfully looked after for the last twenty years by Maureen, her forty-year-old spinster daughter. The

action unfolds in the squalid kitchen of a grimy rural cottage, and explores poverty, individual isolation and frustration caused by a dreary life and the lack of prospects for the future. The play portrays a very pessimistic view of human interaction, where mother and daughter are fused together by hatred and mutual bitterness. The first part of the play offers a harsh yet comic examination of psychological cruelty. However, as the action unfolds, “the women’s mutual mental warfare acquires a shockingly vicious physical edge” (Curtis 1996:288).

Right from the beginning, we perceive that Maureen feels trapped by her drab environment and because of Mag, who represents both a millstone hanging around her neck and a duty which she dreads having to fulfil “from now and ’til doomsday” (McDonagh 1998:5). The play opens with a pithy exchange between mother and daughter:

MAG: Wet, Maureen?

MAUREEN: Of course wet (4).

Indeed McDonagh does not present a nostalgic view of rural Ireland, praised in tourist brochures for its beautiful scenery, but, on the contrary, he puts forward a cutting criticism of its backwardness by showing a world of unfulfilled desires and frustrated dreams. The mythical place of “the remote Celtic continuum” (Coveney 1996:288) of the West of Ireland “is deconstructed with meticulous attention to detail. Scenic beauty becomes constant rain, folksy charm is really inbred ignorance, the old-fashioned village is isolated and full of hatred, and the family a nest of vipers” (Sierz 2000:224). The kitchen/living-room of the grubby cottage stands precisely for this backwardness of rural Ireland, which is symbolically indicated in the stage directions through the accumulated props and its mixture of the

ancient with the modern: a box of turf (for the old turf stove), a rocking chair, a newer oven, a sink, a small TV, an electric kettle, a radio, a crucifix, a framed picture of John and Robert Kennedy, a heavy black poker and a touristy-looking embroidered tea-towel with a traditional Irish blessing 'May you be half an hour in Heaven afore the Devil knows you're dead'.

Globalisation has penetrated the world of Irish provincialism, yet does little to ease the boredom of the villagers through the regular transmission on television of sentimental Australian soap operas, such as *The Sullivans*, British sitcoms, or the broadcast of kitsch Irish ballads, such as *The Spinning Wheel* by Delia Murphy. Another connection with the outer world is provided by the parties for relatives who emigrated to Boston, and by the proximity of England, that represents another chance of escape from bleak rural life.

Maureen, however, seems to be doomed to a life of drudgery which has turned her into a resentful person, who blames her mother Mag for her fate. She rebukes her frequently by telling her: "You're oul and you're stupid and you don't know what you're talking about" (9). Mag, in turn, who looks like a malicious giant toad in her rocking chair, issues countless coaxing orders and complaints that are dragging her daughter down. Indeed, throughout the first scene, the spectator witnesses Mag's incessant and irritating demands. She wants the radio on only to complain that "the radio is a biteen too loud there, Maureen" (6). She also entreats Maureen to prepare her porridge (6), reminding her later: "Me mug of tea you forgot" (9). Exasperated, Maureen clutches the edges of the sink and lowers her head with ill-concealed self-control (10). It is the same sink in which her mother, to torment her daughter, deliberately empties the chamber pot every morning, filling the air with a nauseating smell. Maureen takes her revenge

by feeding her mother with lumpy Complian and Kimberley biscuits which she abhors, as disgusting as “the ones Beckett’s Hamm shoves into the dustbins where he keeps his mother and father”, as Nightingale (1996:1553) has rightly observed.

The play is mainly built on brutal shock and suspense in a Hitchcock-like way, combined with black humour and farce. However, each time humour produces a kind of relief from tension in the audience, the author “presents another morsel of cruelty to force down its throat” (Sierz 2000:224). In fact, the end of the first scene acquires a very vicious and threatening intensity when Mag reports that a “fella [...] murdered the poor ould woman in Dublin and he didn’t even know her” and Maureen, totally infuriated, gives vent to her desire to meet such a type of fella to “bring him home” to murder Mag (10). Maureen states that she would not even mind being one of his victims herself, if only he “clobbered” her mother. The dramatic tension is heightened in the following scenes by the introduction of a series of plot complications. In Scene Two, the neighbour Ray Dooley calls at the cottage with an invitation to a party, finding Mag alone. While waiting for Maureen to arrive, Ray becomes irritated at Mag’s confusing him repeatedly with his brother Pato, and the incessant moaning about her allegedly bad health. Tired of “talking with a loon!” he writes the message out on a piece of paper:

RAY (*angrily*): I should’ve fecking written it down in the first fecking place. I fecking knew! And save all this fecking time! (17).

After Ray’s departure, Mag quickly burns the invitation, “a gesture which implicitly reveals how deeply rooted Mag’s feelings of codependence

and her desire to control Maureen's life are" (Diehl 2001:100). When Maureen, who has met Ray on her way home, comes in she instantly initiates a brutal cat-and-mouse game (19-21) entrapping her mother who goes on telling lies about callers or visitors:

MAUREEN: ... Nobody rang while I was out, I suppose? Ah no.

MAG: Ah no, Maureen. Nobody did ring.

MAUREEN. Ah no.

MAG: No. Who would be ringing?

MAUREEN: No, nobody I suppose. No. (*Pause.*) And nobody visited us either? Ah no.

MAG: Ah no, Maureen. Who would be visiting us?

MAUREEN: Nobody, I suppose. Ah no. (19)

This scene reveals the conflict at the core of the violent combat between mother and daughter. Mag is scared at being left on her own, even if it is only for one evening to attend a party. She blackmails Maureen insisting she is dependent on her, physically and psychologically, alluding to her ailments (a bad back, a urinary infection, a bad hand) and to her pitiful loneliness if her daughter abandons her. Astutely, Mag tries to reverse roles by belittling Maureen, who has to be looked after by her mother: "Young girls should not be out gallivanting with fellas [...]" (22) or calling her a "Whore" (23) when she dreams about satisfying her sexual desires rather than remaining a spinster. On the other hand, Maureen's struggle consists of releasing herself as domestic carer from the petty demands of her cantankerous mother, and from her tedious servitude and spinsterhood, which explains her longing for a man who will help her to obtain this goal. The degree of her bitterness and frustration is revealed at the end of Scene Two, when Maureen, in response to having been called a whore, dreams "Of anything! Of anything. Other than this" (23). And then she relates an odd recurrent dream where she finds herself dressed in black

at the side of Mag's coffin, wishing "a fella beside me there, comforting me, the smell of aftershave off him, his arm round me waist" (23).

