

GENDER STUDIES

Vol. 10 No. 1/2011

GENDER STUDIES

Vol. 10 No. 1/2011

Gender Studies

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

ISSN 1583-980X

Website: <http://www.litere.uvt.ro/publicatii/GS/index.htm>

E-mail: genderst.journal@gmail.com

CNCS (The National Council for Scientific Research) code: 258

CNCS classification 2010: B+ (maintained for 2011)

**As of January 2009 *Gender Studies* is indexed in the MLA
International Bibliography; all our back issues are
indexed in the Central and Eastern European Online Library
(C.E.E.O.L.) at: www.ceeol.com.**

GENDER STUDIES

Editor: Reghina Dascăl

Language consultant: Stuart Elford

ADVISORY BOARD:

Haleh Afshar - University of York

Pia Brînzeu - University of the West, Timișoara

Otilia Hedeșan - University of the West, Timișoara

Margaret R. Higonnet – University of Connecticut

Vesela Katsarova – University of Sofia

Hildegard Klein - University of Málaga

Krystyna Kujawska-Courtney - University of Łódź

Isabel Marcus - State University of New York, Buffalo

Hortensia Pîrlog - University of the West, Timișoara

Nóra Séllei - University of Debrecen

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

Bldv. V. Pârvan, no. 4, 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

- VESELA KATSAROVA Illumine the Mind within: Eva Figes' *Waking* and V. Woolf's *the Waves* /
- MILAN MILJKOVIĆ Irony, Carnivalization and Gender Identities in Fay Weldon's Novel *Spa Decameron* /
- ANEMONA ALB What's in a Rank? Foregrounding Secondary Characters in Chick Lit /

Gendered Diasporic Identities

- COLOMBA LA RAGIONE From 'Limbo' to 'Contrapuntal Awareness.' *The Namesake* between India and America /
- IZABELLA PENIER The Formation of Female Migratory Subjects in Edwidge Danticat's *Krick? Krack!* /

The Gender of Language

- NADEŽDA SILAŠKI *Slave to Love* – A Contrastive Analysis of LUST Metaphors in English and Serbian
- TATJANA ĐUROVIĆ
- BILJANA RADIĆ-BOJANIĆ Gendered Political Discourse – How

NADEŽDA SILAŠKI Women Find Their Way in the Penalty
Area of the Political Battlefield /

Media and Beauty Myths

NADEŽDA SILAŠKI *Dealing with the Mortal Enemy* – the WAR
Scenario in the Conceptualisation of Some
Beauty Issues in Women's Magazines /

Gender, Culture, Society

ANDREEA PELE Travelling Companions. Women under
Communism /

REGHINA DASCĂL Viragos and Pariahs: India's Women /

RAMONA BRAN *Love and Courage* and *Our Generation*:
Two Stories of Insubordination /

REMINA SIMA Demarcating the Boundaries /

The Conundrum of Gender

ROXANA D. A Fancy Exterior: Appearances
CRUCEANU of Charm and Style in the
Protagonist of Byron's *Don Juan*

ELISABETA ZELINKA *'I Mapped the Knitting-Ball'*.
Woolf versus Cunningham: Femininity and
Androgyny in Literary Cartography /

HILDEGARD KLEIN Mark Ravenhill's Plays – Woman's Nourishing
Role in a Barren Homosexual World /

Women Writers Subvert the Canon

VLADISLAVA GORDIĆ PETKOVIĆ Female Appropriation of the Plot

NATAŠA KARANFILOVIĆ in Contemporary Literature /
Woman Must Write Woman.

ANDREEA MINGIUC Jeanette Winterson and Echoes
of French Feminism /

ANA SENTOV Female Characters amidst
Political and Cultural Clashes
in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand
Splendid Suns* /

About the Authors /

Through the Lens of Gender.

Sites of Gendered Representation and Discourse

**ILLUMINE THE MIND WITHIN: EVA FIGES' WAKING AND
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *THE WAVES***

VESELA KATSAROVA

St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia

Abstract: Though most contemporary British women writers follow Woolf's recommendation "to look within", Figes seems to stand closest to the great modernist. In her novel *Waking* she re-creates Woolf's *The Waves* in postmodern terms. The paper dwells on some similarities between the two works concerning structure, the idea of universality, the blending of the conscious and unconscious, the significance of "moments of being", the effects of light, rhythm, verbal poetry, etc. However, unlike Woolf, Figes depicts the life of the body explicitly and presents the subject as fluid and centreless rather than as stable. Thus Figes extends modernism.

Key words: modernism, postmodernism, bodily language, fluid subject.

Critics are usually unanimous that in no other literature is there such a long line of women novelists as in English literature. The remarkable contribution of such outstanding women writers as Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf has been widely acknowledged. However, the number of talented women writers in contemporary British fiction is also truly impressive. A critic writing about a kind of renaissance of English literature nowadays points out that the most intriguing contemporary prose is being created by women novelists (Hosmer 1993: ix). His statement is convincingly supported by the facts concerning the participation of British women writers in the literary process today: the Booker Prize in 2006 was won by a woman – Kiran Desai; the Booker Prize

in 2007 was again taken by a woman – Ann Enright; the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2008 was awarded to a British woman novelist, Doris Lessing; the Booker Prize in 2009 was also received by a woman, Hilary Mantel. Critics often point out the thematic diversity, fluid perspective and rejection of convention generally apparent in women’s writing in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus the novelist Ian McEwan argues: “Women novelists seem best placed now to use the novel seriously to open out relatively unexplored areas of individual and social experience” (Stevenson 2004: 461).

In his significant study of contemporary British literature *The Last of England?* Randall Stevenson includes a separate chapter on women novelists’ important role in contemporary fiction. He says:

Diverse, fluid vision, skepticism of convention and inventiveness in style and form necessarily remained strong priorities for women writers [...] The disposition towards a postmodernist idiom – towards experiment and innovation generally – made women writers among the most progressive in the period. (Stevenson 2004: 474)

As these views show, the position and the role of contemporary women novelists in ‘the House of Fiction’ have already been endorsed.

Stevenson contends further (*ibid*: 468) that most of these writers followed Virginia Woolf’s recommendation to “look within” and “examine the mind” (“Modern Fiction” 1919) and renewed the modernist focus on the values of private experience. It is quite likely that for them the “room of one’s own” was again more readily available than any other place in a still male-dominated society.

Eva Figs (b.1932) appears to have the most obvious affinities with Virginia Woolf. Her feminist study *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society*

(1971), which articulated the spirit of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s, was almost as ground-breaking as Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) had once been. The study traces the history and root causes of women's oppression all the way through Biblical stories and art to modern education. As Figes argues, prejudices against half the human race can be found everywhere – in Rousseau, Darwin, Marx, Freud, etc. She uses recent research to support her argument that nurture is more important than nature. Undoubtedly Figes shares and even develops many of the ideas of her renowned predecessor. And yet Woolf's direct influence on the contemporary writer is explicitly displayed in the latter's innovative novel *Waking* (1981). Figes herself claims that she re-read Woolf's highly experimental work *The Waves* (1932) and "consciously used [it] as a model" (Kenyon 1988: 135).

The most apparent similarity resides in the structure of the two novels – their various parts directly correspond to separate stages in human life. Thus *The Waves* presents the interior monologues of six characters – three men and three women – which outline a journey from morning until night, from childhood into old age. The soliloquies are framed by interludes, i.e. pictures of the outside physical world, which invariably begin with the sun, the source of all life. In the interludes the seasons advance too, from early spring to late autumn and winter. Accordingly, in *Waking* Figes depicts seven mornings in a woman's life and all the parts similarly begin with the sun in different seasons. However, the perceptions of the outside world and inner consciousness are not separate but closely interwoven. As for the number of chapters, Figes says in an interview: "I needed the odd number, rising to a climax. It's not based on Shakespeare's seven ages, but on woman's life" (Kenyon: 134). The climax of the novel comes in the fourth part, which presents the ecstasy of sensual intimacy. In a similar way, Woolf must have

deliberately chosen an odd number because the parts in her novel are nine and the fifth one in the middle is also an undoubted climax, standing for maturity: “The sun had risen to its full height... [it] burnt uncompromising, undeniable” (*The Waves*: 148).

What is more important than the purely structural similarity is that both novelists poetically imagine the passing of time, the experience of ageing, the whole cycle of the seasons as well as life – the journey from the joys of childhood through the tension of puberty, the ecstasy of youth, the heaviness of middle age to the decrepitude of old age. By showing the changing perceptions of mind in a changing body they present the universality of experience in the particular. The idea of universality is considerably heightened in Figes’ novel by the fact that the heroine is unnamed. The novelist aptly comments on it: “My idea is a universal experience which is why she has no name. A name is merely a social phenomenon, not needed when lying half-awake” (Kenyon: 131).

Eva Figes has frequently stated that as stylists she admires Proust and Virginia Woolf most. Like Woolf, she questions the purpose of the novel - contrary to realist views, she does not want to know what *happens* next but what feeling occurs next. Therefore, she unceasingly tries to capture the sense of flux, the sense of perpetual change in all things and emotions. Motion is suggested almost in every line: “The curtain hangs limp and dull. But now it moves inward once more, billowing with the wind heard in the tree outside, wonderfully luminous” (*Waking*: 5). Furthermore, profoundly inspired by her predecessor, Figes often blends the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the irrational within the confines of the same sentence. Such a fusion is typical of her fiction:

One more day. I come back slowly, letting go of the child in my arms, how he

wriggled to escape my clutches, as a child will do, slithering with his soft buttocks in my palms before I woke and remembered he is a man now with a child of his own (*Waking*: 78).

As is clear from the text above, dreams and waking moments are almost indistinguishable; they often blur in her fiction.

In fact what both Woolf and Figs seek to achieve in their fiction is to weld “granite” and “rainbow” together. It is well known that though the focus in Woolf’s novels is on inner consciousness, the outside material world is never excluded because it sends ceaseless impulses to the mind. For example, Bernard, the writer in *The Waves*, observes that he has “a steady, unquenchable thirst” for impressions and sensations from the physical world. “I fill my mind”, he says, “with whatever happens to be the contents of a room or a railway carriage as one fills a fountain-pen in an inkpot” (*The Waves*: 68). He is well aware that outside reality gives fodder to his imagination and creativity. In a similar way, in Figs’ novel the external world is tangible, identifiable, described in minute detail as the series of perceptions offer stimuli to the mind, bring about various thoughts, emotions and states of mind. The novel abounds in close observations of nature:

I will put my feet up [...], watching the sky from the window, how it constantly changes, how clouds move, light turns from grey to silver and back to a darker grey, how heavy rain clouds change shape, become solid, touching rooftops and trees. If it does not rain, if the clouds move and sun breaks through, I will take her to the park this afternoon, to play on the grass. (*Waking*: 45)

Like Woolf, Figs is fascinated by the incessant flow of perceptions, emotions and thoughts. As shown above, the state of dreaminess and

moodiness provoked by the outside world is quickly superseded by the heroine's practical decision to take her daughter to the park.

Furthermore, Figes apparently shares Woolf's view, expressed in *The Waves*, that often "things happen in one second and last forever" (240). In a similar way, she captures the series of precious, privileged moments, or to use Woolf's phrase, "moments of being". Here is such a moment in Figes' novel depicted in minute detail:

Once I felt his eyes watching me during a sudden downpour, a group stood waiting under cover looking on as tall trees dripped water, nobody broke the silence as the wind stirred the high branches and raindrops pattered drily on a brittle flood of old leaves on the ground, I knew he was watching me [...] when at last I did turn my head to answer his black gaze it was with a kind of triumph. [...] I keep going over the scene in my mind, night after night. I close my eyes in the dark, rain falls through the cool wood. Standing with my back to the wall of the shelter I wait for the moment when I will turn my head (*Waking*: 27).

As the text above shows, the fleeting moment acquires a strange permanence. Undoubtedly, the fragmentation in the narrative of both novels is based on the view that life is a continuum enlarged by significant moments. The effect of these moments endures and adds up to the whole that we make of our lives. The moments are strong enough to establish coherence in life. They grow and accumulate new layers of meaning and can continue in the future. Woolf calls such perfect moments "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" (*To the Lighthouse*: 151). It is at such moments of transcendence that one suddenly comes to know "the whatness" of things. By presenting series of illuminations and revelations

both novelists give permanence to transient, fleeting experience. They make life stand still.

Moreover, what is particularly typical of both novelists is their deep fascination with colours. Their concern with the strange effects of light links them both with painting. As a member of the Bloomsbury group, Woolf was greatly influenced by such major figures in the group as the art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell as well as the painters Duncan Grant and her sister Vanessa Bell. As is well known, the exhilaration that art evoked in Woolf made her exclaim after the first Post-Impressionist exhibition in London that about December 1910 human nature changed. Significantly, the novel *The Waves* begins with the word “sun” and unfailingly shows how light transforms ordinary inanimate things:

The sun fell in sharp wedges inside the room. Whatever the light touched became dowered with a fanatical existence. A plate was like a white lake. A knife looked like a dagger of ice [...] Tables and chairs rose to the surface as if they had been sunk under water and rose, filmed with red, orange, purple like the bloom on the skin of ripe fruit (*The Waves*: 110).

The text shows how Woolf persistently foregrounds visual perceptions and frequently presents the world as a luminous cloud of changing light.

Figs is similarly preoccupied with the interplay of light and dark. Her deep fascination is unequivocally expressed in the novel *Light* (1983), aptly based on the painter Claude Monet. In it light virtually becomes the protagonist of the book, as the very title suggests. In her earlier novel *Waking* light also invariably filters through the heroine’s waking moments and modifies her perceptions. It is introduced in the first sentences of the novel: “Light. Glowing yellow. It spills into the room of wavering shadows and

forms a pool on the floor” (5). Figes also frequently reveals the transforming effect of light on objects:

The curtains have changed, do not look as I remember them from yesterday. The cloth has no colour, nor do the leaves and flowers, which are black curved shapes standing out from a luminous ground as the light comes through (*Waking*: 6).

What is more important, however, is that the heroine’s age often modifies her colour perceptions. Thus, her childhood memories blaze in glowing yellow, the short summer of her love is tinted in rose and gold, in middle age the world appears gray to her, whereas in old age she floats on black waves. Therefore, both novelists skilfully employ light and colour schemes to suggest the changing moods in the different stages of human life.

And yet the most significant similarity between Woolf and Figes is that as writers they can be defined as “carvers” – i.e. they both work with infinite precision, tirelessly writing and re-writing until each phrase and detail is perfectly balanced. Therefore, the two novels stand out as highly poetical. The poetic in them can be viewed both as a way of perceiving and also as a mode of expression. Above all, their consciousness is image-making, highly visual. They respond to the world around them with heightened awareness, spontaneously, sensuously. They both present the whole spectrum of a significant moment with all its colours, scents, sounds. Besides, both novelists see the poetic undercurrent beneath the surface of everyday scenes and ordinary objects. Thus, the literal is transposed into the metaphoric images of the sea, the rising sun, mist, clouds, and gardens with birds singing in chorus. Moreover, both novelists move from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the general, from the lives of people to life itself.

As for the verbal poetry of their fiction, it is created by the play and pattern of words, by repetition, rhythms, and cadences. For both of them “the rhythm is the main thing in writing” (*The Waves*: 79). For both of them, as Woolf aptly expressed it, “it is the speed, the hot, molten effect, the lava flow of sentence into sentence” (*The Waves*: 79) that they needed. The “molten effect” and the rhythm in their prose can be felt in every line of their novels. Here are some examples taken at random:

The light touched something green in the window corner and made it a lump of emerald, a cave of pure green like stoneless fruit (*The Waves*: 29).