The possibility of a chance of escape is offered in the following two scenes when Maureen attends the local party where she meets an old schoolmate, Pato Dooley, a serious worker and emigrant who has returned from London for the weekend where he has spent the last fifteen years. Having renewed her friendship with Pato, a loner who yearns to belong to somebody, Maureen brings him home after the party to spend the night with him. Diehl (2001:100) has observed how Maureen "links her independence from Mag with her dependence on a man (be it the vagabond murderer in the first scene or the man comforting her in the second scene)", or now Pato. Mag, faced with the possibility of her daughter's escape, tries to thwart her happiness and turns utterly vicious. She tells Pato that Maureen was taken to a "nut-house" in England, Difford Hall, fifteen years ago, promptly showing some papers as evidence. Maureen had attempted to escape once, at the age of twenty-five, when she went to Leeds to do some cleaning work. Yet the hardship of the work and the strange milieu produced a nervous breakdown, and she was taken to the afore-mentioned psychiatric institution. As further proof of Maureen's supposed mental instability, Mag reveals to Pato that she abuses her physically, and that it was Maureen who scalded her hand, pouring "chip-pan fat o'er it!" (40). Pato takes pains to assure them that his regard for Maureen, "the beauty queen of Leenane", as he calls her, has not been altered by Mag's revelations, that there is no shame in mental illness, because, as he eagerly claims, "a lot of well-educated people have breakdowns too" (43). Nevertheless, Maureen gets angry and asks Pato to leave, receiving his avowal to write to her from London. He keeps his promise asking Ray, his errand boy, to deliver the letter expressly into

Maureen's hand. However, he finds Mag alone and as before, Ray gets extremely irritated with Mag's idiocy, and he finally leaves the letter with her. Maureen's last chance of escape, love and a life with Pato in Boston, is thus foredoomed. Grippingly McDonagh makes use of an ancient literary device, where happiness and disaster depend on a letter, and the four characters are involved so appropriately that the "letter acquires an almost mystical importance, variously representing happiness, escape, danger and penance" (Kingston 1996:291). In fact, Maureen provokes Mag's confession of having destroyed the letter by pouring boiling oil over her hand, a scene that represents a moment of authentic shock on stage. The realisation that her desperate last glimpse of happiness has vanished with Pato's departure, drives Maureen to brutal madness and finally murder.

From the very beginning, the threat of real violence hovers over the stage, "theatrically highlighted" by the poker (Greene 2005:301). Indeed Ray, repeatedly, shows his interest in buying the heavy poker which becomes the murder weapon. As the murder is not executed on stage, it is "a *grand guignol* frisson in the moment of revelation" (Greene 2005:301) for the spectator when he discovers at the end of Scene Eight that "*the rocking chair has stopped its motions*", and that "*MAG starts to slowly lean forward at the waist until she finally topples over and falls heavily to the floor, dead*" with "*a red chunk of skull (hanging) from a string of skin at the side of her head*" (72).

The following and final scene of the play represents a kind of sardonic epilogue that shows the pointlessness of the murder and the hopelessness of escape. Matricide has not freed Maureen, which is indicated by a powerful visual image. We find her sitting in the rocking-chair which had been her mother's domain, just as the woman in Beckett's *Rockaby* as

Greene (2005:301) has correctly remarked. Significantly Ray, who pays Maureen a visit after the funeral to tell her that Pato is about to marry a woman he met at the local party, becomes extremely exasperated at her behaviour that emulates her mother's.

RAY: "The exact fecking image of your mother you are, sitting there pegging orders and forgetting me name!" (83).

It seems as if the pitiless octopus mother is still holding her poisonous grip over her daughter, thwarting her flight both from her servitude to Mag and from Mother Ireland. Before he leaves, though, Maureen asks Ray to pass a message to Pato: "Just say ... Just say, 'The beauty queen of Leenane says hello.' That's all", only to correct herself saying: "*Goodbye*. Goodbye. 'The beauty queen of Leenane says *goodbye*" (83). The tragedy enclosed in her words is undermined by Ray's comic reaction as he does not comprehend its meaning. At the end of the play, Maureen "starts rocking slightly in the chair" (84), listening to "The Spinning Wheel" by Delia Murphy that is being played on the radio. There is some tragic irony in the fact that the song is played specially as the long-promised dedication to the now murdered Mag from her two absent daughters, Annette and Margo Folan, on the occasion of her seventy-first birthday the previous month. It is noteworthy to observe that the two daughters who have never cared for either mother or sister try to fulfil their daughterly duty by a mere formality, that is, sending a song over the radio to their mother "out in the mountains of Leenane, a lovely part of the world there" (84), a place they were eager to leave behind a long time ago. Thus, "[t]he cult of Connemara and the culture of weepy Irish nostalgia are treated

to a savagely sardonic iconoclasm” (Greene 2005:301). Maureen, while listening to the song, “quietly gets up, picks up the dusty suitcase, caresses it slightly, moves slowly to the hall door and looks back at the empty rocking-chair, a while” (84). She exits into the hall, closing the door behind her. The audience is left to listen to the song to the end, “*as the chair gradually stops rocking and the lights, very slowly, fade to black*” (84).

As I have mentioned before, the play does not have a realistic closure, but an open ending as regards Maureen’s fate, which seems to be governed still by Mag’s ghostly presence. McDonald does not provide a moral judgment for Maureen’s deed. In fact, after a month-long police investigation Maureen is free to go, as she tells Ray: “[...] the hundred bastarding inquests, proved nothing” (74). It seems as if Maureen’s crime – to murder her mother – has been atoned for in advance by having had to bear Mag’s incessant complaints and enervating demands. Several critics have stated that audience sympathy is focussed towards Maureen’s hopeless existence, entrapped by her shrewdly selfish mother, who “(is) enough to drive anyone loopy” (45), as she reports to the sympathetic Pato in Scene Four. Mag, in turn, lacks any redeeming features because of her meanness and falseness. “McDonagh not only asks readers/spectators to identify with Maureen, but, in so doing, he also establishes her as the voice of reason, truth, and morality in the play” (Diehl, 2001:102). In this sense, the audience is manipulated by the author because, when the murder is discovered in Scene Eight, the spectator is perplexed at his ambiguous attitude, not knowing whether to condemn the appalling matricide, or to be gratified by Maureen’s action accomplished as a kind of self-defence to free herself from an awful burden.

According to several critics, “[t]he poisonous symbiosis of parent and child has been an Irish theme since Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World*” (Nightingale 1996:1553). In McDonagh’s play, however, we have an inversion of the situation of the tormented Christy Mahon, whose prestige depends on the recounting of a deed which has failed to succeed. Both plays are set in an isolated rural Irish community, and both spin around parricide, though one is imagined, and the other is real. Nevertheless, while at the end of Synge’s play order seems to be re-established in the community disturbed by the arrival of a supposed parricide, in McDonagh’s work there is an unfathomable, open ending with unanswered questions. In consonance with Brechtian, experimental theatre, it is for the audience to find adequate responses to the motives behind matricide. We have viewed Mag’s and Maureen’s present drab existence, but hardly any details are provided about their past lives. Why is Mag so cantankerous? When did the terrible hatred between mother and daughter begin, and why? In accordance with the theatre of the nineties, McDonagh presents the family as a no-man’s land of missing husbands and fathers. There is no allusion to Mag’s husband, their married life nor to his absence from the household, which may be due to either separation or death. Mag’s home is an example of the fragmentation of modern society, where people no longer control their lives, trapped in a hopeless existence that foments domestic violence. We witness an unbearable situation that finally leads to a desperate act of madness, caused perhaps by Maureen’s mental instability, that incites her to commit matricide.

Matricide is, undoubtedly, one of the most disturbing crimes particularly when we consider the sacred, biological and loving bond between mothers and daughters established during the child’s first few

years, the pre-Oedipal phase. According to Freud, it is precisely this strong blood-relationship that normally prevails. Feminist psychology has given considerable emphasis to this mother-daughter bonding. Nancy Chodorow, for example, stresses that the later Oedipal crisis is resolved very differently by girls and boys and that the “girl cannot and does not completely reject her mother in favour of men, but continues her relationship of dependence upon and attachment to her” (in Austin, 1990:64). She summarizes her description of the early bonding of mother and daughter in this way:

Mothers of daughters tend not to experience these infant daughters as separate from them in the same way as do mothers of infant sons. In both cases, a mother is likely to experience a sense of oneness and continuity with her infant. However, this sense is stronger, and lasts longer, vis-à-vis daughters. Primary identification and symbiosis with daughters is more likely to retain and emphasize narcissistic elements, that is, to be based on experiencing a daughter as an extension or double of a mother herself. When the girl reaches adolescence, she is struggling to separate out from her mother, but at the same time feels the close bonding. Mothers “desire both to keep their daughters close and to push them into adulthood” which makes the daughters anxious and “provokes attempts by these daughters to break away” (in Austin: 66).

In literature, this complex relationship between mother and daughter has been explored in drama (cf. Klein 2004:147-161) and in several novels. However, few authors have dealt with matricide, as the American novelist Judith Rossner (1935-2005) does in *Perfidia* (1997) (Chesler 2001:197), where the relationship between Anita Stern and her daughter Anita explodes into violence and death. Likewise, in the works of the British emancipated anti-feminist Eliza Linton (1822-1898), a successful novelist and essayist, matricide and Oedipal fantasies are recurrent. “In one

novel, a female hero poisons her stepmother and dies as atonement; in a short story, another female hero is blamed for causing her mother's death" (Chesler 237-8). Matricide also occurs in Phyllis Nagy's drama *Butterfly Kiss* (1994). Nagy herself has expressed her enlightening opinion about a matricide that is performed by a daughter as opposed to that of a son which stresses the long-lasting bias towards men:

When a son kills his mother, it can be seen as understandable and even heroic. A man can break with his mother symbolically and it's a rite of passage. [...] When a daughter does it, it's seen as fundamentally unnatural, a violation of the sacred bond between mother and daughter. In literature, the relationship between mother and daughter can be explored, but the bond is always reaffirmed. Literature tells me that women are seen as emotionally unable to make the break with their mothers. In *Butterfly Kiss* matricide smashes this view of the family (in Sierz 2001:51-2).

While real matricide is rare, imaginary matricide as a kind of psychological liberation has occasionally been referred to by renowned women, such as Sylvia Plath, Doris Lessing, Signe Hammer, and Linda Grey Sexton. Doris Lessing, for instance, "exorcises her mother-demon over and over again in her novels" (Chesler 2001:191), to liberate herself from her mother's constant emotional blackmail. She had to submit herself to the treatment of a Jungian psychiatrist "who encouraged her to enter the minds of such un-swayable role models as Electra, Antigone, and Medea, with giving her the strength to resist all the appeals and to send her mother [away]" (Chesler 191-2).

As Lessing, most daughters fear, rather than want, the relationship with a powerful, over-protective mother. This ambiguous desire recalls the

myth of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone, who remains merged with her mother (Chesler, 181). As is well known, when Persephone is abducted by the god of the Underworld, Hades, Demeter threatens with the destruction of the world. Demeter negotiates Persephone's return to her for half of every year, while her daughter will remain in the Underworld for the other half-year. This negotiation brings about Persephone's partition between her husband and her mother. Both Persephone and Demeter experience merging as ecstatic union.

However, there are Demetrian mothers who refuse to let their daughters go, as Mag in McDonagh's play. "They bind them with maternal envy, disapproval, anger, insecurity, depression: they remain merged together in embattled relationships" (Chesler, 187). Mag wanted to keep Maureen at home by bullying her, but also because she needed her. The psychoanalyst Molly Walsh Donovan refers to a "reverberating cycle of envy and rejection in the troubled mother-daughter relationship. Each experiences "differentiation" as "rejection": "The mother's envy of her daughter's potential and freedom, and her feeling of rejection as her daughter appropriately moves away from her, can be communicated to the daughter in many, often unconscious ways" (in Chesler, 214). Mag, an unfulfilled, insecure and envious mother, rejects Maureen's desire for freedom and thwarts her departure. Maureen, therefore, indulges in destructive fantasies and hostile impulses towards Mag, her mother.

Therefore, to escape the danger of being incorporated by one's mother forever, a daughter might have "to kill" her mother. Chesler (198) has observed that "[to] escape being swallowed alive by one's mother, many women psychologically enact the mythic Electra role: we psychologically murder our Queen mother Clytemnestra in order to replace her. Electra does

not identify with her mother and she feels cheated out of her love; she hates her for having deceived her loving father during his long absence. These primal psychological dramas take place in the theatre of the unconscious. Electra conspires to kill her mother for having murdered her father Agamemnon. While she plans the murder, her brother Orestes commits the matricide. Chesler (205) points out that “[t]hese pagan myths depict unconscious psychological possibilities. Demented Demeters, ghostly, embryonic Persephones, arrogant Clytemnestras, murderous Electras exist in all women; however, only “mad” women [...] act it out”. Maureen has declined to be a Persephone, forever merged with her mother, and has become a defiant and murderous Electra. Like Electra, she is not haunted by the Furies after the destruction of her tyrannical mother, but, significantly, emerges guiltless in the eyes of the Law.