A spot of light is now dancing on the ceiling, trembling with an intensity of light, perhaps a mysterious form of living, capable of changing shape, of hovering without wings or limbs, without taking in food. I watch it for a long time as it shines, quavering, without leaving the dark corner of the ceiling (*Waking*: 5-6).

As Olga Kenyon argues, what these writers brought to the novel is “the jewel-like compression” and images of poetry (Kenyon: 131). Besides this, the diffuseness, characteristic of the writing in both novels, is well suited to representing subjectivity. Their style therefore has some features of *l'écriture féminine*. Rather than rigidly opposing and ranking elements of reality their writing harmoniously blends oppositions: consciousness and unconsciousness, rational and irrational, order and chaos, self-control and oblivion, determinacy and indeterminacy, truth and illusion, etc. However, Figs favours a polished and lucid aesthetic form to describe inner reality and her style is easily accessible.

Despite the obvious similarities between the two writers, the fact that Figs created her novels several decades after Woolf brings about some

differences in their manner of writing. In her essay “Professions for Women” (1931) Woolf admitted that she managed to cope with “the Angel in the House” by killing it personally but she never succeeded in coming to terms with the second “demon” – auto-censorship. Therefore she never wrote directly about the body and the purely physical is only suggested in *The Waves* through rhythms, repetitions and cadences. Figs was well aware of this lack in Woolf’s novel. Though she admired *The Waves* greatly and used it as a model, she found it “too intellectual” because, as she said, “the physical is missing, which is a form of sensual experience, like language” (Kenyon: 135). Thus she extends Woolf’s daring experiment by adding a new dimension to it – the life of the body rendered explicitly. Undoubtedly, Figs was influenced by French feminist theory and particularly by Helene Cixous’s recommendation that the body must be heard. Accordingly, she makes the body a protagonist in her novel. She poeticizes typically female experiences such as the state of pregnancy, childrearing, the experience of childbirth which were never depicted by earlier generations of British women writers. Besides, the central fourth section is a powerful ode to physical love. In it the parallel made between the female body and nature is emphasized by repeated references to a picturesque landscape:

My body is a landscape which I have been exploring, through the night I have found small unexpected hollows, hidden valleys, cool wind now thrilling glacier slopes, soft curving downs and the new found ridge which is my spine (*Waking*: 48).

For Figs as well as for many contemporary women novelists the body is a source of self-knowledge, of self-discovery. Bodily language, completely muted for long, begins to pulsate in female fiction loudly and

ecstatically and can hardly be silenced again. Many critics see it as “a revolutionary force, opening the way to new possibilities” (Kenyon: 141).

Furthermore, under the influence of postmodernist aesthetics Figs seems to call into question the conventional notion of character and goes on to push beyond not only realist but also modernist notions of the subject. It is well known that the traditional humanist concept of the whole, unified self, which contains an essential, centered, unchanging core, does not undergo any radical change in modernist literature. It is true that Woolf deals with the fragmentation of the self in *The Waves*, but she sees this as only a surface fragmentation. She often claims that the subject possesses an essential core, as is apparent in the text below about a willow tree:

Its shower of falling branches, its creased and crooked bark had the effect of what remains outside our illusions yet cannot stay them, is changed by them for the moment, yet shows through stable, still [...] Hence the comment it makes; the standard it supplies, and the reason why, as we flow and change, it seems to measure (*The Waves*: 251).

Woolf obviously sees characters as willow trees that change their foliage but are “stable” and keep their “standard” and “measure”. Thus in the novel Jinny is invariably associated with sensuality and fire, Susan – with common sense and the earth, Rhoda – with melancholy and water, Louis – with action, Neville – with intellect, Bernard – with artistic creativity. Therefore, what stands out clearly is that beneath their outward fragmentation they have an essential core.

As a writer of the postmodernist age Eva Figs views the subject as fluid, de-centred and dispersed, a set of constructed positions or roles: the roles of a daughter, a wife, a mother, a housewife, a mistress, an intellectual,

and a friend. For example, during her pregnancy she feels she has become a different person, has turned from an intellectual into a “biological body”:

I was simply a pod, an envelope. To be torn up, used. Not the person I was so proud to be, so carefully cherished, nurtured through the growing years, a unique structure defined by high walls of emotion, shelves of intellect stacked with the whole armoury of definitions, constructs [...] Within five minutes of my coming into that room, cream walls, high bed, [...] the whole structure had come tumbling down just like a child’s building bricks scattered on the floor (*Waking*: 30).

Thus, in her attempts to forge a new literary form adapted to the fragmentation of the contemporary world and of the individual, Figes manages to delineate a new female subject who is in process and can never be firmly fixed.

To sum up, in her novel *Waking* Figes offers a postmodernist version of Woolf’s *The Waves*. Deeply inspired by the eminent modernist, she breaks former rigid taboos and gives expression to life-enhancing female experiences, such as the experience of childbirth for example. Besides, she daringly depicts physical love from the point of view of woman, showing thereby that woman’s passion is no less intense than that of, say, D. H. Lawrence’s characters. Bodily language, suppressed for ages in female fiction, throbs rhythmically and clearly throughout the whole novel. Furthermore, Figes depicts a new female subject that is fluid, centreless, and diffuse, in a ceaseless process of formation. Thus she extends her predecessor’s modernism. Therefore, very much like Michael Cunningham who re-wrote *Mrs Dalloway* in postmodernist terms in *The Hours*, with her

novel *Waking* Eva Figs contributed to the debate between different literary generations, epochs and aesthetic schools.

References

- Figs, E. 1981. *Waking*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Hosmer, R. (ed.). 1993. *Contemporary British Writers: Texts and Strategies*. London: Macmillan.
- Kenyon, O. 1988. *Women Novelists Today*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Stevenson, R. 2004. *The Last of England?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woolf, V. 1959. *The Waves*. New York: Harcourt Brace&Company.
- Woolf, V. 1979. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Granada Publishing Limited.

IRONY, CARNIVALIZATION AND GENDER IDENTITIES IN FAY WELDON'S NOVEL *SPA DECAMERON*

MILAN MILJKOVIĆ

Institute for Literature and Arts, Belgrade

Abstract: In her novel *Spa Decameron*, Fay Weldon (de)constructs representations of gender roles and identities using (self)irony and the process of carnivalization, emphasizing idea of unstable identity boundaries. This paper will also discuss the wider issue of overlapping boundaries, which is questioned at different structural levels through irony and carnivalization: genre, characterization, language and style.

Key words: body, carnival, feminine/masculine, gender, irony

1. Introduction

In the past few years, Fay Weldon's novel *Spa Decameron* has received various mutually ambiguous critical responses that have ranged from affirmative evaluation of the work's style and narrative technique to contradictory remarks on the novel's implausibility, flat characters, and artificial delivering of ideas. However, the majority of critics have underlined some of the themes and literary devices of the novel that are an idiosyncratic feature of Fay Weldon's writing in general: a tension between female and male roles, gender boundaries and their socio-cultural background, biological, social and ideological aspects of human psyche and behavior, wittily ironic style, sharp sentences of distinguished rhythm, and a multiplicity of narrative voices which makes it impossible to establish any monolithic structure of world views and ideas. These distinctive aesthetics and poetics of Fay Weldon's which are difficult to grasp within one hermeneutical perspective and their always-fluctuating elements present an opportunity to interpret the novel *Spa Decameron* contextually, in relation to some of the key concepts in western culture, literary theory and criticism: *irony, carnival and binary oppositions*.

Whether it is employed as a stylistic device or in a more extensive sense as a world view (or a philosophical attitude towards human existence), irony is an artistic procedure that disrupts, questions and transgresses the notion of boundaries. From the period of romanticism onwards, irony was often regarded as an ambiguous oscillation between affirmation and negation of values and truths, thus creating in the subject a sense of uncertainty, skepticism, doubt and ambivalence. Nowadays,

[...] our very historical context is ironic because today nothing really means what it says. We live in a world of quotation, pastiche, simulation and cynicism: a general and all-encompassing irony. (Colebrook 2004: 1).

Irony is not a mere tool but a foundational process of decomposing strong entities, narratives of coherence, totality and completeness, and a strategy of resistance that can also, at the same time, affirm or criticize certain values. Through the irony, the world of *Spa Decameron*, its all-female cast and their gradually developing liaisons, presents itself in a mode similar to the carnival world view model, theoretically developed and deepened in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, based on the abundant material on non-official medieval cultures in Western Europe (see Bakhtin 1984).

Carnival, as a nonliterary phenomenon, is a form of syncretism and representation that has a ritualistic function, and therefore the notion of carnivalization usually refers to the transposition of essential and idiosyncratic elements of carnival into a literary language. In the carnival world, encompassed by specific time/space boundaries such as the period before Lent and the setting of the public square or streets, everyone is an active participant. Social, political, and religious differences and hierarchies are suppressed or suspended in order to create free, familiar contact between people. Participants' actions are eccentric; their excessive facial and bodily gestures are exaggerated and welcome since they produce powerful, affirmative grotesque images of the body carnivalesque. Carnival, therefore, sets up a different world model, built upon the poetics of the parody, pastiche, vulgar, non-official genres and modes of behavior, where most of the binary oppositions (high/low, sacred/secular, spirit/body) are distorted.

By looking at various reviews in American and British journals, one can recognize most of the above mentioned elements of irony and carnival,

interconnected with Fay Weldon's constant recourse to the gender issue, female/male roles, identities and sexualities. In that light, having in mind the carnivalesque vision of the world, the ambiguities of postmodern irony and the repeatedly varied themes of neurosis and hysteria, *Spa Decameron* presents an intricate web of diverse ideas: carnival is simultaneously undermined and asserted by the ironic twists in the novel, hysteria (represented in western culture as a predominantly feminine trait) is utilized as a powerful performative in liberating the boundaries of femininity, and the lack of moralistic views on human nature brings a significant, playful and wickedly mocking stance towards any kind of undiversified and totalistic models of truth or ethics.

2. Irony

2.1. Irony and Ideology

In *Spa Decameron*, irony is a never-ending play with the boundaries of established literary genres, with a division between high and low culture, tradition and modernity, and gender identities. The title itself expresses ambivalence in Fay Weldon's literary approach. The term *Spa* incorporates associations with stereotyped images of women's leisure time, bodily and sensual relaxation or harmony; on the other hand, *Decameron* creates a multifaceted intertextual reference to the work of Boccaccio, its employment of the carnival and the celebration of human interactions versus the strongly emphasized atmosphere of corporeal desolation in plague-devastated Florence. Irony is also omnipresent at sentence level or in wider novelistic discourse, incessantly distorting the opposition between manifest and latent meaning, while as a specific view of the world it is generally used within each of the tales, which are narrated by different female characters.

A story chapter entitled “The Conspiracy Theorist’s Tale”, with its rhythm, conflicting topics, obscure plot structure and development of characters, represents one of the best examples of authorial irony and its procedure of deconstructing monologic structures of ideology. This is achieved through repeatedly inserted interruptions, made by other characters who, genuinely bored, ask questions concerning food and drink and share vulgar comments. The character of Mortgage Broker has never heard of Gramsci, while someone else gives a rather sentimental comment on Gramsci’s destiny by saying how romantic his life was, which is soon followed by an ex-Vicar’s wife asking if anyone would like some coffee (Weldon 2008: 174-177). These seemingly irrelevant details from everyday life interrupt the paranoid structures of the conspiracy discourse which are also ironically undermined in a brief description of Conspiracy Theorist’s diction.

She spoke with the accent of the bourgeoisie, as so many radicals do. (2008:172).

Any elaboration on the conspiracy issue is profoundly suspended in this chapter because of the given historical paradox: most of social revolutionary rhetoric stems from the very cultural and ideological centers they intend to criticize. Thus these discourses show these people’s immanent incapability of making any change of values because they do not actually reflect upon their own biased ideas. The pace and ironically oriented fragmentation of the tale’s plot illustrate how these concealed modes of thinking are trapped in their own argumentative circles, but they still seek to suppress other dialogically rendered voices, especially those of the corporeal, sensual, non-metaphysical and trivial.

2.2. Irony and Character Neurosis

Coming now to consider the process of character creation, one could trace certain levels of flatness within female characters, the creation of which is an element of tendencies shown in popular romantic novels, but these personal and psychological stereotypes are inverted in the course of the plot, thus expressing the author's ironic stance towards the idea of both uniqueness and flatness in human psychology. Each of these women is portrayed by means of her profession, written with a capital first letter (The Judge, Surgeon, Company Director, Mortgage Broker), which emphasizes their collective personas more than their individual identities, but also accentuates an idea of women's emancipation - historical, social and cultural achievement - as most of them are eagerly thriving professionals. However, Fay Weldon's sometimes satirical world view affirms the female right to choose to work in diverse areas and at the same time undermines this socio-political effort by utilizing motifs of neurosis which reintroduce the familiar masculine concept of female hysteria as a sign of weakness and irrationality. The narrator, Phoebe, often finds herself caught in the whirl of neurotic fears during the day in the Spa Castle.

[...] by tea time neurotic fears started to surface again, taking hold like a fever in a patient who spends the morning cool and happy, only to be poorly again by evening. (2008: 230).

Connected and conditioned by the rhythm of cyclical daily changes, Phoebe expresses a mixture of feminine delicateness, anxiety and melancholy which are later in the novel made relative due to other voiced discourses that question the cognitive limits of a psychoanalytic approach to the human psyche.

But in my experience there isn't a single, simple motive to any act, just an accumulation of moods, actions and unintended consequences. (2008: 214).

By confronting psychological notions of the inner, unconscious life, the character of Judge supports the idea that external signs and traits in people's appearance are sufficient for the understanding of a person's character, and consequently carries out one more time the author's idiosyncratic ironic twist in the world of the spa. Even though neurosis and hysteria, integrated in the process of character modeling, represent an act of abasement of feminine strength and a subtle inscription of misogyny, they are also employed as literary devices that reveal a carnivalesque vision of life.

2.3. Irony, Genre, Setting

Having in mind previously mentioned aspects of the novel, it could be said that Fay Weldon deals with various clichés or commonplaces, widely present in popular culture; thus in order to harmonize contemporary gaps in the Judeo-Christian tradition of mind and body separation she employs the ironical transgression of literary genres. Katy Guest's remark in the *Independent*:

In a series of stories that could almost all work as free-standing narratives we get modern parable, fairy tale and myth (Guest 2007).

briefly sketches how the author combines different modes of writing and various genre aesthetics, striving to establish an image of the world where boundaries are not crossed out but are essentially questioned, destabilized and made fluid. Fay Weldon mistrusts any values that are taken

for granted; parable is a succinct story that illustrates a moral or religious lesson, fairy tale is on the other hand a narrative of the unreal, and finally myth, as a politically emphatic mixture of archetypes, intertwines with the previous two genres, expressing an idea that all ethics, politics and all moral judgments are in a way “suspicious” since they possess the quality of the fairy tale’s magic and surreal.

Whether it is genre or character at issue, Fay Weldon unmistakably transgresses fixed boundaries, which is one of the major characteristics of the medieval carnival’s particular time/space framing and its constant border-crossing play. At the same time she engages her narrative in a continuous dialogue with the carnival tradition, by utilizing the poetics of irony, parody and pastiche. From the perspective of the authorial voice’s narrative superiority, Fay Weldon symbolically inverts the traditional carnival setting: it is not the public square with its street scenes at open-air dramatic performances and its closely familiar contact between participants in the carnival. It is a Spa Castle, advertised in the contemporary era, hyper-inflated with visual messages, as a utopian and phantasmagoric space that will provide an instant gratification or pleasure for its female visitors, and a final disappearance of all their current neurotic fears, tensions and dilemmas.