In 1976 Adrienne Rich introduced the concept of *matrophobia* which she defined as a “desire to be purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free” (in Chesler, 213). The literary critic Judith Kegan Gardiner stated in 1978 that “[i]n the Oedipus myth, the son murders his father in order to replace him”. Contrastingly, in the new woman’s myth, the daughter “kills her mother in order not to have to take her place” (in Chesler, 213). A *matrophobic* daughter wishes to free herself both from a mother’s powerless fate and from her own (imagined) complicity in that fate. Maureen is such a matrophobic daughter, but rather than achieving her desired freedom from bondage, she seems to be doomed to inherit her mother’s condition, that is, to be destined to a frustrated and lonely life. The ending seems to suggest “that the mutually sadistic bond shared by mother and daughter is both ongoing and enduring – a relationship unimpinged” (Diehl 2001:106).

In my opinion, the play also contains a Fairy Tale element, where Maureen can be seen as a Cinderella and the victim of an evil mother and two unloving sisters. While her sisters succeeded in achieving their freedom, “The Beauty Queen of Leenane” is doomed to an imprisoned existence without a prince/king (Pato) to rescue her and to lead her into his kingdom (the Diaspora of Boston). At the end of the play Maureen is found with a dusty suitcase going towards the hall, but it will probably be another fruitless attempt to flee from her present life, persecuted by the ghost of her dead mother that condemns her to occupy her empty chair forever.

References

- Austin, G. 1990. *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press
- Chesler, P. 2001. *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books
- Chodorow, N. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Coveney, M. 1996. *Observer in Theatre Record*, 26 February-10 March, p. 288
- Curtis, N. 1996. *Evening Standard*, in *Theatre Record*, 26 February-10 March, p. 288
- Diehl, H. A. 2001. “Classic Realism, Irish Nationalism, and a New Breed of Angry Young Man in Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*” in *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, (34:2), pp. 98-117
- Donovan, M. W. 1998. “Demeter and Persephone revisited: Ambivalence and Separation in the Mother-Daughter Relationship” in G. H. Fenchel (ed.) *The Mother-Daughter Relationship: Echoes through Time*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson
- Greene, N. 2005. “Ireland in Two Minds: Martin McDonagh and Conor McPherson” in *Yearbook of English Studies*, (35), pp. 298-311
- Kingston, J. 1996. *The Times* in *Theatre Record*, 26 February-10 March, p. 291
- Klein, H. 2004. “Mother-Daughter Relationship in British Feminist Drama from a Psychoanalytical Perspective” in *Gender Studies* (1:3), pp. 147-161

- McDonagh, M. 1998. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane and Other Plays*. New York: Vintage Books
- Nightingale, B. 1996. *The Times in Theatre Record*, 2-31 December, p. 1553
- Rich, A. 1976. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton
- Sierz, A. 2001. *In-Yer-Face Theatre. British Drama Today*. London: Faber and Faber

**BYRON'S *DON JUAN* AS ADDICTION
TO MOTHERHOOD**

ROXANA DIANA CRUCEANU

University of the West, Timișoara

When penetrating into *Don Juan*'s world, a real understanding of the phenomenon nicknamed Donny Johnny by Byron himself, begins at the source, in the middle of the child's universe. The perpetual crisis of identity and the pattern of deviant behaviour have deep roots in the origins and traumatized childhood of the character, recalling Byron's own process of formation. In fact, it is the poet who becomes the first psychoanalyst of his Juan, a strategy adopted most naturally without affecting any of his poetic intentions. The whole personality rebuilding route is one of the keys to unlock the perplexing thinking of the adult, as well as a bridge towards an

expected profile of Donjuanism or dandyism, had Johnny followed one of these two directions in the real sense. Instead, he remains the inert baby characterized by an incredible passivity that would mark him out as a dull presence if the tumultuous events around had not saved him from mediocrity.

The disaster of the hesitating trajectory begins with the placement of the infant in the bosom of a disorganized family, with a libertine as a father, a mother with a stormy marriage, full of fake virtue. Whereas Don José, an adventurer longing for women's company, deprives his son of paternal advice, Inez monitors her boy obsessively, choosing for him a childhood surrounded by educational books and numerous teachers, with masculine impulses carefully and constantly repressed:

The languages, especially the dead, / The sciences, and most of all abstruse, /
The arts, at least all such that could be said / To be the most remote from
common use, / In all these he was much and deeply read, / But not a page of
anything that's loose / Or hints continuation of the species / Was ever suffered,
lest he should grow vicious (Byron 2004: 56).

That is, roughly, the doom-laden scenario. Let us then unravel the symbols hidden behind each step made by little Johnny towards his adulthood.

I. An Altruist Mother

The decisive perturbation comes with the poor administration of the motherly custody. It seems that Inez is faultless in this role. She appears as the unselfish mother neglecting her existence and happiness in favour of her fatherless son, convinced that this is the right modality to teach the value

of love, of giving and receiving. Actually, the effect obtained is a man with an anaesthetized heart, whose aim is to be loved, not to love - a deficiency we shall return to. Such altruism, a replacement for the mother's inability to show natural love, inhibits and tenses the morally obliged offspring. It is, as Erich Fromm puts it in *The Art of Loving*, a symbol for the "mother's hidden hostility towards life" (transmitted to the children who) "are taught, under the mask of virtue, dislike for life" (2006:34).

In the light of this statement, Johnny's almost omnipresent careless inactivity, only very rarely interrupted by chaotic moments of initiative, opens a new door for interpretation. Could this be his manifestation of hatred, his mute protest against life? Why not, since it is a plan of self-destruction as effective as Byron's need of action, of rebellion at all costs, even for a cause that was not his own.

Inez's choice of educating through manipulation, based on the assumption that a child will be good only if the grown-ups seed in his brain what is right and extirpate what is rotten, is an excuse for avoiding the separation from the son, which is painful but necessary. The syndrome is understandable with Dona Inez for two reasons. The first concerns her urge to fill the empty place left by the husband. A wife who

[...] bore / With such serenity her husband's woes, / Just as the Spartan
ladies did (Byron, 2004:53)

or had the 'patience' to keep "a journal where his "faults were noted" (ibid.), is capable of the same 'sacrifices' for her progeny. The second concerns the narcissistic woman who sees in the child a prolongation of her

own self. The little one is felt as if he is being integrated within her, a supplementary reason for the mother to take pride in him:

[...] And his mother's joy / Was to declare how sage and still and steady /
Her young philosopher was grown already (Byron 2004:58).

It is the love for the baby, who though he has nothing to offer concretely, feeds his mother's conceit. The infant's growth produces a rupture in the chain, because he ceases to be an object easy to mould. For that, Inez hangs on to the continuation of her son's babyhood, a condition that is maintained artificially by wrapping him in the diaper of intellectualism to round off her creation. She transcends herself through the boy, the easiest way of taking action and doing something grandiose, an atavistic necessity of the human being, unsatisfied with the passive Adamic role of having being created.

II. Maturation as Anxiety, Isolation, Loneliness

On reading between the lines, a great part of Canto I is an appendage of the same major idea, rendered very well in the lines:

Young Juan now was sixteen years of age, [...] / And everybody but his
mother deemed / Him almost man, but she flew in a rage / And bit her lips
(for
else she might have screamed), / If any said so, for to be precious / Was in her
eyes a thing the most atrocious (Byron 2004:59).

It is the fear of adulthood, resented by mother and son alike. Growing up means being autonomous, going into a world where the baby no longer orbits around the maternal axis. With Juan, the abandonment of such

a small, secure, albeit too cold universe is unacceptable; that is why he reiterates it endlessly, in the welcoming of surrogate mothers. According to Freud separation from motherhood brings about anxiety. For Lacan, on the contrary, it is the non-separation that generates this feeling. Considering the contradiction, we can not know for sure if Don Juan is obsessed with the 'feeding breast' because of an unconscious urge to hinder uneasiness, or if his behaviour is precisely the nervousness of a man who will not cut the umbilical cord. In other words, his immaturity may be induced either by an anxiety or by a lack of it.

What is certain however, is Juan's stagnation at a pre-oedipal phase, undisturbed by the decisive intervention of the father. Fundamentally, this is the period when the child accepts being the illusory phallus for the mother, before the symbolic castration performed by the father, a recompense which awakens the infant's awareness about the impossibility of the game. Don Juan never gives up self-identification with this imaginary phallus, the gift for all his protectresses. The trouble happens because he is always surrounded by feminine authority, from birth, until the end of the unfinished poem. The protagonist does nothing to oppose it; moreover he clings to it desperately, in order to avoid socialization, although there are moments in which maternal threat rouses his opposition. Very often children who are treated unfairly by a parent become hostile in one way or another, like Juan faced with Gulbeyaz's injustice, disrespect and unreasonable demands, or faced with the Russian empress' despotism. Nevertheless, despite the gross intimidation that he is permanently subjected to, our hero's hostility is not powerful enough to break the chains. Rather, his revolt is hilarious in both form and content, all the more so as it ends by enforcing his invisible ties with feminine totalitarianism after every

experience of this type. The auto-transformation into an object for the female - subject estranges him significantly from both the dandy and the Don Juan, who never place women in any higher position than that of talking things, nor do they tolerate enslavement or infantilization by them. By extension, Juan's acquired easiness over time to act and speak in society:

as if each charming word were a decree. / His tact too tempered him from grave to gay / And taught him when to be reserved or free" (Byron 2004:517),

is the bluff of the baby who plays the fashionable blasé, in the shelter of maternal protection.

Johnny's conscience is reduced to the instinctual creed that the psychological symbiotic mother-son union involves safety, wellbeing and happiness. He pursues alienation by the simple physical presence of any 'clone' of Inez and maintains the imaginary bond to escape loneliness. In actual fact, he escapes freedom, which must look frightening if the individual does not bother to feel its taste. The wish for liberty usually erupts sooner or later, with the strength of a volcano inside any prisoner, except Juan, who thus merits the description of puppet on a string, deprived of vital force. A juxtaposition of two theories, one encountered in Lacan, the other in Fromm, can offer a better understanding of Don Juan's feebleness:

the *imago* of the mother has to do with the depths of psychism and its sublimation is particularly difficult, as it is shown in the child's attachment to 'the skirts of the mother" (Lacan, 2001:35; my transl.),

because

native links offer security and fundamental unity with the outer world. As the child emerges from the primal world, he becomes aware that he is alone, as an entity distinct from all others. This separation from a universe, which compared to the individual existence, is overwhelmingly powerful, often threatening and dangerous, creates a feeling of impotency and anxiety. As long as someone was part of that world, unaware of the problems and responsibilities of individual action, it was not necessary to be afraid of it. When that someone has become an individual, he stays alone and confronts the world with all its dangerous and overwhelming aspects (Fromm 1998:33; my transl.).

The obvious complementarity of these assertions bringing together the same thought provides an insight straight into the hero's brain. The investment with the demiurgic omnipotence in fiction, allowing decisions affecting lives and destinies, will have Byron chose the simplest path for his creation, which involves no struggle, only serenity, even if pathological. It is the refuge of the excessively tormented author, who in his dandy mode, was accustomed to eulogise solitude, a feeling induced by his earliest life impressions. Passionate, sullen, defiant of authority, lonely in his sufferings, he enables Juan, as an *alter ego*, to fulfil a secret desire of the child hiding within the grown-up: the pursuit of primordial happiness. Juan's non-detachment from Inez must be sought in Byron's letters and journals, where the complaints about his endless quarrels with the irrational Catherine Gordon, are accompanied by the confession that he does not want to be separated from her completely, being sure of the love she had for him. Besides, Catherine's death fills the grieving Byron with existential doubts, a reason more to spare his character such pain, by fabricating an army of obliging mothers.

Returning to the pre-oedipal complex, it is interesting to observe how the helplessness of the child is maintained in *Don Juan*. Inez's main weapon is the suppression of sexuality in her son for as long as possible, a sexuality that would have hastened Johnny's realization of his inadequacy as imaginary phallus. Her ridiculous diligence in this direction culminates in the cancellation of "the grosser parts" (Byron 2004:57) from all Juan's books, the missal included. Indeed, her instincts function well: when Juan is dragged into sexual initiation, the biological mother is replaced with a person who signifies the unfaithful mother. It is now, at the age of puberty, that Juan should have truly been born through eroticism, a physiological revolution, accompanied by a spiritual one. Except that, what could have represented a cry for independence, an *ascesis*, accomplished after his passage through the whole oedipal cycle, is a regression caused by all the reasons enumerated above, plus the missing Law of the Father, an issue which we will not detail here.

It is however worth mentioning that the Law of the Father is the stentorian voice of reason, of obligation, the oedipal interdiction, where the father is the prohibiter, the person who seeds the virile aspiration in the boy. In *Don Juan*, the Law is abolished, mimed unsuccessfully by a series of men who are ascribed the role of the castrator, but who end by being impotent against Juan because their authority is not recognized as legitimate either by the mother figure, or by the oedipal hero. And, since the Name-of-the-Father is erased radically, the message is clear: the absolute of desire reigns over every constructed ethical or social rule.

III. Repetition versus Evolution

We have ascertained so far that at each encounter with a woman, Don Juan is reincarnated as a new-born baby, condemned to restart the pre-Oedipal cycle, a Sisyphean sentence that prevents development. He loves stagnation, challenging the known course of life which supposes that

children change constantly, from one state of growth to another. They change regarding their understanding of events, their tolerance for frustration, and their needs for and demands on motherly and fatherly care for support, stimulation, guidance and restraint. These demands vary as the child matures and begins to gain independence, i.e., gradual freedom from control. (Goldstein; Freud; Solnit 1973:11).