A short leaflet about the Castle is presented at the beginning of the novel:

Yuletide Break. Special Offer for High Achievers. Ten days of peace and tranquility at world’s Castle Spa. Join us in a scenic Cumbria. (2008: 3)

The narrator, or the author, never misses a chance to ironically point out the effects of the globalized world, its reliance on the flood of images and the very powerful mechanism of appropriation. Like a postmodern patchwork

of cultural data, the opening leaflet offers the new-age radiating mixture of associations regarding pagan traditions (Yuletide), promises of instantaneous pleasure and simple life solutions. This type of beginning represents a case of self-irony due to the use of a non-sacral word, Xmas, as a synonym for Christmas, but those ironic tendencies reach their climax at the end of the novel.

Promised a change, an adventurous stay and a prospect of new beginnings in life, Fay Weldon's characters, although they have shared some of their most intimate details, end up in the middle of a snowstorm. A helicopter that will take them home resembles a *deus ex machina* plot solution in pulp fiction. The author's continual return to the mélange of cultural differences is also intensified in a travesty scene where Phoebe, acting like a priestess to the gods, ceremonially turns off the Jacuzzi. Her gesture is typical of Fay Weldon's mocking mode of representation, since all the women return to the world more shattered and shaken than ever, which also fundamentally questions the liberating potential of the carnival's unity and equality.

2.4. Narrative of Irony and Desire

In addition to the novel's ironically inverted setting, non-narrative techniques in the plot development and the novel's fragmented composition serve an idea that the neurotically chaotic world of Spa Castle could be a sign of a renewal process. According to Bersani (Clayton 1989: 42), linear, realistic and mimetic plot structures tend to encourage the reader to accept passivity in the reading process. Therefore, the novel's mixture of pastiche, irony and burlesque characters is much more associated with Bersani's affiliation for non-mimetic, discontinuous and mobile strategies of art; thus, *Spa Decameron*, with its non-causal, collage-resembling plot, represents both

for its readers and its characters a space for liberating a desire for life, whose strength we can recognize in the substantially changed mood of these women when they enter the helicopter. In this mosaic-like narrated vision of the world, hysteria and inquietude, the author seeks to map and represent processes of disrupting the Self. At the same time, she refrains from making one-dimensional claims about modern society, because the novel's fragmented narrative structure embodies the shattering power of renovation which is fruitfully placed and elaborated in the Screenwriter's Tale.

As the spa treatment comes to an end, the screenwriter's story imitates the model of a Borgesian multiple narrative, emphasizing the idea of life-narrative possibilities, while at the same time in an ironic, carnivalesque and burlesquely frivolous manner it deconstructs current cultural differences: as part of the same plot, or even within the length of the same sentence, this collage narration merges Indian tradition with Hollywood and Buddhism with Christianity.

The producer, once a NY dilettante, heir to a vast fortune, now dressed in white robes, drugged out, sitting cross-legged in Bombay, consulting the I Ching, the Book of Chinese Oracles. More Confucian than Buddhist, but never mind. (2008: 281)

3. Carnival

3.1. Carnival and Gender

Critics have described the population of the novel as "bawdy characters, applying mud packs to their faces and taking chocolate into the bubble pool" (O'Grady 2007). It could be suggested that such character representation is essentially a moderately grotesque outcome of the two-way interaction between irony and the carnival. Slightly caricatured, these women

exercise their freedom, enjoying forceful sensual experiences, thereby invoking the archetypal imagery of a female divinity, a pre-Christian goddess, that amalgamates aspects of purity and danger, spiritual and corporeal, affirmation and negation. As the plot unravels, the female characters form stronger bonds, while each of them is constructed as a collage, without deeper social or psychological motivation. They are often represented as masculine, wicked or morally disputable women who gather around transgressing the culturally given space, when, according to the night porter, “most ladies are in their beds this time of night” (2008: 186). Monolithically rounded gender models are contested due to the atmosphere of the carnival where female characters acquire masculine traits. They are given the role of active agents in the plot, which was once a predominantly masculine attribute reserved for the heroes of novels, whether it is the character of a strongly determined Judge who decides to undergo a transsexual operation, or the Weather Girl who, having had a traumatically eccentric childhood in a Christian fundamentalist family, takes morally disputable actions in order to achieve her life goals; she sets a trap for her college friend Matthew by simulating a rape scene in order to provide herself with money.

As well as their active roles, they are given a number of traits traditionally assigned to the characters of extraordinary women, but their wickedness is either welcomed or left without explicit judgmental comments. Even though the Weather Girl sets off a terrible chain of events, as Mathew commits suicide after her “intervention”, most of the women around the tub stay silent. Their silence could be interpreted as a sign of great shock and unspoken disgust, but also as a way of accepting the things that go beyond the boundaries of socially determined ethics, which is a specifically carnival effect.

The nonjudgmental point of view of the carnival is also stressed by the ironical time displacement of the plot, which is not set within the period of time between two feasts but precisely at the time of Christmas, evoking the imagery of family gatherings, home, warmth and security. Since all the female characters are separated from their everyday lives, their castle stay implicitly drives them to share space with others, thus forming at the end of the novel a new type of communion, essentially different from that in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Even though the motif of a castle resembles Boccaccio's setting, it represents a certain ironical intertextual reference; in Boccaccio's text a gender-mixed company leaves the city of Florence already carrying within themselves ideas and desire for sharing. By contrast, the women in *Spa Decameron* choose to spend the *spa* holiday weekend hoping to find solitude and harmony, while, ironically, staying within their solipsism and alienated individualistic philosophies.

3.2. Community and the Body

Due to certain technical problems in the castle, these "spa women" progressively start sharing their experiences, gathered around the Jacuzzi, eating caviar and drinking champagne without culturally predefined rules of conduct. While Boccaccio's stories are frivolous and provocative considering the wider context of the deadly bubonic plague, Fay Weldon's characters resemble participants in an ancient orgiastic feast, accompanied by certain elements of pagan rituals and freedom. Like Boccaccio's characters, the women in *Spa Decameron* are also sequestered, even entrapped within the castle, and threatened by the pandemic flu while the castle facilities fail due to computer viruses and its owner's debts. These dominant motifs become meaningful elements in the critique of the contemporary society of the

spectacle and its rhetoric of simulacra. In comparison with Boccaccio's naturalistic description of bubonic plague, the extensive flow of television images in *Spa Decameron* makes the flu seem less apocalyptic and real, with an almost complete lack of background substance of the signified.

Although the body is presented as a powerful liberating tool, something unruly and disruptive with a life of its own, detached from the modes of rationality, Fay Weldon reemploys ironic turns to draw the reader's attention to physiological and neurological layers in the human psyche and body. The connection between biological and social, stressed in the characters' conduct and world views, tends to disintegrate those core tendencies in western metaphysics that were predominantly based upon Judeo-Christian ideas. Therefore, she succeeds in her attempt to get back to the body, with all its complexities that were once silenced, its multilayered combination of biology, culture, sociology, philosophy and neurology, particularly when many binary oppositions (reason/passion, sense/sensibility, appearance/reality) are set loose, and more specifically questioned, within the Judge's Tale.

4. How the Judge Judges Body and Gender

Structurally positioned in the novel's centre, the Judge's Tale presents itself as a foundational model for the entire novel. It is an exemplary, both ironic and carnivalesque frame which immediately questions themes of gender and sex transformation. Gender identity is at the same time presented as something unfixed and always changeable, and on the other hand predetermined by nature and biological configuration.

I have been made, I was not born, and mine was the perfect surgeon's
knife: if nature bungles, man perfects. (2008: 137)

Although characteristic of the English language, the passive voice construction delineates the human body as an object withdrawn from the emotionally charged image of natural birth and given a frame of a strict and almost technical presentation whose sharpness is specifically stressed by the image of a surgeon's knife. Furthermore, when the Judge character claims:

I was born transsexual: a woman short of estrogen, wretchedly play-acting male.
(2008: 136)

the notion of gender as a predominantly socially constructed category is seriously undermined because it is represented as something deeply rooted in physiological patterns that precede those of the socio-cultural environment. However, Judge's attitudes towards the gender issue are difficult to define since she is simultaneously portrayed as a caricatural deviation from both masculine and feminine paradigms, and as a lovable figure of a newly born woman who embraces and relishes life with all its insoluble discrepancies.

Her discourse is a *mélange* of new age rhetoric, followed by religious, poetically dramatic pathos when she speaks of her surgeon, and combined with the style typical of popular romantic novels.

One night Dr. Nail appeared to me in a dream. He beckoned me and said: The time is ready. Come [...] I saw his image on the screen. The eyes spoke to me, with the same force now as once they had. They called me and I went. (2008: 143-144)

In this rhetoric of revelation, inner self-recognition and acceptance of female gender and sexuality, Fay Weldon mockingly deconstructs the discourse of sexual change, but also gives it a strong political note by going

further in destabilizing the ordinary human need for strictly defined boundaries, labeled and clustered similarities or differences.

I reckon dr. Nail is a non-heterosexual with sadistic leanings whose sexual orientation is to transsexual females who have undergone a sex change. (2008: 149)

Whether it is a matter of gender, sex, politics, aesthetics or religion, Judge's point of view brings an idea of indefinite entities. Her epistemological whirl in this quotation is compiled of words and concepts that constantly contradict each other and are contradictory even in themselves. Everything is determined by negation and deviation, since non-heterosexual does not mean either bisexual, or transsexual, or homosexual, Judge's explanation produces a postmodern ironical effect of cognitive uncertainty and skepticism which is further reinforced by motifs of sadistic leanings and sexual change.

At the end of the tale, Judge's claim that in order to change the mind we have first to change the body (2008: 139) includes both a critique and a celebration of new technological possibilities that provide us with an opportunity to experiment with our identity; also, this word play is critically deconstructed by the idea of a simulacrum, a sign that became the only reality – a flat image that could be changed in the process of postmodern collage performance.

5. Conclusion

Fay Weldon's narrative techniques, combining a vast repertoire of parody, pastiche, collage and patchwork assemblage, serve not to impose patterns of social domination but to thoroughly disrupt gender boundaries

and sexual differences. In her carnivalesque and ironical manner, the author criticizes the postmodern lack of core identity, but within the same frame she promotes this same postmodern state where identities are much easier to experiment with. Disrupted narrative leading to a disruptive Self is a potentially endangering concept, but nevertheless its uneasiness clears the space for new interactions, suspending and transgressing differences that were excluded from the binary oppositions. The promise of *spa* leisure ends up as a story with no identity relief, no closure and no solution for contemporary neurosis, but through neurotic fears and carnivalesque behavior, the female characters create a new sense of community, different from that of Boccaccio, which once more confirms Fay Weldon's diverse ironical stance towards any kind of past, tradition and canon.

References

- Bakhtin, M. M. 1986. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Clayton, J. 1989. "Narrative and Theories of Desire" in *Critical Inquiry*. 16/ 1, pp 33-53. [Online]. Available: JSTOR [2010, June 10]
- Colebrook, C. 2004. *Irony*. London: New York: Routledge.
- Guest, K. 2007. "The *Spa Decameron* by Fay Weldon" in *The Independent*, 14 September. [Online]. Available: <http://www.independent.co.uk> [2010, May 14]
- O'Grady, C. 2007. "Nothing to Wear (Again)" in *The Guardian*, 8 September 2007. [Online] Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk> [2010, April 26]
- Weldon, F. 2008 (2007). *The Spa Decameron*. London: Quercus.

WHAT'S IN A RANK? FOREGROUNDING SECONDARY CHARACTERS IN CHICK LIT

ANEMONA ALB

University of Oradea

Abstract: The prompt for this paper is the question of to what extent secondary characters in a novel – here a chick lit novel – simply replicate the paradigms that the main characters inhabit, and to what extent they propose novel ones of their own. To answer this question, I will use extracts from Sophie Kinsella’s *Shopaholic and Sister* (2004) as data for analysis.

Key words: chick lit, eco-feminism, paradigms, secondary characters.

1. Introduction

Subverting the canon in terms of, *inter alia*, well-established paradigms, is part and parcel of postmodernism. What I am looking at in this paper is the interplay between conflicting paradigms, i.e. the challenge to the more or less mainstream, canonized paradigms in chick lit, more specifically at the supplanting of the paradigms of consumerist hedonism by the newer eco-feminism/green discourse paradigms that chick lit seems recently to have appropriated.

2. Theoretical Underpinning

Eco-feminism is a recent development of the feminist strand in terms of epistemological considerations. It celebrates “a pre-historic era, destroyed by patriarchal scientific culture, an era in which women were held in high esteem.” (Danciu and Alb 2010: 104).

Indeed the principles of matriarchy, fertility as a basic function in the – remote or contemporary – community, stability and cohesion, i.e. the cohesion of the group with woman as the cohesive factor, are the main staples of eco-feminism. This raises the question of which of these functions have been preserved in an age of assisted *in vitro* fertilization, surrogate mothers,

of gender-blind upward career mobility, as a result of globalization, the leveller of time and space, whereby local, traditional images of women are blurred in the efficiency frenzy of the postmodern world.

Danciu (2010) quoting Carr (2000) states that:

(Eco-feminism) demonstrates the relationship existing between women and Nature through the revival of ancient rituals centred on goddess worship, on the veneration of the moon, it observes and links animals and female reproductive systems considering that both women's biology and Nature are sources of female power to resist technology (man-created power of domination); their recurrent motif is the image of the soil as mother and people as her offspring not her masters. (Danciu and Alb 2010: 105).

Ergo, I would argue, filiation and not submission. Indeed, it is Jessica's *modus operandi* (Jessica is the long-lost sister of the shopaholic character in the novel under scrutiny here and a secondary-character-turned-main-character) to work within the ecological framework, namely to engage in nature-protective clamour, vehemently voicing green discourse preoccupations and organizing pickets and street demonstrations for a 'cleaner' planet. And equally saliently, to recycle massively in her private life.

Among the theorists who have recently laid out the eco-feminist manifesto, the following stand out in terms of their conceptual contributions: Glynis Carr, Carol Cantrell, Janice Crosby, Greta Gaard, Patrick Murphy and Elizabeth Waller (all quoted in Carr 2000). Their work is preeminently interdisciplinary, bordering on hybrid fields such as environmental justice, bio-ethics, the ecology of language etc.

3. The Data

The novel I am looking at as the source of data for analysis belongs to Sophie Kinsella's *Shopaholic* series, in which the tenets of consumerism are placed under scrutiny via Becky, the consummate shopaholic, whose life of hedonism and *carpe diem* revolves around the mishandling of finances, in the sense that this anti-heroine is perpetually in debt as a result of her compulsive buying and spending.

In this particular novel in the series, *Shopaholic and Sister* (2004), Kinsella has her protagonist discover a long-lost half-sister whose existence had been unknown to the family as a result of a surreptitious affair of Becky's father in his youth. The newly-found half-sister (Jessica), who is brought on to the stage by a twist of fate (a rare medical condition that she has and that requires blood compatibility in order to be cured), turns out to be, in an anticlimactic turn, quite the opposite of what Becky expects her to be; indeed she is positioned at the other end of the consumer_ecologist/green activist continuum. If Becky is the epitome of capitalist consumerism, shopaholism and what I term 'object bulimia', Jessica by contrast is a woman on a mission, i.e. she is a vehement green activist, an environmentalist and – alas! – a minimalist. Hence the two siblings' lifestyles, and indeed worldviews, clash. Consumerism, represented here by shopaholism, fashion fascism and generally speaking excess, is a paradigm that is abruptly supplanted by the alternative discourse of green-correctness that Jessica can be said to embody.

4. Text Analysis

In a discussion of the ways of men, with reference to Luke, Becky's husband, the following exchange between the two long-lost sisters occurs:

“Men!” I say as I’m out of earshot. “All they think about is computers!”

“I like computers,” says Jess.

“Er ...me too,” I backtrack hastily. “Absolutely!”

Which is kind of true.

I mean, I love eBay.