Instead, we do not approach motherhood as a mirage that relates any major human travel to the depth of the womb. Irrespective of the number of initiating events, the plunge is into the mother, who is the ocean, the earth, the final trip towards the land of the dead. This does not relieve the individual from the hardship that he must experience alone, and not within or through the mother. As for Juan, he is not endowed with free will. He is afraid of the world outside, and with each new mile, he takes a step back in place of the step forward, so as not to be too estranged from the matrix, the shield that wards off blows. He does not internalize motherhood as the starting point of knowledge, but compresses the entire Universe inside the mother. It is principally from this perspective that his route will be seen as regression, opposing progress.

The phenomenon is not unique; Juan is not a random victim. Jung (1994:141-142) comments upon the mentality of such a person:

His Eros is passive like that of a child; he hopes to be made prisoner, absorbed, wrapped and devoured. He looks somehow for the magic circle around the

mother, with its protective and nourishing virtues, the state of the child absolved of any worry, when the world is the one coming to him, bringing, and even imposing happiness. It is no wonder if he misses the real world. (my transl.)

The coming of the world to Juan is one of the *leitmotifs* in the poem. Each woman in turn offers it on a golden plate: Inez brings the wisdom of humanity through learning, Julia reveals the secret of eroticism and determines his vast voyage, Haidée shows him the image of paradise, Gulbeyaz throws the boy-man into battle, Catherine makes him feel the taste of power, the English Genocracy inflates his ego throughout unlimited admiration of his dandy gestures, Aurora is the face of death, the ultimate experience that must be undergone. Therefore, Donny Johnny experiences everything, through the eyes of the mother, under her attentive observation. This concrete travel is not satisfactory, the fragments of land or civilization that he visits are not flawless, because they do not surrender, are harsh and must be conquered by strength. He is in the middle of the most important events, yet he is not there mentally; he is a fugitive, hiding from coldness, intolerance, wickedness. To do this, he instinctively plots with the mothers. This conspiracy, fed equally from both parts, is manifest in the mother-son desire to cheat life. For example, Inez mimics a liberating conduct when she lets her son grow up sexually with Julia. As a matter of fact, it is a compromise, gladly accepted by the son, through which he is kept in reach, inside the parental house, where the mistress is always welcome. Or Adeline's 'altruism' can be added to the list, her rush to arrange a suitable marriage for Juan – an alternative never firmly rejected by him, although he is not exhilarated – so as to manipulate him better. Juan is not allowed to become a man but the guilt is not that of the woman pre-eminently; he

indulges in this wellbeing which weakens his tenacity. The normal impulses of the child “to enter contact with real things, to hold the entire earth and to fertilize the field of the world” (Jung 1994: 142; my transl.) are repressed until they disappear, which is suggested by the hero’s sedentariness towards the end, in the English cantos.

Decision making can jeopardize a man’s security or harm him in the worst way. To have the power of doing what is apparently bad for him, the individual must be unfaithful to his primal Eros, to leave his first love, to forget the mother, or rather her *imago*. If not, the peril of the incest, which has its source more in the area of affectivity than in that of sexuality, is almost inevitable. Byron, it will not be forgotten, resorts to this incestuous reunion with the mother, through the guilty relationship with his half-sister Augusta. Don Juan commits incest first with Julia, another disloyal Inez, and continues the idea in all his amorous escapades. His optimism and vivacity are artificially born, not due to an internal active construction, but to the certainty that he is not allowed to fall away from.

The pattern of the unequal relationships, with a dominatrix in the centre, sends Juan back to babyhood, together with the focus on the re-exploration of the same typologies of ladies. The reconstruction of Julia through Adeline, of Gulbeyaz through Catherine, of Haidée through Aurora, says more than words will ever do about regression. The process of pregnancy which begins with a fusion and culminates in separation is averted in *Don Juan*. Canto I, equivalent to the first stage in Juan’s existence, closes with a departure, a metaphor of the detachment from Inez. The impression of independence, conveyed by the adventure on the sea and by the shipwreck episode, is undone with the introduction of Haidée in the poem, when Juan rejoins a paradisiacal uterus in an almost primitive

atmosphere dominated by wild nature. At the same time, Haidée who proclaims herself the matriarch of the island, embodies the symbolism of that epoch when

the links with the mother, like those which connect the man with the blood and the earth, represented the supreme form of individual and social relations (Fromm 1983:75;my transl.).

At the re-inauguration of patriarchal hierarchy, Juan leaves Haidée and directs himself to another womb. After the Haidée period, with effluxes of love to replace Inez's rigidity, Juan loses his Eden and goes on with his non-wanderings. Unlike Ulysses or Oedipus, who discover the unknown in their search for answers through unrestrained efforts, Juan traverses every route with an immutable ignorance, simply to be passed from one mother to the other.

Another expression of infantilism is the suspension of language, as mediator between adult human beings. Speechlessness characterizes Donny Johnny very often in his affairs, which are consumed without too many words. Dialogues are cut out and communication is achieved mostly through body language. His first story with Julia is dominated by quietness, which is preserved all along, even with the anti-maternal Fitz-Fulke. This aspect reaches its climax with Haidée, who gives birth to Juan for the second time, after rescuing him. Byron's makeshift through which Haidée's idiom is not familiar to Juan is very suitable in this respect. As long as Greek words are not understood or uttered by the young man, he and the pirate's daughter form a single being, the baby-mother union. Socialized order does not spoil perfection during the period when Juan is just able to compare his beloved's

voice with the “[...] warble of bird, / So soft, so delicately clear” (Byron 2004: 139).

And to avoid any equivocation, Byron calls his hero “infant” without reserves:

[...] like an infant Juan sweetly slept. / And then she stopped and stood as if in awe / (For sleep is awful) and on tiptoe crept / And wrapt him closer, lest the air, too raw, / Should reach his blood (Byron 2004:137).

In addition, the girl feeds Juan, a nourishment ritual that makes the mother-son identification stronger. Looking for the maternal breast is what he does when, “[...] after bathing in the sea / Came always back to coffee and Haidée (Byron 2004:144) so as to feel safe from an existential point of view.

The statements about the awfulness of sleep and the bathing in the profoundness of the sea are the clue for one more status of the mother: that of irreversibility, of death, which again is a return to a formal condition of human nothingness, of dust. It is the last face of the threefold motherhood, split by Freud into the mother herself, the beloved – chosen after the same pattern – and Mother Earth who receives the son in her arms for the final dissolution. Mother Death’s presence is compulsory in the re-enhancement of the imaginary bond and her image is expressed at its best in the Haidée – Aurora pair, especially because of the mysterious, death – like aura that wraps them both. They are predestined to form a whole, even before Aurora’s introduction in the scene, when we find out about Haidée that the goddess of dawn, “[...] young Aurora kissed her lips with dew, / Taking her for a sister” (Byron 2004:137).

The girls are dark creatures, taken directly from the depth of the earth. When Juan first looked at Haidée

[...] her eyes / Were black as death, their lashes the same hue / Of downcast length, in whose silk shadows lies / Deepest attraction. (Byron 2004:131),

while Aurora's whole being is "as deep seas in a sunny atmosphere" (Byron 2004:547) and "in her / There was a depth of feelings to embrace / Thoughts, boundless, deep" (Byron 2004:535).

Moreover, she is "silent [...] as space" (Byron 2004:535) and has the pallor of death – "her colour ne'er was high" (Byron 2004:547). By being lodged into this immateriality, Juan disaggregates himself; he gives in to the sweet death. Haidée bending "still as death" (Byron 2004:131) over the sleeping Juan, mimes the position of Mother Death who sucks the last breath from the body and takes the soul of the dying within her. The obsessive repetition of words with the same root – 'deep' - , demonstrate that Juan is bewitched by depth, which should not be interpreted as complexity of thoughts, but as sneaking inside the deepness of the womb-earth. His going through life is caught in the hypostasis in which he "Lulled like the depth of the ocean when at rest" (Byron 2004:114), an uninterrupted sleep veiled by no matter what mother from the triad.

The unbreakable mythic triangle is omnipresent. In the first part there are Julia, Haidée and the two facets of the same medal: Gulbeyaz / Catherine. In the second part the three are reunited in Adeline (Julia), Aurora (Haidée), Fitz-Fulke (lustful, shameless Gulbeyaz / Catherine). This recurrence, the *déjà vu* feeling invites a backward reading, and therefore to a childhood repeated compulsively in which Juan is again the little boy

hushed up by Dona Inez and kept to the Lacanian pre-mirror, non-gendered stage for sixteen years.

The entire matter of Juan's non-development, and resistance to development is placed under the sign of the prefix re-, considered as the most relevant for our demonstration; regression, repetition, reunion, re-enhancement, restart, reconstruction, re-exploration, rejoining, etc., belong all to the semantics of involution, concretized here in the return to or within the mother.

Childhood – Whither?

From the arguments presented for Don Juan's lame start, a unique conclusion can be drawn about the grown-up: he failed to develop a healthy self-esteem, to become confident in his chances of achievement in life and convinced of his own human value. He was destined to have not one but two inept parents and brought to the situation in which

where the tie is to adults who are "unfit" as parents, unbroken closeness to them,
and especially identification with them, may cease to be a benefit and become a threat (Goldstein; Freud; Solnit 1973:23).

Don Juan, the vagabond is the man-child driven by the rule of chaotic links and even more chaotic ruptures. He is the naïve egocentric who needs to be loved, but is incapable of love, and who chooses for the fulfilment of this wish authoritarian women to revive the memory of the first mother. The hero subscribes to the Lacanian theory which views desire as metonymy, in the sense that one lost love, one lost paradise is immediately displaced onto another, in an endless attempt to grasp the real

mother. His tacit message for his mistresses is clear: 'I adore you because I need you', never 'I need you because I adore you', a reversed word order that makes all the difference between the baby and the man. That is why we see a Juan living in the reality of his women, whatever it may be, not in his own one, which is obviously uncreated.

Johnny's "quiet cruising o'er the ocean woman" (Byron 2004:453) is above all a cruising into motherhood. The 'ocean woman' is not the woman of the Don Juan the seducer, and our character's travel across eroticism is not that of the careless adventurer looking for pleasure. The poet informs us that this cruising is "quiet", silent like that of the speechless baby who is not in the position to utter his will, but to obey and look blindly for the warmth of the mother's breast while floating on an ocean of femininity in which his self is doomed to drown.

References

- Brill, A. A. (ed.). 1938. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Random House
- Byron, G. G. 2004. [1819]. *Don Juan*. London: Penguin Books
- Cameron, D. 1992. *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*. London: Macmillan
- La Cassagnère, C. 1995. "I've Got New Mythological Machinery: Don Juan as a Myth of the Self" in *Lectures du Don Juan (Reading Don Juan)*. C. La Cassagnère (coord.). Lyon: Didier Erudition
- Dokou, C. 1997. 'Androgyny's Challenge to the 'Law of the Father': Don Juan as Epic in Reverse' in *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. Winnipeg: Vol. 30, Iss. 3.
- Evans, D. 2005. *Dicționar introductiv de psihanaliză lacaniană (Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis)*. București: Paralela 45
- Fromm, E. 2006. [1956]. *The Art of Loving*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics
- Fromm, E. 1983. *Idei contemporane (Contemporary Ideas)*. București: Editura

Politică

- Fromm, E. 1998. [1941]. *Frica de libertate (The Fear of Freedom)*. București: Editura Universitas
- Horney, K. 1995. [1939]. *Direcții noi în psihanaliză (New Ways in Psychoanalysis)*. București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic
- Goldstein, J., Freud, A., Solnit, A. J. 1973. *Beyond the Best Interest of the Child*. London: The Free Press
- Jung, G. G. 1997 [1954]. *Personalitate și transfer (The Development of Personality)*. București: Teora
- Jung, C. G. 1994. *Psihologia individuală și socială (Individual and Social Psychology)*. București: Editura Anima
- Jung, C. G. 1994. [1925] *Psihologia analitică. Temeiuri (Analytical Psychology)*. București: Editura Anima
- Lacan, J. 2001. *Autres écrits (Other Writings)* Paris: Seuil
- Paglia, C. 2001. *Sexual Personae*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press
- Rank, O. 1997. *Dublul. Don Juan (The Double. Don Juan)*. Iași: Institutul European

Web-References

- Elledge, P. 1989. 'Immaterialistic Matters: Byron, Bogles and Bluebloods' in *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 25, Issue 3
Available: <http://webscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=7&hid=102&sid=8ef51547-1f0a-407f-9baf-e01d481a2ba4%sessionmgr106> [2008, February 7].
- Fleck, P. 1976. Romance in Don Juan, in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 45, Issue 2. Available: <http://webscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=8&hid=102&sid=8ef51547-1f0a-407f-9baf-e01d481a2ba4%sessionmgr106> [2008, February 7].

About the Authors

Irén E. Annus is currently Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary. She completed her PhD dissertation on the identity model of the Latter-day Saints and Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration. She has lectured and published on topics regarding identity, gender, ethnicity, Mormonism, and art in American culture, both in Hungary and abroad. Her current research focuses on gender and race in 19th-century American painting.