(Sophie Kinsella 2004: 194; underlining mine)

Competing paradigms emerge here, namely the male hi-tech paraphernalia versus the female mode of instant gratification by purchasing goods on eBay. The implication here is that men use computers mainly for upward mobility in the workplace and advancement in general - indeed computers can arguably be decoded as the new power tools in the replication of power in the corporate world - whereas women tend to use them as instruments for ephemeral gratification through shopaholism.

Not only are male and female paradigms in antagonism here, but the two newly-reunited sisters’ are as well. At first, Becky and Jessica seem to revel in their compatibility of norms and ways, but this putative compatibility proves short-lived. During one of their first encounters, Becky sneakily peeps into Jessica’s paperwork in a bid to learn more about her sister. What she gets a glimpse of makes her head whirl with the promise of spiritual – beyond the biological – kinship, i.e. Becky mistakenly believes Jessica is an over-spender herself, a shameless hedonist, like Becky herself is:

£ 30, 002.

I hastily sit up again, nearly knocking over my champagne glass. Thirty thousand pounds? *Thirty thousand pounds?*

That’s a bigger overdraft than I’ve ever had. Ever!

Now it’s all starting to make sense. It’s falling into place. No wonder she makes

her own weights. No wonder she takes her coffee flask everywhere. She's probably on an economy drive, just like I went on once. She's probably read *Controlling Your Cash* by David E. Barton!

God, who would have thought it?

As Jess comes back into the room, I can't help looking at her with new eyes. She picks up one of her bank statements and sighs heavily – and I feel a sudden wave of affection for her. How many times have I picked up a bank statement and sighed? We're kindred spirits! (Sophie Kinsella 2004: 198; underlining mine)

Here bonding occurs for all the wrong reasons in that (sisterly) affection is inextricably linked to figures, numbers, calculations, in short money, and the weakness putatively detected in the sister (overspending, living beyond one's means) implies that the two share common ground. Or do they?

Identifying her own location as extraneous to Jessica's paradigm (environmentalism, eco-activism), Becky frantically embarks on an attempt at appropriation that proves superficial in the end, indeed shallow.

Becky is at this point trying to work out a schedule for the two of them that will allow space for hanging out, but with an ulterior motive, that of the shopaholic young woman locating other ways of spending a weekend – away from the mall:

“Look, Jess,” I say, leaning forward. “I want to do whatever *you* want to do. But you'll have to guide me. So ...be honest. Suppose I hadn't invited you here for the weekend. What would you be doing right now?”

“Well ...” Jess thinks for a moment. “I was supposed to be at an environmental meeting this evening. I'm an activist for a local group. We raise awareness, organize pickets and protest marches. ...that kind of thing”.

“Well, let’s do that!” I say eagerly. “Let’s organize a picket ! It’d be fun! I could make some banners ...”

Jess looks nonplussed.

“A picket of what?”

“Er ...I don’t mind! Anything. You’re the guest – you choose!”

Jess is just staring at me in disbelief.

“You don’t just *organize pickets*. You have to start with the issues. With the environmental concerns. They’re not supposed to be *fun*”.

“OK”, I say hastily. “Let’s forget the picket. How about if you *hadn’t* been at the meeting? What would you be doing now? And whatever it is ...we’ll do it.

Together!”

Jess frowns in thought, and I watch her face with hope. And a sudden curiosity.

For the first time I feel like I’m actually going to learn something about my sister.

“I’d probably be doing my accounts,” she says at last. “In fact, I brought them with me, in case I had time.”

Her accounts. On a Friday night. Her accounts.

“Right!” I manage at last. “Fab! Well, then ...let’s do our accounts!”

(Sophie Kinsella 2004: 197; underlining mine)

With Becky, form supersedes content. The form-informed, superficial factor in organizing pickets and protests emerges triumphant in her view (“It’d be fun! I could make some banners”) whilst the issues behind it all are relegated to a marginal role, even one of insignificance (“You don’t just organize pickets. You have to start with the issues. With the environmental concerns. They’re not supposed to be fun”, Jessica retorts).

While there is ideology informing Jessica’s discourse, Becky’s is ideologically-barren terrain.

Later in the plot we are immersed into Becky’s world of consumerist cornucopia. Indeed, her world is one of excess, a fantasyland where the shopping mall is the staple.

Jessica is appalled at her sister's shopping addiction and goes into prescriptive mode, advising her and expressing her – ideological – concern:

“I'm only doing it for your own good, Becky! You're addicted to spending! You have to learn how to say no!”

“I can say no!” I practically spit in fury. “I can say no whenever I like! I'm just not choosing to say it right now! I *will* take one,” I say to the nervous-looking woman. “In fact, I'll take two. I can give one to Mum for Christmas.”

I snatch two more boxes and defiantly put them in my trolley.

“So you're just going to waste fifty pounds, are you?” says Jess contemptuously.

“Just throw away money you don't have.”

“I'm not throwing it away.”

“Yes, you are!”

“I'm bloody not! I retort. “And I *do* have the money. I have plenty of money.”

“You're living in a total fantasyland!”

(Sophie Kinsella 2004: 224; underlining mine)

Indeed Becky inhabits a sort of Disneyworld of infinite consumerist possibility, a Neverland of infantile Peter Pan-like self-indulgence. The ‘you-do-too!’ dialogue the two sisters engage in is redolent of child-speak; they are both in ideological regression, they temporarily become kids having an absurd fight over who's right.

Again, the incongruous paradigms that the two sisters embrace are instantiated on this ideological battlefield: namely Jessica's interest in all things geological (rocks, rock formation, geological strata, the preservation of the soil in nature reserves etc) versus Becky's intent interest in the perishable, the ephemeral, for instance lavish expensive food, and any of the other perks of consumerist, Epicurean-informed lifestyle:

“Well, I don’t understand *you!*” I yell, in tears. “I was so excited when I heard I had a sister, I thought we’d bond and be friends. I thought we could go shopping, and have fun ...and eat peppermint creams on each other’s beds ...”

“Peppermint creams?” Jess looks at me as though I’m crazy. “Why would we want to eat peppermint creams?”

“Because!” I flail my arms in frustration. “Because it would be *fun!* You know, ‘fun’?”

“I know how to have fun,” she snaps.

“Reading about rocks?” I grab *Petrography of British Igneous Rocks*. “How can rocks be interesting? They’re just ...rocks! They’re the most boring hobby in the world! Which just about suits you!”

Jess gasps. “Rocks are ...*not* boring!” she lashes back, grabbing her book.

“They’re a lot more interesting than peppermint creams and mindless shopping and getting yourself into debt!”

“Did you have a fun bypass operation or something?”

“Did you have a responsibility bypass operation?” yells Jess. “Or were you just born a spoiled brat?”

(Sophie Kinsella 2004: 231; underlining mine)

A clash between the perennial (the rocks, the earth, the planet) and the ephemeral (Epicurean gastronomic delights) is brought to the fore here in a bid to underline the discrepancies between the solidity of norms and beliefs with Jessica on the one hand and the superficiality of Becky’s lifestyle on the other hand.

A humorous – if childish - exchange is used by the author here to, first, express these discrepancies, and second, to convey each character’s intolerance of the other’s ideology and behaviours: “Did you have a fun bypass operation or something?” Becky ironically challenges her sister’s stern austere worldview; in response, the latter retorts: “Did you have a

responsibility bypass operation?”, and so their respective incapacities are evoked.

Subsequently, a play on words is utilized to illustrate this epistemological power struggle, i.e. whose set of values counts, whose expertise? Rocks versus shops configure the continuum on which the two sisters move:

“I’m not *crazy!*” I say. “I’m normal. I’m just ...a bit different from Jess. We like different things. She likes rocks. I like ...shops.”

(Sophie Kinsella 2004: 279; underlining mine)

Again, the rocks can be said to stand for essentialism, ecology and the (preservation of the) perennial, whereas the shops obviously are icons of transience, transitoriness, frivolity, and fleeting gratification by consumerism.

The commodification of life, of lived experience, is further hinted at in the (urge to) display one’s life, one’s private experiences (marital crises, extended family issues etc) on a reality show on television or in Agony Aunt anguished letters sent to women’s magazines.

Becky’s mother is bent on helping her daughter handle her rows with Luke, the husband, one year into their marriage. The instruments she considers suitable for dealing with this are women’s magazines, tabloids, and later, in a downward spiral, TV reality shows:

“Well then. That’s the time for your First Big Row! You knew that, didn’t you, Becky?”

“What?” I say blankly.

“Your First Big Row!” She tuts at my expression. “Dear me! What do the women’s magazines teach you girls nowadays?”

“Er ...how to put on acrylic nails?”

“Well! They should be teaching you about happy marriages!”

(Sophie Kinsella 2004: 242; underlining mine)

Sadly, as apparent in the quotation above, the essential books of yore – as storehouses of culture and, if need be, of pragmatic advice for one’s (emotional) life - have now been replaced by magazines, that is, high culture, the canon *per se* by pop culture, the massification of culture that the press and television stand for. Acrylic nails and marriages thus appear on the same page in a totally eclectic jumble.

The superficial versatility of TV reality shows is alluded to here when the producer of the reality show that Becky was supposed to be participating in switches prompts hastily when Becky announces she is no longer enthralled by her long-lost sister (having discovered that the latter is by no means her consumerist alter-ego, but a stern ecologist/green activist), indeed no longer friends with her. The producer does not find this problematical; on the contrary, she invites Becky to make an appearance anyway in the opposite role, this time round that of her sister’s enemy. This is indicative of the postmodern play of surfaces, contours, images and appearances, where essence and content no longer matter:

The Cindy Blaine Show
Cindy Blaine TV Productions
43 Hammersmith Bridge Road
London W6 8TH

Mrs Rebecca Brandon
37 Maida Vale Mansions
Maida Vale

London NW6 OYF

22 May 2003

Dear Mrs Brandon:

Thank you for your message.

We are sorry to hear you will no longer be able to appear on the Cindy Blaine Show "I Found a Sister and a Soul Mate."

May we suggest that you appear instead on our upcoming show "My Sister Is a Bitch!!!" Please give me a call if this idea appeals to you.

Very best wishes,

Kayleigh Stuart

Assistant Producer

(mobile: 077878 3456789)

Conclusion

Becky's paradigm of consumerism has been supplanted by her sister's paradigm of ecology and eco-feminism and as a result, the long-lost sister sheds her persona of secondary character and becomes the protagonist, just as similarly, on the epistemological battlefield, eco-feminism has been overriding shopaholism in recent chick lit novels.

The foregrounding of secondary characters in literature is not a new technique (see Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966)), in which two secondary characters in *Hamlet* are brought to the fore, J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and Michel Tournier's *Vendredi/Friday* (1967),

where the (noble) savage, the ‘other’, replaces the white man, i.e. Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, as main character, and, last but not least, Kazuo Ishiguro’s Stevens, the butler, who transgresses from the margins to the centre by becoming the hero in his master’s stead in *The Remains of the Day* (1989).

But, as I have argued, the canonized postmodern paradigm of the *consumer paradise* has recently been relegated to the margins in favour of the post-lapsarian/ fall-from-paradise *paradigm of ecological ethics*.

References

- Carr, G. (ed). 2000. *New Essays in Eco-Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cranbury, NJ :
Associated University Presses.
- Coetzee, J.M. 1986. *Foe*. London: Verso.
- Danciu, M. and A. Alb. 2010. *Aspects of Contemporary British Literature:
Conflating Texts from the Post-war to the Globalization Age*. Oradea: Editura
Universității din Oradea.
- Ishiguro, K. 1989. *The Remains of the Day*. London: Faber and Faber
- Kinsella, S. 2004. *Shopaholic and Sister*. Black Swan Books.
- Stoppard, T. 1996 (1966). *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. London:Vintage.
- Tournier, M. 1988 (1967). *Vendredi / Friday*. London: Verso.

Gendered Diasporic Identities

FROM 'LIMBO' TO 'CONTRAPUNTAL AWARENESS.'
THE NAMESAKE BETWEEN INDIA AND AMERICA

COLOMBA LA RAGIONE

Parthenope University of Naples

Abstract: *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian novelist, has been transformed in a movie by the director Mira Nair, also, of Indian descent. The paper focuses on analyzing such issues as cultural and racial representation, gender diversity and otherness in the American society from the point of view of these two Indian feminine artists living in the USA. It will compare their way of emphasizing the feelings of migrants through words and images.

Key words: migration, otherness, identity, gender diversity.

The Hybridization of Migrant Identity in *The Namesake*

The novel *The Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri (Pulitzer Prize 2000), born in London in 1967 of Indian parents and raised in the United States, was transposed into a popular film in 2007 of the same name, by Mira

Nair. A director of Indian origin, living in New York and author of the famous *Salaam Bombay*, Nair considers her Indian origins an added value for her films; her Indian stories become American ones, questioning the complex hybridisations of migrant identity, in the view of the Arab tradition, in my opinion a correct one, that men resemble their own time more than they resemble their own past. Her characters' identity is, thus, defined on the basis of differences that are open to any universalization process, interaction with American culture or development of alternative models of belonging and citizenship (it is no coincidence that she quotes J. Campbell). In her film, the director tends to show a *métissage* of a positive and constructive kind. Though she has not been active in the Bollywood circuit, she has received some criticism for her work from, among others, from the Anglo-Indian writer, Jasvinder Sanghera (British Woman of the Year 2007 and winner of the Pride of the Year Award 2009) who has long disagreed with the Indian tradition of arranged marriages. *The Namesake* is Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli's love-story, spanning over thirty years. Their firstborn son, Gogol, does not understand why his parents have given him such an embarrassing unusual name; his father's death leads him to rethink his entire life and heritage, and this brings him to make peace with his name. A second-generation immigrant, Gogol considers himself American, though he has had to cope with his Indian heritage throughout his intellectual and physical growth; his relationship with Maxine, an American girl from the Upper East Side, ends when, upon his father's death, he realizes that she only cares about her own world. The complex articulation of his identity, at once Indian and American, is marked by his growing anxiety whenever he is faced with "memory" issues. Only when he is forced to cope with the reality of death does, he begins a journey back into "memory", and this name, chosen by his

parents after a series of errors, begins to acquire a new meaning. At this point it becomes pressing to attend the traditional mourning ceremony. This is almost a self-punishment through which he at last reconciles himself with his roots, but also detaches himself from Maxine's American family, culturally too distant from him. In his process of intellectual growth, the American-Bengali or Bengali-American Gogol is thrown into a reality that is no longer familiar to him and perceives with suffering his precarious condition as a migrant, a condition well summarized by Ashima, his mother, at the end of her American adventure, when she decides to return "home" for at least six months a year, confessing: - "I have missed my life in India and now I will miss my life here."

The saga of the Ganguli family shows the greater and lesser problems of people who live between two worlds: 'East and West, marginalization and desire of belonging', a very unstable human condition which is the primary cause of the fears and anxieties of modern woman/man in the global reality. In telling the complex and painful stories of the protagonists, both Lahiri and Nair highlight the basic processes of the systems of thought that lead to changes in identity, a condition marked by existential dissatisfactions that are more evident in female identities: Ashima's acquiescence and loneliness is not less painful than Moushumi's disturbed rebellion. Indeed, both the writer and the director, through their different media, penetrate the many facets of mestizo identity, as the actions of various characters unfold and reflect their social and cultural characteristics - a topic widely debated in American society. Both provide profound insights into the sense of loss and inadequacy involved in 'the hybridization of the migrant identity'. Both stress, in different ways, a *continuum* in the social and identitarian transformation undergone by the protagonists, highlighting the divisions, either positive or negative, that arise from the coexistence of multiple cultures in a space that

Bhabha has called “between and into (in-between) past and present, and that affects their life events, contradictorily marked by traumatic experiences of global transformations as well as by an *otherness* that wishes to preserve itself. In fact, to speak of the life of the migrants is to focus on one of the most burning issues of our present age, an age that is changing faster than we are ready to accept, heading swiftly towards that “melting pot” that is the real novelty of our time, that is, “the great opportunity that migrations offer to the world” (Bhabha: 241).

Mira Nair’s Film and its Methodological Starting Points

The relationship with the source-text is not as simple as it appears at first sight even though this is a novel written by a novelist of Indian origin, Jhumpa Lahiri, who experienced similar problems and difficulties to Mira Nair, who is also Indian. Two women, two Indian women, two educated immigrants willing to speak out on issues that deeply concern them, which each wants to tackle using her own medium: writing for Lahiri, cinema for Nair.

The main focus here is on Nair’s film adaptation. Only indirect reference will be made to Lahiri’s “word”, following a Greimasian model, along with the study papers on cinema by Francesco Casetti.

Interpreting is not translating and the interpretive universe of Nair’s film offers an expressive wealth of great narrative value.

the transmutation of matter adds meaning or lends importance to connotations that were not originally such (Eco 2000: 77).

As a matter of fact, the filmic narration raises issues related to translating into a different code, made of different expressive material and

substance with multiple interferences between iconicity and verbal language. This is a transpositional process that involves multiple languages and emphasizes the 'body' which becomes predominant in the representation, replacing literary imagination which has, up to this moment, acted as an interface between the generative and interpretive sides of the filmic narration. The film, which combines music, bodies, costumes and acted dialogues, and involves the ear and the eye of the spectator, follows specific procedures and timing. It is a "gesture", in Casetti's words, shaped by the "gaze" (the work of the camera) and the words on the track (captions, voiceovers, etc.) A "gesture" that is unthinkable without taking into account the "one who looks", the spectator, in short, that incorporates the visual and figurative language typical of films, interpreting it, of course, through the perceptual codes proper to his/her own cognitive competence.

The procedure of interpellation is the most direct address in profiling the role of the spectator (the *enunciataro*). Consider, for instance, the sequence where Gogol/Nikhil is standing at Astrid and Donald's, while everybody else is sitting comfortably, drinking and chatting. Very relevant is the moment when Moushumi, while sitting with the others, reveals her husband's secret name to her friends - Gogol instead of Nikhil. The character is shown as feeling uncomfortable, he looks magnified – caught by a low-angle shot – while he "looks and shows what she's looking at", that is, strangers who are metaphorically stripping him. By looking at the camera, that is, off the fictional space, Gogol makes clear the existence of a "you" receiver, that is, the one who looks at and subsumes communication, performatively joining the uttering process: this is the establishment of the triad me-you-he/she/it, as well as the initialization of the film "gesture", which questions "the one who looks", recognizing him/her, asking him/her to be aware of his/her role as a privileged interlocutor. It must be said that the

intersemiotic translation, namely the transition from one substance and matter of expression to a different one, in this case from literature to film, forces the spectator into the director's personal vision of the film, thus in this case Nair's, which does not leave the recipient any of the interpretative freedom granted by the novel source-text (Eco 2000: 95). The time limits and the objectives of the film market impose unavoidable limitations on the film, though its relevant sequences can sometimes make clear some obscure passage in the novel or reduce elements that were magnified in the source-text, thus resulting in interpretive signs open to multiple interpretative paths. As a matter of fact, in Nair's transmuted text, there are additions and subtractions, which create "semantic openings" (Dusi 2000) of considerable interest for the basic theme pursued by both novel and film. Gogol's relationship with Maxine and, later, his marriage to Moushumi, for example, are reported very briefly in the movie if compared to their treatment in Lahiri's novel, but the brevity of the sequences is very meaningful from the communicative point of view. Even Moushumi's betrayal receives no overt treatment, scenes have been cut, the only hints left being *The Red and the Black*, a gift received from Pierre (Dimitri, in the novel), which she reads at night while Gogol is sleeping, and the train she catches while, from the back and reverse shot, she makes herself anonymous, though her spike heels in focus in the sequence shot hint to which her desire is taking her.

The Construction of the Filmic Text According to Mira Nair

The film, as Mira Nair has said in an interview, was inspired by a loss - the death of Ummi, her mother-in-law - "an event without appeal" which no-one could change. During this time of suffering she happened to read Lahiri's thirty-year long saga of the Ganguli family who emigrated to America. She was very fond of the novel, not only because it described the

uncertainties and fears of first- and second-generation immigrants, but also because by making it into a film, she could give a central role to the city of Calcutta, interspersing images of the Indian city with those of New York, just as if they were one city. The film, unlike the novel, is mainly the love story of Ashoke and Ashima, two young strangers to each other, whose wedding has been arranged by their families, according to the Indian tradition, before they emigrate to the United States, where Ashoke has been granted a contract to teach at the university. Fortunately, they fall in love and live together bravely, strangers among strangers.

Nair, who loves choral films, had the idea of portraying Calcutta and New York as if they were one city, given their sharing more similarities than differences, which become places where characters move to and from, either out of necessity or from curiosity; they are at once immigrants and cosmopolitans, whose lives rest on the imperative of 'transit' and journey, that is, an idea of life which implies a concept of departure that is similar to that signified by the word "travel", from French "travail". Consider the scene of the family scattering Ashoke's ashes in the Ganges, a scene where Nair brings together life and death which alternate in an endless becoming: Howrah Bridge is in the background, people pass, children play, the boatman is singing a song about the 'river of life' and the family in mourning throws into the river wreaths of yellow marigolds, whose colours recall a New England autumn, to which those who are taking part in the funeral ceremony will go back, pursuing the constant "crossing" that characterizes them. The bridges of New York and Calcutta are an important reference point from this angle of view, they are an invitation to "crossing" understood as a journey of knowledge of self and the other, which is the leitmotif of the film. As Nair says, the Queensboro bridges of Long Island and the George Washington Bridge in some way resemble the great Howrah Bridge over the Ganges in

Calcutta, one could switch from one to the other, and vice versa, aiming at passing the “trial” that any travelling person, like a novel Ulysses, has to undergo. The bridge, symbol of what unites but also divides, is almost ever-present in the background, just like the one that can be seen at the beginning, from the hospital room where Ashoke is hospitalized after the wreck, which his mother looks at in a continuous movement through a window blocked by a heavy iron grate, which materializes for the spectator the barriers that cannot be always overcome, between the world of departure and the one where the migrants land, defenceless, painfully and in solitude. It is a gaze that asks the spectator to seek answers beyond images, and to penetrate that *other* world configured beyond the barriers.

The Namesake is a filmic text resting on items and places that are very important to the lives of migrants, such as the airport and the train station, places of separation and exchange that are proposed as a prism of imagination and desire, but also as a prism of the doubts forcing the protagonists to confrontation, exposing them to the threat of the other. The most important events in the story take place right in railway stations or airports, which the director highlights with the bleach bypass or skip bleach technique, in order to obtain color desaturation and a heightening of contrast which anticipate or underline important clues to the advantage of the spectator. The train crash that nearly kills Ashoke, saved by the open book which draws the attention of rescuers, Gogol’s *The Overcoat*, is the zero point of the film, thus directing the whole story and providing comments on it. It is by train - a symbolic element of great power throughout the film – that Gogol, finally rid of his ghosts, goes back home at the end of the film, and it is by train that Moushumi runs away from the “cage” of marriage. The exteriors are basically characterized by the sometimes incumbent presence of

gigantic iron bridges, as well as by trains or trams trundling through the busy streets, while the protagonists look at the world from behind or through their windows, distorting lenses of a reality that is not always friendly. Nair uses the film camera with freedom and imagination, builds many scenes with flair; she places, for instance, white doves in the scene of the train crash that nearly kills Ashoke, at Ashima and Ashoke's wedding, as well as at Gogol and Moushumi's, she combines red and gold for the costumes, giving directions to the costume designer, Ariun Bhasin, to create effects similar to the wings of butterflies. She likes to magnify items and comic characters to lighten a story about life and death, finally, she emphasizes misunderstandings with comic effects. The refined choices of costumes are never left to chance, nor are the colours and the use of the bleach bypass technique to differentiate memories, furniture and anything necessary to create the right atmosphere and environment; these are intended to stress the importance of the atmosphere of the film, not only formally, but also for its deep meanings. These choices have not only practical functions but also, *inter alia*, ritual and aesthetic functions in close relation with the identity of the characters, often revealing through figurative traits that level of 'meaning', implied in every film, which Barthes identified with the 'third sense' or 'obtuse sense' (Barthes, 1982). On the other hand, as Barthes likes to stress, the dressing system is a "communication system which, together with other ones, "moulds" the being of the individual in the world".

This is a very photographic film which raises interesting questions as to the interplay between verbal language and iconicity, questions regarding the relation of intersemiotic translatability of the source-text. Consider, for example, the shots of Ashoke's accident, both in the antefact and half-way through the film when Gogol learns the reasons for his name. The damage caused by what has happened is in objective shot through the train window

that darkens the scene. These are central moments of the audio-iconic perception of the filmic text that catch the eye of the spectator in the traditional role assigned to them by utterance theory. Their signifying virtuality plunges into the shapeless areas of the “minimal feel” of the spectator-perceiver who interprets these images as key traits of the story. Many close-ups and extreme close-ups are edited in the visual découpage. The film, says Nair, was conceived as a series of still images, like photographs, interspersed with extreme details taken in focus, like Ashima’s eye, disoriented and curious, taken in horizontal plane, opening up, for the very first time, on America. The technique of the point-of-view shot (POV) is used very frequently, that is the object is taken through the shot reverse shot, first taking the character who looks and sees; an example is the sequence in the kitchen, where Ashima and Moushumi, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are frying the famous Indian samosas and Ashima picks up from Moushumi’s call in French a false note that is dangerous for her son’s marriage. Also frequent are cases of ‘semi-subjective’ in which the display available to the character is simultaneous with that of his/her object: in one shot, for instance, we have Moushumi and Gogol at the train station acknowledging, at the end of film, the breakdown of their marriage: To “the one who looks” is opposed the other character over the shoulder, or hinted metonymically with one part of his/her body in the frame, shot alternately. The “subjective” as in the “semi-subjective”, carry out a process of communication through which the first subject framed transmits the message “I am looking and I’ll let you see what I see”. It is worth noticing, moreover, that Nair prefers sequence shots, which allow her to shoot entire scenes in one take, without abrupt transitions, playing with depth of field effects. The sound découpage contextualizes the filmic text and charges it with meaning thus playing an important function in its overall structure. The musical

passages successfully integrate the continuity of the speech. This way Bengali music shifts to American or French music.

Nair, quite fond of Indian classical music, gives Ashima a beautiful voice and a great passion for singing and her voice joins the soundtrack of the film that ends with a musical sequence that illustrates how Ashima, returning to India to study singing, is able to regain her life. Ashima, „without borders”, the quiet and patient protagonist of the story, whose loneliness is represented with a light touch, with her subtle sufferings and her daily battles for her status as a Bengali woman in New York, finds in singing a new and satisfactory existential dimension. After having nursed her husband and children, and having reconciled rationality and sensuality, censorship and libido, she is finally free to take “a pillow and blanket and go see the world” - as Mr. Gosh had wisely suggested to Ashoke on the train before the crash.

Moushumi: the Indian Bride

Moushumi, “moist wind of the South”, curious and stubborn, sensual and unpredictable, is a character of great interest because of her controversial confrontation with the world surrounding her. Characterised by a deep wound that finds no healing, neither in the novel nor in the film, she sails along “the river of life” and runs into dangerous rapids. She can run away from New York to Paris and back, she can get married and divorced, she can have French lovers and American friends, but she will never be really free, as Ashima is, or as Gogol is at the end of their path of knowledge. In the novel, with its proper pace, Lahiri describes the ‘sour’ charm of her mouth, the loneliness of her adolescence and her rebellion as a young student, which turned her to French: “immersing herself in a third language, a third culture”, which “she approached [...] without guilt, or misgiving, or expectation of any kind.” Her marriage to Gogol, ‘the kind of person whom she had always

tried to avoid', appears over time to be a defeat. She does not feel 'Mrs. Ganguli at all; she does not want children, she wants to finish her Ph. D, she does not like Indian music. The piece of the white dress she would have worn if she had married Graham, the American financier she had met in Paris, that peeps out from a hemp bag laying in the bottom of her wardrobe in her new bride's bedroom, is a disturbing sign: a sign of her upcoming defeat. Her quiet giving up of the scholarship to go back to the *Sorbonne*, is the most important breaking point of her passion and love story with her Bengali husband. „It was not Gogol's she wanted to end her life with", yet, when she married him, she had felt as if she was doing something forbidden, radically transgressive, because by taking a Bengali husband she would be doing something her family would never expect her to do. In the film, she reminds one of a Godard heroine, she could be a French girl in a *nouvelle vague* film, her hair combed, her glasses falling down her nose a bit, striking Gogol who looks in amazement and bewilderment. A beautiful feline creature, as Nair says, played by Zuleikha Robinson.

The transformation process established by the director reconstructs the contents of the source-text within a narrative grid whose effects articulate on the dual track of the visual and sound. Moushumi's first implied, then more overt rebellion, is against the traditional Indian model of daughter-wife-mother; it is emphasized in those sequences where her search for social affirmation is plastically enhanced, such as her feeling at ease only with her snobbish friends whom Gogol dislikes so much, the same circle of friends to which her American ex-fiance belongs, whom she had abandoned shortly before the wedding. A rebellion marking clarifying openings on the impossibility to compromise lies and secrets, externally and interiorly, in public and private matters. The camera shot often emphasizes the position of the woman who feels trapped. She is confused and divided. Throughout the

film she retains an element of uncertainty and mystery which shapes her concern and characterize her choices. The acquisitions of her past are fewer than those of Ashima's, Gogol's mother, which nevertheless are a part of the content. Unlike in the novel, these acquisitions are mostly represented at the figurative level, translatable in terms of meaning. The processes of communication that, by triangling on Moushumi and Ashima, become evident to the spectator, are congruously rooted in the syncretism of the expressive codes of cinema; in other words, they merge at the plastic and figurative level and by doing so, they create a complex and ambiguous "meaning". The verbal level does not become involved, thus charging the film with a 'significance' that is at once adequate and ambiguous. In the game of phoric tensions, Moushumi is dominated by her passionate self, hurt as she is by an uncomfortable feeling of defeat: with marriage, no "golden daffodils appeared to her", announced by Wordsworth's poem, recited by Ashima, in the first part of the film when while wearing maliciously, out of curiosity and for fun, Ashoke's shoes - shot in extreme close-up – she decides to marry him and move to America with him.

Conclusion

In the filmic text, Ashima is a dominant figure, constantly contrasted with the restless wife of Gogol. There are many adjacent sequences alternating the two women. Moushumi's marriage, for example, is built to mirror Ashima's, and is designed as a choral type of sequence which asks the opinion of the spectator through the eyes of the mother-in-law, often framed as central, who is recalling old scenes of her wedding with the bleach bypass technique. Then there is the sequence in which Moushumi tells Gogol, defiantly, that she has refused the post at the Sorbonne ironically promising "I'll be a good Bengali housewife, I will make samosas every Thursday",

followed soon after by the sequence in the Library, where Ashima, in her sari, the symbol of her essential 'Indianness', confesses to Sally that she wants to follow her bliss. Moushumi's planning her betrayal while opening an old edition of Stendhal, is opposed, in the following sequence, to Ashima, in the library, taken in knee shot and then in close-up, with her friend Sally behind her, as she looks off-screen and thinks of India: her next 'transit'. These sequences were combined deliberately, as shown by the final sequence in chapter 24, with the two women together in the kitchen; one next to the other, taken from behind, the window opening up on an off-screen representing the world and its uncertainties. Moushumi is frying the famous Indian samosas; she is elegant, elusive, she talks of Sonia's marriage to Ben: "doesn't it matter if Ben is not Indian?", but Ashima only cares that Sonia is happy, "as long as this is her bliss!...". Here is their meeting place, both love Campbell, both seek their own *bliss*, both would like to reach "the place where there is nowhere else to go". Moushumi discovers that Ashima is a woman full of surprises, in many ways not different from her. "I want to be free," Ashima as well wants to cross 'the double-edged limit of knowledge' and reach "the vanishing present moment" (Caprettini 1992), she wants to be free to return to India, to start singing again, by recovering her past and projecting herself into the future; her plan is inscribed in her name that means 'borderless, unlimited', as Moushumi explains. Ashima, in fact, is the positive counterpart of Moushumi, the one who has sorted out the doubts and modulated her passion towards the rational side, she has had her moments of rebellion, too; her desire for protection and company has collided more than once with the solitude of her daily life in America. Emblematic is one of the early sequences in which, in shot reverse shot with the winter scenery visible from window, she waves goodbye to her husband as he leaves for work. She

is desperately lonely, she has no idea where to start from as she makes her breakfast of chilli and peanuts, thinking of the Indian 'Jhal muri'.