Mária Bajner is assistant professor at the University of Pécs, Faculty of Education. She has been in EFL teacher training since 1990 teaching several subjects from academic skills to English literature. At the department of English Literatures and Cultures at the University of Pécs - where she is a part-time university lecturer – her courses centre on the Victorian novel and modernist fiction, each focusing on a gender-related aspect. She holds a

PhD in English literature, her dissertation dealt with text and gender in Charlotte Bronte's novels. Her main academic interests are gender issues, in general, and the female-male type of writing and speaking in particular. She has published and co-authored several articles and studies in the field.

Roxana D. Cruceanu is a graduate of the University of the West and holds an MA in British and American Studies, earned from the same university. She has published several articles – in the country and abroad – on British and American literature, British culture and civilization, foreign language teaching methods and approaches. Currently she is a last year Ph.D. student at the University of the West, Timișoara, writing a thesis on the implications of dandyism and Don Juanism in Byron's *Don Juan*.

Korinna Csetényi is Assistant Lecturer at the Department of English at the University of Szeged. Her main academic interests are American popular fiction, Gothic and horror literature and the place of Stephen King within this genre, together with his impact on contemporary culture. Forthcoming publication includes a paper on the relationship of writers and the reading public in *Misery* by King.

Regina Dascăl teaches British Studies and Gender Studies at the English Department of the University of Timișoara. She holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology (her thesis was entitled *House and Dwelling in a European Cultural Context*) and she has so far published four books: *Casă/Locuire* (1999); *British Topics* (2000) *Feminist Perspectives* (2001), *British Studies Course* (2005) and *Christine de Pizan Essays* (2008). She is Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies at Timișoara University. Over

the years she has presented and published papers in the country and abroad and has also edited and co-edited several publications. Polirom has published her translation of Andrea Dworkin's *Letters from the War Zone*.

Ecaterina Lia Hanțiu is a Professor of British Literature and teaches English literature and Canadian studies at the University of Oradea, Romania (graduate and postgraduate courses). Her main research fields are English and American literature, comparative literature, English Canadian studies, gender studies, fine arts and literature. She is the author of 12 books and numerous articles published in the country and abroad and is involved in a number of national and international projects on literary and educational issues.

Hildegard Klein is professor of English Literature in the English, French and German Department at Málaga University, Spain. In 1995 she completed a Ph.D. thesis on the theatre of Edward Bond. She has written a number of articles on this author and on contemporary British theatre, published in several books and periodicals, such as *Atlantis*, *In-between*, *Studii de limbi și literaturi moderne*, *Gender Studies*, etc . She has also researched German theatre on the First World War. She is co-author of a book on feminist theatre *Teorías Feministas y sus Aplicaciones al Teatro Feminista Británico Contemporáneo* (Granada, 2000) . She has edited a book on feminist strategies in Contemporary Feminist Theatre: *Estrategias Feministas en el Teatro Británico del siglo XX*. Her current research centres on British theatre of the 1990s as member of a Research Group from Barcelona University.

Catherine MacMillan is an instructor in the department of English Language and Literature in Yeditepe University, Istanbul. She completed her doctorate in European Studies and International Relations at Marmara University in 2008. Her research interests include migration, identity and imagology, particularly in the context of Turkey and its accession process to the European Union. However, she is also interested in imagology in film and literature, and has worked on Orientalism and Occidentalism in depictions of Turkey and Europe in European and Turkish novels and cinema.

Andreea Pele teaches English as an Assistant Lecturer for the Department of Modern Languages and Social Informatics, which is part of the Faculty of Psychology and Sociology at the University of the West in Timișoara. Her main interests are literature, culture, blogging and gender studies, which are manifest in several of her publications such as her graduation paper, “Muslim Women in Britain”, articles such as “The Prevalence of English on the Internet”, “Gendering the Internet” and her upcoming article “Black and White Lives in Teheran” about women under fundamentalist Islam.

Adriana Răducanu has a BA in English and Spanish literature from the University of Bucharest, holds an MA from Yeditepe University, Istanbul and in 2008 she defended her PhD thesis at the University of the West, Timișoara. Her research interests include Gothic novels, Jungian criticism, post-colonial and gender studies, comparative mythology.

Nóra Séllei is Reader at the Department of British Studies of the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen, Hungary. She

gained her PhD (1996) and “habilitation” (2002) from the same university. Her main teaching and research areas include gender studies, feminist literary theory, and 19th and 20th-century women’s literature, primarily novelists and autobiographers. Her numerous publications include four books (*Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Personal and Professional Bond*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996; a monograph on 19th-century British women writers’ novels—*Lányá válik, s írni kezd*; one on early 20th-century autobiographies by women writers—*Tükröm, tükröm...*; and one on feminist literary theory in Hungary—*Mért félünk a farkastól?*; all three: Debrecen: Kossuth UP, 1999, 2001, 2007). She is the series editor of the Hungarian feminist book series Artemis Books (Artemisz Könyvek), a co-editor of *HJEAS*, a member of the advisory board of *Gender Studies*, and the translator of Virginia Woolf’s *Moments of Being*, Jean Rhys’s *Smile Please* (Debrecen: Csokonai, 1999 and 2001), and Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* (Budapest: Európa, 2006).

Remina Sima is a graduate of the English Department of the University of the West, Timișoara. She holds an MA in Gender Studies from the same university. She teaches English at the Millennium High School in Timișoara and her academic interests include 19th century women’s history and a gender perspective on the private/public divide. She has published several articles at students’ and teachers’ symposia such as: *Women's Self-Esteem - the Way to Women's Self-Contentment* and *Equality - Women's Main Concern*.

Monika Sosnowska is a PhD candidate at the Department of British and Commonwealth Studies, from the University of Łódź, Poland. Her research

interests focus on the intersection between gender, culture and sensory perception. She is writing a dissertation on the representation of the senses in *Hamlet*. Her most recent publications include: “(Nie)tolerancja dla (nie)rozumu i praktyki wykluczenia kobiet stygmatyzowanych szaleństwem na przykładzie Ofelii” [(In)tolerance for (Un)reason and Practices of Exclusion Towards Women Stigmatized with Madness on the Example of Ophelia] (in *Dyskursy i Przestrzenie (Nie)tolerancji* [Discourses and Spaces of (In)tolerance], Lodz University Press) and “New York City of 2000 as *pars pro toto* in Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet*” (in *Images of the City*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing).

Erzsebet Zelinka is an assistant lecturer at the *West University Timisoara*, Romania, Department of Sociology and Psychology. She holds a BA in Germanic, British and American Studies, and an MA in Gender Studies. She is currently a PhD Candidate in Postmodern Anglo-American Comparative Literature. She works as a migration expert and media correspondent for the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, Bonn, Germany (*German Federal Agency for Civic Education*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs—Germany), after having completed their specialised training seminars. Her academic interest areas include: Anglo-American Studies and Germanic Studies, Comparative Literature, Gender Studies and Human Rights.