Unlike Moushumi, Ashima has been able to live out her youth less anxiety, sacrificing work but not love. Only after her husband's death and her childrens' departure from home does, she find the courage to reclaim her life. Two different generations, two different forms of rebellion and adaptation to the duties, needs and desires of their own lives; two women that share a fondness for Joseph Campbell whose advice is to survive by finding shelter in each one's "bliss". The alternation of the scenes contrasting Moushumi's rebellion with Ashima's submission, the anxiety of one and the acquiescence of the other, is meant not only to highlight the difficult condition of migrants, but also the more difficult one of women migrants:

I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills
When all at once I saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils. (Wordsworth)

References

- Bhabha, Homi K. 1997. 'Togliendo i libri dalle casse di nuovo' in *La questione postcoloniale*. Chambers, I. and L.Curti (eds.). Napoli: Liguori
- Barthes, R. 1973. *Le plaisir du texte*. Paris: Seuil.
- Barthes, R. 1982. *L'obvie et l'obtus*. Paris: Seuil.
- Caprettini, G.P. 1992. *Simboli al bivio*. Palermo: Sellerio.
- Casetti, F. 1986. *Dentro lo sguardo, il film e il suo spettatore*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Dusi, N. 2000. 'Introduzione' in *Versus*, nos. 85-86-87.
- Eco, U. 2003. *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Eco, U. 2000. 'Traduzione e Interpretazione' in *Versus*. nos. 85-86-87.
- Greimas, A.J. 1984. 'Sémiotique figurative e sémiotique plastique' in *Actes sémiotiques. Documents*, 60.

**THE FORMATION OF FEMALE MIGRATORY SUBJECTS IN
EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *KRICK? KRACK!***

IZABELLA PENIER

Academy of Humanities and Economics, Lodz

Abstract: This paper theorizes Edwidge Danticat's book *Krick? Krack!* within the Black Atlantic framework which Danticat supplements with her focus on the Caribbean region and female experience, absent from Gilroy's agenda. She goes against the grain of contemporary postcolonial criticism by demonstrating that the achievement of positive female subjectivity is not contingent on exile. Dislocation is not regarded as a virtue in itself, and readers are reminded that the Black Atlantic is and has always been a place of perilous human traffic.

Key words: Paul Gilroy, Black Atlantic, Black Diaspora, Caribbean Feminism

This article will explore Caribbean female writing in the context of Black diasporic criticism most eloquently articulated by Paul Gilroy in his seminal study *The Black Atlantic*. The Black Atlantic paradigm had a powerful impact on the narratives of Caribbean feminism which

supplemented it with a new focus on the Caribbean region as well as on female experience and intellectual tradition that were absent from Gilroy's agenda. Since the early 1990s a number of feminist critics such as Carole Boyce Davies and Myriam J. A. Chancy managed to deflect the sway of Black Atlantic criticism, *re-routing* it to the Caribbean and altering its gender configuration. Their respective books – *Black Women, Writing and Identity, Migrations of the Subject* (1994) and *Searching for Safe Spaces, Afro-Caribbean Women in Exile* (1997) – focus on the figure of the Black Caribbean migrant woman journeying through the Black Atlantic world. Both Boyce Davies and Chancy look closely at the routes of contemporary postcolonial women from the West Indies and examine how they construct their identities as hybrid persons straddled between different worlds. In the words of Chancy (1997: 13): “Afro-Caribbean women writers in western societies work at self-definition as they recuperate their histories of lost African cultures, enslavement and exploitation through neo-colonization in the countries to which they had emigrated.” In other words, being between nations or camps, as Gilroy would put it, and having multi-positional status makes women more aware of different forms of oppression and enables them to move from victimization to consciousness. Therefore, as Boyce Davies (1994: 4) insists:

Black women writing [. . .] should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing. In cross-cultural, transnational, trans-local diasporic perspectives, this reworking of the grounds of Black women writing redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality. Black Women writing/existence, marginalized in the terms of majority-minority discourses, within the Euro-American male or female canons or

Black male canon [. . .] redefines its identity as it re-connects and re-members, brings together black women dislocated in space and time.

The purpose of this article is to complement Chancy's and Boyce Davies's persuasive readings of contemporary diasporic African Caribbean women writers with my own reading of a number of diasporic tales written by the young and highly acclaimed Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, who made her literary debut after Chancy and Boyce Davies completed their studies. I will attempt to theorize Edwidge Danticat's short story collection *Krick? Krack!* within the Black Atlantic framework. It is my argument that in this short story cycle Danticat explores a variety of diasporic voices of "black women dislocated in space and time," to use Boyce Davies's words again, and in this way she "re-members" and "re-connects" women across the black Atlantic world. Her stories speak from different places and times and in this way they build bridges between places and temporal frames. They spin a web of connections between rural and urban Haiti and between Haiti and its "tenth department" – the diaspora in the United States. Rocio G. Davis (2001: 73), who calls this collection a mother-daughter short story cycle, contends that Danticat's protagonists understand their place in the community "through the bonds with women." They are drawn into a supportive community of mothers, daughters, aunts and sisters who negotiate strategies of survival and identification and pass on to their daughters their feminine and cultural identity. As Davis (2001: 74) claims:

[the] women [. . .] are primarily responsible for perpetuating culture and bonds with the lost homeland. The mothers play major roles in the daughters' lives and growth, a role that provides the daughters with models for self-affirmation.

Although the mothers have different names and individual stories they seem to be interchangeable in that their role of mothers supersedes all others.

Davis (2001: 76) argues there are many stories in this collection where this vital bond has been broken, but he nonetheless concludes: “[though] these stories reflect loss and a sense of a lack of affiliation, the overwhelming movement is towards reconciliation and pertinence, confirming the necessity and the possibility of seeking connection even after death.” *Re-membering*, which is involved in this process of making connections, recuperates the past and cures the wounds on the often *dis-membered* bodies of women.

Danticat, who moved to New York at the age of twelve, is widely considered a spokesperson for the one million Haitians living in exile in the United States. She has experienced the feeling of loss and confusion that comes as a consequence of migration: “when I first came [to the United States],” confessed Danticat, “I felt like I was in limbo, between languages and cultures” (Farley 1998: 78). However, ultimately, like other diasporic subjects described by Gilroy, Chancy and Boyce Davies, Danticat (http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/farming_of_bones.htm) found the condition of “limbo” enabling:

I think being an immigrant, you get to look at both your own culture and the culture you come to with fresh eyes. This is a great point of observation from which to examine both cultures, a very good space from which to write. I write both about Haiti and the United States as an insider/outsider. This makes me work harder to understand both cultures. I take nothing for granted about either place. Everything I write starts with my own personal quest for a better understanding of both places and their different culture.

Danticat's words resonate with Edward Said's (2001: 186) conceptualization of an exilic awareness that is "contrapuntal":

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal*.

Danticat's collection *Krick? Krack!* consists of nine stories that are held together by recurrent characters and motifs such as violence, migration and survival. The book begins in Haiti with a poignant story entitled "Children of the Sea," reporting the fate of two lovers separated by the political turmoil following the military *coup d'état* which deposed President Aristide from power in 1991. It closes with "Epilogue: Women like Us" in which the narrator, probably Danticat herself, pays homage to her female ancestors – the kitchen poets, which is also an obvious allusion to Paule Marshall – Danticat's literary foremother. In between, there are several interlocking stories that are set in different places: the Haitian village of Ville-Rose ("Nineteen Thirty-Seven," "The Missing Peace," "Seeing Things Simply"); in Port-au-Prince or its shantytown ("Between the Pool and Gardenias," "A Wall of Fire Rising," "Night Women"); or in the United States ("New York Day Women," "Caroline's Wedding"). All the stories are about Haitian women trying to understand their difficult and troubled relationship to their motherland.

The narrative structure that brings their distinct voices together creates a collective protagonist – a community of women who are linked by their personal tragedies and by their struggle to survive in various adverse circumstances in and away from Haiti. In this way the form and composition

of the book enhances the hybrid character of Danticat's diasporic subjects. As Davis (2001: 72) observes, "the short story cycle is itself a hybrid, occupying an indeterminate place within the field of the narrative, resembling the novel in its totality, yet composed of different stories." The short story cycle can be seen as a "form that itself vacillates between two genres" (Davis 2001: 72) and thus mirrors the concept of cultural or ethnic hybridity. The cycle has an episodic and un-chronological method of narration and a non-linear plot – different temporalities and characters are intertwined into a network that unites several generations of women with different experiences but similar traumas. In Evans Braziel's words (2005: 80), this network is "a *dyaspora* across space and times, across geographical boundaries and historical, temporal divisions."

Even though Danticat rarely joins in theoretical debates about "creolization, transculturation, hybridity and diaspora" or "contact zones of nations, cultures and regions" (Clifford 1994: 303), she does seem to endorse in her writing the ethos of "*maroonage culturel*" (René Despestre's expression). In one of her interviews Danticat stated: "I'm maroonage" (Shea 1997: 49). The motif of the maroon that signals the migration of black people across five hundred years of Caribbean history also taps into the dialectic of the Black Atlantic. Maroonage then can be seen an alternative descriptor to creolization, and thus it can be viewed as another way of conceptualizing and grounding the discussion of the diasporic movement and displacement of the Caribbean people.

Krick? Krack! maps a politics of cultural identity that is embedded in Maroonage and mobility: "Our identities expand," claims Danticat (1995: 6), "the more places we go, the more it expands, the more we add to our own Créolité." Danticat's female protagonists not only cross national boundaries

but also move between the rural and urban setting. A number of tales in this collection narrate the stories of country women who abandon their villages in search of a better life in the city of Port-au-Prince, where they encounter prejudice and oppression. They are often suspected of being *vodouissants* practicing black magic and are accused of “[flying] in the middle of the night, [slipping] into slumber of innocent children, and [stealing] their breaths” (Danticat 2001: 37-38). In these tales the village appears to be a secure environment associated with a more ethical and meaningful African cosmology. The city, on the other hand, is associated with modernity and the Western ideals of the homogeneous nation state that strives to impose uncentricity on the Haitian cultural melting-pot. With each move Danticat’s characters make, they are faced with new ideas and values which they have to come to terms with, and the stories often capture their moments of negotiation between their folkloric past and a new set of assumptions associated with the urban center. Their dislocation results in severing the connections to their mothers who stand guard over Haitian cultural sovereignty. The daughters try to find their bearings in a world that is growing increasingly more complex as a result of displacements and separations by finding their agency in re-memorizing their mothers and re-connecting with their rural, ritualistic world. Numerous stories in this cycle emphasize the importance of looking back to one’s cultural past through matrilineal connections, female bonding and the tradition of storytelling that “educates people in imaginative history and community values, [and] provides a link between that past and the lives of the people in the present” (Davis 2001: 69). In this way storytelling celebrating matrilineal connections becomes an important component in the new migratory location of culture that bridges the gap between the folkloric past and the urban/nationalistic or metropolitan/diasporic present and contributes to the hybrid identity beyond cultures.

In *Krick? Krack!* there are numerous stories of the imprisonment and political persecution of women by the Haitian government in its strivings to suppress the indigenous culture in order to win respectability in the eyes of the white world. These stories are interspersed with episodes of flight, escape, and agency. These forays are successful provided that the migratory subjects are able to take with them all the vital parts of their cultural past as they embark on their journeys. What Davis (2001: 76) says about the impact of exile and displacement seems to be true for all Danticat's female protagonists, for those who traverse both local and national boundaries:

[exile], which implies the loss of an original place, banishes belonging to memory and often causes dislocation from both the old ways and the new home. The process of diasporic self formation is presented through growing distance between mother and daughter who struggle to define new identities and decide what to keep and what to relinquish.

In *Krick? Krack!* the fates of these women who do not migrate are juxtaposed with those of women who negotiate new identities in the broader transatlantic context. Some of the stories, such as "New York Day Women" and "Caroline's Wedding", deal with the need of re-establishing bonds between different generations of women living in separate worlds as a result of migration. As Chancy (1997: 32) puts it, "in the Caribbean context, the particular and short term consequences of migration have resulted in the physical, psychological and emotional alienation of young girls from older women." In these stories the daughters and mothers inhabit different cultural spaces and as a result they suffer a rupture of cross-generational bonds. In "New York Day Women" it is the mother who has a secret life and who withdraws from her American-Haitian daughter's public life for fear of

shaming her with her Haitian peasant background. As the daughter stealthily follows her mother through the streets of New York she tries to solve the puzzle of her mother's identity.

In "Caroline's Wedding," it is the American-born Caroline who creates a distance between herself and her mother by insisting on marrying a non-Haitian man in blatant disregard of the old country's rules. Caroline was born in the United States and her only visible connection to the migrant past is the stump she has instead of her left arm, which is a result of a shot her pregnant mother was given in the "immigration jail" (Danticat 2001:158). She occasionally suffers from phantom limb pains, which can be seen as a metaphor of the emotional price she pays for her detachment from a Haiti that she knows only at second hand from her parents' stories. In spite of her deformation, she is said to be a "miracle baby," one that can boast American citizenship as her lawful birthright. Her sister Gracina (called Grace), born in the shantytown of Port-au-Prince but raised in the United States, is by contrast called by her parents a "misery baby" - she is the one who tries to solve the puzzle of her identity.

While Caroline takes for granted the fact that she has American citizenship, Grace's sense of identity is contingent on becoming naturalized and receiving an American passport. The whole procedure is described using the imagery of fight and battle. When Gracina receives her naturalization certificate she wants to run to her mother "waving the paper like the head of an enemy rightfully conquered in a battle" (Danticat 2001: 157), with the enemy being the American administration and its bureaucracy. Her sense of security and belonging is defined by this document, so when she has to part with it for a while "[she] suddenly [feels] like unclaimed property" (Danticat 2001: 158). Finally when she receives her passport she says "it was like being in a war zone and finally receiving a weapon of my own, like standing

on a firing line and finally getting a bulletproof vest” (Danticat 2001: 213). The war has taken its toll on the entire family, as Grace explains with sarcasm: “We have paid dearly for this piece of paper, this final assurance that I belong in the club. It had cost my parents’ marriage, my mother’s spirit, my sister’s arm. I felt like an indentured servant who had finally been allowed to join the family” (Danticat 2001: 214). Citizenship, then, is like membership in an elitist club; by entering it she feels she will be finally on a par with her family in terms of class and status and will finally be able to benefit from the privileges that her family have already had. Her passport also gives Grace the right to travel across geographical borders and this freedom of movement is what differentiates her from other travelers – especially third world illegal immigrants or the “boat people” whose plight is described in another story in “Children of the Sea” and commemorated in the remembrance service that Grace and her mother attend. Her citizenship allows her to disassociate herself from the plight of the Haitian boat people and immigrants “without papers.” But as will eventually turn out, the passport will not provide a solution to all the predicaments and anxieties that a diasporic subject has to face.

Like the female characters of earlier stories, who had to leave their country homes for Port-au-Prince, Grace is suspended inbetween two disparate worlds. The first one is represented by her Haitian mother Mrs. Azile, who considers herself Haitian in spite of her residence in the US, and by her father Mr. Azile who died ten years earlier but often appears in Grace’s dreams. The other world is represented by Caroline, who considers herself American in spite of her Haitian heritage, to which she lacks any sense of attachment. Caroline is dismissive about her mother’s Haitian customs and ostentatiously refrains from participating in the life of the Haitian community. Grace is literally caught in the conflict between her

mother and her sister, who for her represent the two ends of the spectrum, between which her own identity has to be defined. As she tries to create a compromise between Mrs. Azile and Caroline, she engages in the process of self-negotiation to see where on that continuum her own identity is placed. She wavers between her allegiance to her parents and her approval of her sister's decision to marry the man of her choice, between her dedication to the collective memory of her Haitian past that she shares with her mother and her new privileged position as an American citizen with its vistas of conformity and forgetting.

The tension between these two positions, between the traditions and memories of the past and the immediate demands for cultural assimilation, is expressed through the motif of a recurrent dream in which Grace remembers her deceased father and seeks his approval. The dream reveals the pain of negotiating his hybrid identity, the traps that are set for immigrants, some of which the father seemingly had not avoided. In the first dream, Grace can see her father but is not seen by him – thus symbolically he refuses to grant her the recognition that she so much wishes to obtain. As he walks through a deserted field, Grace and her sister are left behind, not able to catch up with him. The dream might suggest his gradual growing apart from the family which was a consequence of their long separation, during which, we are told, Mr. Azile stopped loving his wife. This motif of desertion, broken relationships and betrayal is reinforced by the second dream, in which Grace sees her father enjoying himself at a ball at a French château – he is in the company of other women, which again might be read as an allusion to his being “unfaithful” to the memory of the familial past. When one of the women turns out to be Caroline, the suggestion is that both he and Caroline seem to belong to the same “camp,” whereas Grace feels left out, like her mother whom he stopped loving. As Grace tells us, her father and her sister

even looked alike – like “one head on two bodies” (Danticat 2001: 177). The implication then is that Mr. Azile shared ideas and loyalties with Caroline.

In the third dream, the dynamics of the relationship between the father and the daughter changes; – the father not only sees and recognizes Grace but also has a voice and speaks to her. Both of them are in precarious situations – she is hanging from a cliff, while he tries to save her, putting his own life in danger. In the last and most frightening dream, Grace is traveling with her father. They are camping near what seems to be the Massacre River – its waters are blood-red. This is when the father starts a game of questions – the same game Grace’s mother and other women belonging to a secret society of *vodouissants* used to play. Thus the father comes closer to the values embodied by his wife and by other women to whom Mrs. Azile is related: “[Mrs. Azile’s] mother belonged to a secret women’s society in Ville Rose where the women had to question each other before entering one another’s houses. Many nights while her mother was hosting the late-night meetings, Ma would fall asleep listening to women’s voices” (Danticat 2001: 165). Therefore the father’s efforts to rescue Grace might be viewed as an attempt to stop her from making the same kinds of mistakes that he and his American-born daughter Caroline fell prey to. It is an about-face, a return to old allegiances.

The questions that the father asks pertain to cultural choices: “Which landscapes would you paint,” “How would you name your sons?” “What kind of lullabies do we sing to our children at night? Where do we bury our dead?” “What kinds of legends will your daughters be told?” (Danticat 2001: 211). When the confused Grace turns to her mother for answers she finds out that there are no ready answers and she has to find them herself. As Davis puts it, the daughters, who carry on with this ritual, must be “creative and constructive” (Danticat 2001: 64). The questions and answers are not

predetermined. On the contrary, they are open-ended: “the hidden meanings in their mother’s verbal games form a significant starting point from which they can develop their own voice and autonomy because a space is created within the inherited contest in which their own representation is possible” (Davis 2001: 69). The daughter can “construct and claim their own subjectivity in this way” (Davis 2001: 70).

This story makes it particularly clear that Danticat contests the idea that to form diasporic identity daughters must grow away from their mothers. Conversely, she shows that in order to strike a balance between the Haitian and American component of their subjectivity, the daughters have to remember their mothers. The last question in the game that the mother poses to her daughter is: “Why is it that when you lose something it is always in the last place you look for it?” The reply is: “Because of course, once you remember you always stop looking” (Danticat 2001: 216). Grace will stop looking for her identity once she remembers her past and puts herself in the role of a mediator between the tradition of the past and the multicultural present.

This is precisely how Danticat envisions her role as a writer. “I look to the past – to Haiti – hoping that the extraordinary female storytellers I grew up with – the ones that have passed on – will choose to tell their stories through my voice. For those of us who have voice must speak to the present and the past” (quoted in Davis 2001: 68). As Chancy (1997: 33) emphasizes, “remembering our mothers in poetry, fiction and personal writings is a means by which the reparation of the rift between the younger and the older generation of Black women can still be achieved.” Honoring the ordeals of these women through writing – a modern form of telling stories – “forges bonds between women by preserving tradition and female identity as it

converts stories of oppression into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment” (Davis 2001: 68).

Due to her commitment to the recovery of Haitian female voices, Danticat shows the politics of nation and diaspora from a female perspective. She highlights the female diasporic experience, thus filling an important void in the gender configuration of the Black Atlantic paradigm. According to Clifford (1994: 258-259), “diasporic experiences are always gendered,” and “when diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling then the experiences of men will tend to dominate” (Clifford 1994: 313). By showing different trajectories of Haitian women and illuminating the specificity of gender operation, both in the Haitian nation and in diaspora, Danticat offsets the imbalance in the attention bestowed on male and female travelers.

Danticat’s stories not only heal the trauma of the generation gap and bring about the recovery and recognition of female history but also propose a new model of diasporic Haitian femininity, one that takes into account the folkloric past but is at the same time transformed by new modalities such as time, space, language and education. Writing used to be an activity forbidden for Haitian women: “And writing? Writing was as forbidden as dark rouge on the cheeks or a first date before eighteen. It was an act of indolence, something to be done in the corner when you should be learning to cook” (Danticat 2001: 219). Danticat makes it plain that for a diasporic woman writing is indispensable for survival - it replaced the folkloric tradition of storytelling as the Haitian culture went from local to global. In the “Epilogue,” Danticat argues with older women who see her desire to write as a betrayal. We can hear the voices of these women who say: “We are a family with dirt under our fingers, do you know what that means? [. . .] That means we’ve worked the land. We’re not educated” (Danticat 2001:

222). When the narrator announces her desire to become a writer and storyteller, an older woman condemns and disavows her: “*I would rather you had spit in my face,*” she says (Danticat 2001: 222). “Are there women who both cook and write?” asks the narrator, and she answers: “Kitchen poets they call them. They slip phrases into their stew and wrap meaning around their pork before frying it. They make narrative dumplings and stuff their daughters’ mouths so they say no more” (Danticat 2001: 219-220). Though the mothers may want to silence their diasporic daughters, these young women “modulate their identities depending on the situations they find themselves in, tapping into plurality and finding it very resourceful and rich” (Schleppé 2003: 3). They refuse to be circumscribed by domestic labor and they see cooking and writing as in a reciprocal relationship: the act of cooking is a poetic act, the act of writing is a “survival soup.” Writing is also compared to another female occupation, that of hair braiding, during which mothers tell stories to their daughters and each braid is named after nine hundred and ninety-nine women who “are boiling in [their] blood.” Writing is like bringing unity to “unruly strands” – it means bringing cohesion to the disruptive experience of dislocation, to conflicting cultures and traditions.

Krick? Krack! examines the relation between what Said called the politics of identification and the politics of location (Said 1993). It combines Danticat’s interest in the local with the focus on the black diasporic experience, as she describes the journeys and pilgrimages that take place both within the island and between the island and the metropolitan center. In this way it shows that Danticat is as much interested in “roots” as “routes.” All the narratives, those that are geographically embedded as well as migrant tales, are “rooted” in oral stories and folklore – the foundational narratives of the Haitian village. They evoke the richness and beauty of the rural world

that Haitian immigrants to the US had to leave behind. This world is not abandoned by her diasporic female characters, who celebrate diasporic continuity through a sense of loyalty to their ancestors. The women in *Krick? Krack!* are spiritually and emotionally attached to their foremothers even though they reside in different places. Cultural distinctiveness is maintained even as de-territorialized, transformative identity is established. This imagined matrilineal community that transcends geographic space and national structures makes belonging possible despite women being situated far away from their ancestral homeland. In this way Danticat's interest in the local defies the claim that "the Black Atlantic epitomizes the hybrid, syncretic, mobile, de-terrorized cultural space [. . .]" (Donnell 2006: 78).

Danticat is concerned as much with the emancipatory experience of traveling as with cultural belonging. In her focus on both the traveler and the dweller, she expands the Black Atlantic model by showing that the village can also be a place of liberating cultural exchange. Such stories as "Seeing Things Simply" or "The Missing Peace" reveal that cross-cultural encounters can also happen in the village. In "Seeing Things Simply" we can see how the village community becomes trans-local, how it accommodates diverse experiences, people and traditions. Among its characters, we can find a teacher from the Sorbonne and a cosmopolitan painter from Guadeloupe who comes regularly to Rose-Ville to paint her pictures. They both influence the maturation of a sixteen-year-old girl named Princess, who poses for Catherine – the painter – as a model, and who uses this experience to recreate her identity through art. Her encounters with the exilic intellectuals who come to the village encourage her to become an artist – someone who "sees things simply." "Seeing" can be treated as a metaphor for a healthy voyeurism whose aim is to produce art "something to leave behind even after she was gone, something that showed what she had observed in a way that no one else

would after her” (Danticat 2001: 140). As the story opens and ends with images of blood and killing it becomes clear that, for Princess, and by extension for Danticat, art is a way of overcoming death and building ties between the antecedents and the posterity.

The same anxiety animates the characters of the story “The Missing Peace,” in which an exilic Haitian woman, Emilie, comes back to Haiti to look for the grave of her mother killed by “the new regime.” If she could mourn at her mother’s grave, she would find the “peace” that she “misses” so much. Though her quest is aborted, she nevertheless reconciles herself to the loss of her mother, thanks to her young Haitian guide -- a girl named Lamort – who, like Emilie, is an orphan. Her name “Lamort”– meaning death in French - was given to her by her grandmother, who in this way punishes the girl for her mother’s death in childbirth. The grandmother is conventional and deeply suspicious of all diasporic outsiders who, unlike her and her granddaughter, can read and write. The cross-cultural encounter of Emilie and Lamort liberates them both from the grip of the past – while Emilie finally starts to think about the future, Lamort finds strength and courage to successfully defy her grandmother and claim her mother’s name as her lawful birthright.

These two stories demonstrate that the acts of crossing are as important as the specific locations where the crossings begin and sometimes end. The village of Ville Rose, where the stories are set, is a localized and diasporic place – it is a place where diasporic subjects come into being. Thus it is not only the metropolis that is a contact zone for different cultures; the village also can be a place where the tides of the Black Atlantic crisscross. Border-crossing and migrancy are indeed liberating, but as those who left come back the whole community benefits.

This intersection of the local and the global fills an important void in Gilroy's paradigm. Danticat proves that the achievement of positive female subjectivity is not necessarily linked to the condition of exile. As Danticat explores the lives of those who stayed, she challenges the idea that their lives were impoverished because they did not migrate, but on the other hand, she seems to believe that personal development and empowerment hinge on cross-cultural intercourse and exchange, on borrowing and lending across cultural boundaries. In the words of Donnell (2006: 87), who often contests Gilroy's praxis, "the kinds of trans-cultural and intercultural work that Gilroy locates as somehow exceeding and even deconstructing the nation can actually be located within the Caribbean nation, city or even village." But in Danticat's fiction it is the village, not the city, where cultural plurality is allowed to thrive. In this way Danticat goes against the grain of much contemporary postcolonial criticism. Most postcolonial and Caribbean critics, to quote from Donnell again, are "both profoundly suspicious of pastoral motifs which they see as promoting a mystifying narrative of the recovery of a lost essence and therefore obstructing a more direct entanglement with the actual conditions of Caribbean life." These critics "tend to associate pastoral with a regressive politics, and in general, scholars of Caribbean literature celebrate a turn away from pastoral setting in favor of more urban ones" (Phillips Casteel quoted in Donnell 2006: 103). Danticat, on the other hand, obviously gives preference to rural settings, but her village is not static or regressive, and it is not posed in opposition to the liberating condition of migration and exile, but in contrast to the city, which is a forcibly monolithic place, a place of "cultural insiderism," dedicated to the dream of "ethnically homogenous object," to use Gilroy's words. Thus her interest in rural and urban Haiti turns the tables on the Caribbean critics and enables us to think about the location and diaspora in new ways.

Also, the experience of dislocation is described without going into raptures and is not regarded as a virtue in itself. Life beyond Haiti is often described more in terms of loss than of success. The opening story “Children of the Sea” dramatizes the fate of the boat people who are lost at sea and never reach the shores of Florida. This story shows another dimension of the Black Atlantic crossings, reminiscent of the traumatic experience of the Middle Passage. It proves how unwilling Danticat is to subjugate her art to any theoretical agenda. In her investigation of the connection between history and travel and the dynamics of cultural exchange, Danticat refuses to treat Atlantic crossings as merely an intellectual odyssey. As Alison Donnell (2006: 97) aptly remarks: “[the] sea is not charged with cross cultural flows or tides of intellectual exchange but with the fears and hopes of the ‘Illegal Immigrant’ and the ‘stowaway’ whose identities are lost at sea with no certainty of landing.” As the travelers – the children of the sea - sink into their “watery graves” we are reminded that the Black Atlantic is and has always been first and foremost a place of perilous human traffic.

References

- Boyce Davies, C. 1994. *Black Women, Writing and Identity, Migrations of the Subject*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Chancy, M. J.A. 1997. *Searching for Safe Spaces, Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Clifford, J. 1994. ‘Diasporas’ in *Cultural Anthropology* 9/3, pp. 302-338.
- Danticat, E. 2001. *Krick? Krak!* New York: Soho Press.
- Danticat, E. 1995. ‘Hati: A Bi-cultural Experience.’ Lecture presented at the Inter-American Development Bank on Dec. 7, 1995, as a part of the IDB Cultural Center’s Lecture Series, *Encuentros*, No 12.
- Davis, Rocio G. 2001. ‘Oral Narrative as Short Story Cycle: Forging Community in Edwidge Danticat’s *Krick? Krak!*’ in *MELUS*. Vol. 26. Issue 2, p 65.

- Donnell, A. 2006. *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature. Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Evans Braziel, J. 2005. 'Re-membering Défilée: Dédée Bazile as Revolutionary Lieu de Mémoire' in *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*. Issue 18, pp. 57-85.
- Farley, C. J. 1998. 'Review of Farming of Bones by Edwidge Danticat' in *Time Magazine*. Vol. 152.
- Said, E. 2001. (2000). 'Reflections on Exile' in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge MA: University of Harvard Press.
- Schleppe, B. E. 2003. *Empowering New Identities in Postcolonial Literature by Francophone Women Writers*. Doctoral Disseration presented at The University of Texas at Austin.
- Shea, R. 1997. 'Traveling Worlds with Edwidge Danticat' in *Poets and Writers Magazine*.

The Gender of Language

***SLAVE TO LOVE – A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF LUST
METAPHORS IN ENGLISH AND SERBIAN****

NADEŽDA SILAŠKI

and

TATJANA ĐUROVIĆ

University of Belgrade

Abstract: Basing our study on Lakoff's (1987) and Kövecses's (2003) classification of LUST metaphors in English, in this paper we provide a contrastive analysis of English and Serbian metaphors for LUST (the latter being compiled from the Serbian online edition of *Cosmopolitan*) to show the similarities in the conceptualisation of this emotion in the two languages and in particular point out its gendered nature.

Key words: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Critical Metaphor Analysis, LUST metaphors, English, Serbian, gendered metaphors.

1. Introduction

As fully documented by Kövecses (2003), emotional language is rich in metaphors and other forms of figurative language. Although emotions cannot be conceptualised in a way that contradicts universal real physiology (i.e. the functioning of body in emotion), members of different cultures “can choose to conceptualise their emotions in many different ways within the constraints imposed on them by universal physiology” (Kövecses 2003: 165). In other words, the conceptualisation and experience of emotions, i.e. the conceptual metaphors used together with their linguistic instantiations, may differ from one language to another, which makes the metaphorisation of emotions a culturally-bound process. It is our aim in this paper, by contrasting English and Serbian metaphors, to identify the similarities in the conceptualisation of LUST in these two languages and particularly lay stress on its gendered nature.

2. Theoretical Framework and Data Collection

The analysis in this paper is embedded in the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), initially developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), whose basic tenet is that metaphor is not a property of individual linguistic expressions and their meanings, but of whole conceptual domains. At the heart of Lakoff and Johnson’s theory lies the *conceptual metaphor*, defined as an essential conceptual tool which consists of the *source* and *target* domains. The TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN formula describes the metaphorical connection between the two domains, where complex and abstract concepts (target) are thought of and talked about in

terms of conceptually simpler and more concrete notions (source). According to CMT it is our conceptual system that is metaphorical in nature, not the language itself. Language thus becomes one of the ways of expressing our conceptual system and is assigned a subsidiary role. However, according to López Rodríguez (2007: 18), “considering metaphor an exclusively mental phenomenon [...] would be rather simplistic because, given that metaphor manifests itself in language, and language is the product of a society, it seems logical that cultural mechanisms should be a determining factor for the entrenchment of many metaphoric themes.” This cultural aspect of metaphors makes them a suitable tool for transferring and perpetuating social beliefs, from which the evaluative dimension of metaphors stems. Therefore, in our analysis of LUST metaphors in English and Serbian, along with CMT, we incorporate the main principles of Critical Metaphor Analysis where metaphor, viewed as a blend of semantic, cognitive and pragmatic dimensions, serves the purpose “of influencing opinions and judgements by persuasion” (Charteris-Black 2004: 21). Most metaphors are rarely void of their evaluative stance but are charged with an ideological component, “which reflects a bias on the part of a speech community towards other groups of peoples, mores, situations and events” (López Rodríguez 2007: 18). Thus, in this paper metaphors are regarded as a discursive means that aids us in understanding the relationships and experiences in which we find ourselves. By emphasising the gendered nature of metaphors for LUST in English and Serbian, we will also attempt to show how metaphors shape our reality and make sense of the world around us. The data collection for the analysis has been compiled from texts published in various issues of the Serbian online edition of *Cosmopolitan* (2009), a magazine which has been reported to “depict[s] a smooth, idealized and beautiful world in which women’s beauty and sexuality magically empowers them.” (Machin &

Thornborrow 2003: 461). These texts explicitly and pervasively deal with love, the sexual act, desire, lust, etc. Our approach to the analysis of the concept of LUST in Serbian, focusing on popular, journalistic discourse targeting women as readership, differs from that adopted for English in Lakoff's collection of contextually-void examples from a variety of sources (Lakoff 1987: 409-411) as well as from that used in Kövecses's classification of LUST metaphors collected by Csábi from romantic novels (Kövecses 2003:31-32). Potential differences between English and Serbian in the conceptualisation of LUST may thus be searched for in the area of the creativity and complexity of discourse-based examples in Serbian, which frequently tend to conceptualise LUST by drawing inferences from more than one source domain within the same sentence.

3. LUST Metaphors in English and Serbian

Despite traditional beliefs that lust, as a sexual urge or desire, is void of cognitive content (Lakoff 1987), Lakoff (1987) and Kövecses (2003) convincingly show that LUST, similar to other abstract concepts, is better understood via a varied system of conceptual metaphors. Thus, LUST has been reported to be conceptualised in English by means of a large number of target domains such as CONTAINER, HEAT/FIRE, FOOD, WAR, GAME, MACHINE, ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR/WILDNESS, INSANITY, NATURAL FORCE, PHYSICAL FORCE, SPORT, SOCIAL SUPERIOR, OPPONENT, PAIN/TORMENTOR, HUNGER/EATING, MAGIC, UNITY/BOND, JOURNEY, RAPTURE, MAGNETIC FORCE, etc. (see Kövecses 2003, Lakoff 1987, Underhill 2007, etc.).

What follows is a contrastive analysis of five LUST metaphors in English and Serbian in which we particularly target the gendered nature of the selected metaphors.

3.1. Lust as Hunger and Food

According to Kövecses (2003), HUNGER (FOOD) is one of the metaphorical sources in which the concept of LUST is predominantly couched, as illustrated by the following metaphorical expressions in English: He *fell* to her like a *starved* man might *fall to food*. Her *appetites* were hot and uninhibited. (Kövecses 2003: 31). In the LUST IS HUNGER metaphor, “the basic ‘shape’ of the experience of hunger and eating is transferred to the sexual domain” (Emanatian 1995: 169), as evidenced by the following examples in Serbian (English translation is provided below each example):

(1) Ako je predigra „apetisan“ pre seksa, onda je „gužvanje čaršava“ glavno jelo i to ono iz restorana sa pet zvezdica. Ali, šta je sa dezertom?

‘If petting is ‘the appetiser’ before sex, then ‘crumpling the sheets’ is the main course in a five star restaurant. But what about the dessert?’

(2) I iako ideja o „seksualnom postu“ neke od nas ispunjava užasom, a neke olakšanjem, izgleda da ćemo po isteku perioda uzdržavanja svi biti ispunjeni čistom seksualnom energijom i željom da što pre zadovoljimo apetite.

‘If the idea of ‘sexual fasting’ fills some of us with horror, and some with relief, it seems that after a period of abstinence we will all be filled with pure sexual energy and the desire to satisfy our appetites as soon as possible.’

(3) „Ljubio me je gladno, strasno, istraživački“, kaže ona.

“‘He kissed me hungrily, passionately, searchingly” she said.’

(4) Dok se upoznajte sa nekim slatkišem, kratko ga pogledajte pravo u oči i istovremeno mu čvrsto, naravno ne prejako, stisnite ruku.

‘While being introduced to some piece of candy, briefly look straight into his eyes and at the same time firmly, of course not too hard, squeeze his hand.’

(5) Igrum raznolikih uloga, novim pozama i drugim trikovima koji odišu kreativnošću, „zasladićete“ život i sebi i njemu.

‘Playing various roles and experimenting with new positions and other tricks which smack of creativity, you will ‘sweeten’ life for both of you.’

What Serbian example (1) seems to impart is that when *feeling hungry* (for lust) we want to *satisfy our appetites* as soon as possible; we start off with an *appetizer*, i.e. foreplay and proceed to *the main course in a five star restaurant*, standing for love-making (i.e. ‘crumpling the sheets’), with *dessert* on top of it. *Sexual fasting* as literal fasting (example [2]) is viewed as a transitional stage leading to the feeling of being fully nourished and satiated, lending support to the underlying notion of LUST as FOOD and HUNGER. When we are hungry or break our fast, we get food to make us nourished – when we have a sexual desire we crave to satisfy it. As Kövecses (2003: 45) claims, “[t]here is some desire on the part of the subject of emotion to perform an action, where the action is ‘spurred’ by or is a result of the emotion itself”. What this metaphor may suggest is that eating and food are “pleasurable phenomena which (like sex) are meant to be utterly enjoyed” (Undie et al. 2007: 228), emphasising the naturalness of both acts (lust and eating). However, LUST IS HUNGER/FOOD may also be interpreted as hiding a potential aggression arising from the very image of eating and the physical experience of food moving down inside the body. Sexual partners, men and women alike, perceive themselves as an object, i.e. food that must be eaten in order to satiate one’s appetite and hunger (i.e. lust), food and eating being the vehicle for “the desire to obtain an object (corresponding either to an emotion or the object of an emotion)” (Kövecses 2003: 39). The

coalescence of sex and food, as illustrated by the metaphorical expressions *appetizer*, *main course* and *dessert*, conforms to Lakoff's OBJECT OF LUST IS FOOD metaphor (Lakoff 1987) and tends to nicely mask the main idea condensed into these linguistic metaphors, that partners treat themselves as sexual objects.

3.2. Lust as an Object or Product

The objectification of partners, however, is also prominent in the two metaphors in Serbian, LUST IS AN OBJECT and LUST IS A PRODUCT, instantiated by the following metaphorical expressions:

(6) Vaš dragi sanja da ga tretirate kao seksualni objekat, a vi ćete mu ostvariti tu fantaziju.

‘Your loved one dreams of you treating him like a sex object, and you will make his fantasy a reality.’

(7) Kada su u pitanju saveti o seksu, ponekad je skraćena verzija odgovora bolja od detaljnih opisa, zato uživajte u jednostavnim uputstvima za upotrebu.

‘As for advice about sex, sometimes the abridged version is better than the detailed description, so enjoy the simple instructions for use.’

The equation of LUST (and sex) with an OBJECT or a PRODUCT is also common in English (see e.g. Underhill 2007; Kövecses 2003). Thus, the encounter between the two partners is reduced to an object or a product for whose proper use there are simple instructions. It is no longer an activity of feeling sexual desire, but a pleasurable thing, a reified object, “something you get, something you give” (Underhill 2007: 99). Making human beings “invisible” and relegating them to the status of objects results in downplaying

the roles and responsibilities of individuals sharing this emotional concept. Example (7), which refers to the LUST IS AN OBJECT metaphor, explicitly states that “Your loved one dreams of you treating him like a *sex object*” while you [addressing women] will make his fantasy a reality”. Objectification is thus equally shared by both partners, while giving the woman a more prominent role in this process. She is the one who does not manifest her own willingness and desire, but rather furnishes the man with what he demands. This is particularly emphasised in the next metaphor, where the OBJECT OF LUST is conceptualised as a POSSESSED OBJECT.

(8) On će se onda lako uživeti u vašu ulogu robinje i osetiti slobodnim da vam pruži sve potrebne sugestije.

‘Then he’ll find it easy to get into your role as slave and feel free to give you all the necessary tips.’

(9) Naravno, pobrinite se da on dobije igru, a kada pobedi ponizno mu dajte do znanja da mu stojite na raspolaganju do kraja noći.

‘Of course, make sure that he wins the game, and when he wins, humbly let him know that you will be at his disposal until the end of the night.’

Examples (8) and (9) suggest that a woman readily accepts her assigned role as the one who is expected to fulfil all her “master’s” wishes, following his guidelines unreservedly. However, in consenting to engage in such a game (to play the role of a female slave) and stripping love of fuller emotional content, debasing it to sheer lust and objects of lust, it may be assumed that what women are motivated by are selfish drives and desires to take full advantage of such a concept. In advising women how to enrich and enhance their sexual life by adopting particular conceptual domains,

metaphor creators seem to portray a woman who expects to be satisfied and may feel resentful “if she is not delivered the right product”. By catering for all man’s wishes by deliberately letting him ‘win the game’ and humiliating herself by stooping low and being treated as a female love servant, woman appears to intentionally assume an air of submissiveness to derive maximum satisfaction for herself too. In other words, “[g]iving pleasure to the man brings pleasure and power to the woman” (Machin & Thornborrow 2003:464)

3.3. Lust as a Mechanical Process

According to Lakoff (1987: 410-411), A LUSTFUL PERSON IS A FUNCTIONING MACHINE, usually a car in English. Mapping the source domain of MACHINES onto the target domain of LUST serves to intensify the portrayal of this concept as a mechanical process which is deprived of emotional content. We provide the following Serbian examples:

(10) Ako priželjkujete ludu jurnjavu bez kočnica u krevetu (a ko ne želi?), morate da igrate prljavo i smelo – bar ponekad.

‘If you long for a mad race with no brakes in bed (and who doesn’t?), you have to play dirty and daringly – at least sometimes.’

(11) Vaš dečko je možda već sjajan, ali nekoliko sitnih „prepravki” napraviće od njega vašeg partnera iz snova. [...] Naša lista najčešćih muških „falinki” i jednostavnih načina da ih „popravite” i napravite od njega savršenog dečka pomoći će vam da u ljubavi dobijete sve što želite.

‘Your boyfriend might be great already, but a few minor ‘repairs’ will turn him into your dream partner. [...] Our list of the most common male ‘defects’ and the simple ways to ‘fix’ them and make him the perfect boyfriend will help you to get everything you want from love.’

(12) Ali, ako se uvek ograničavate samo na sigurne „okidače” strasti, može se desiti da vam promaknu neke važne a još neistražene zone.

‘But if you still limit yourself only to safe passion ‘triggers’, you might miss some important but yet not investigated zones.’

The mechanical, deterministic aspect of lust is emphasised in Serbian examples as well. Men are viewed by women as machines (cars) which in order to provide sexual satisfaction must be in perfect condition, without any *defects* (example [11]). This implies that like cars men also should be occasionally serviced so that the *defects* may be *fixed*. Women are conceptualised as mechanics who have to be knowledgeable about machines so as to get maximum benefit. It is the woman who is in control of her sexual desire and who uses man as a means of getting it. If she wishes to lose control and sets off on a *mad race with no brakes in bed* she must *play dirty* and *daringly* (example [10]). Although this metaphor gives more credit to the woman, the reduction of women to mechanics who look ‘under the bonnet’ to see if everything is functioning well, together with men who are pieces of machinery in constant need of checking, contributes to an extremely dehumanizing image of lust and sex, which has also been observed in the previous LUST IS FOOD and LUST IS A PRODUCT/OBJECT metaphors.

3.4. Lust as War

LUST is also conceptualised as WAR and sexual partners as opponents. We provide two examples in Serbian to illustrate this metaphor:

(13) Iskoristio je tajno oružje: igru uloga u kojoj on dominira.

‘He used his secret weapon: role play where he dominates.’

(14) Kada ste prvi put prešli na „stvar” bio je to vatromet strasti [...]... iako kasnije njegovi erotski manevri nisu baš svaki put izazivali „zemljotres”.

‘When you got “down to it” the first time, there were passionate fireworks [...] even though his later erotic manoeuvres didn’t cause an ‘earthquake’ every time.’

LUST is perceived as a struggle between two sides: the one who is in control of the sexual desire and does not want to yield to it, and the other who attempts to get control of this desire by using all the possible weaponry and tactics at their disposal. If, by exercising enough force and skill, one side wins the struggle, the other loses it (see Kövecses 2003:69). The war concept with its implied violence being usually linked with men finds its linguistic realisation in the words *he dominates* (example [13]), which clearly unveil the perpetrator of violence. Similarly to the English examples, the metaphorical expressions in Serbian also seem to emphasise a man’s need to attest his virility and sexual dominance by “conquering” a woman’s body.

3.5. Lust as an Animal

The dubious character of lust and love is also reflected in likening them to animal behaviour. The perception of human sex as animal sex (the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor) rests on emphasising animal drives in humans, imparting negative evaluations of lust stemming from the latent aggressive behaviour identified in animals. We, as rational beings, should try to “tame” the animal inside us. We illustrate the LUST IS AN ANIMAL metaphor in Serbian with the following examples:

(15) Ali, istina je da je eksplozivan, animalni seks jednako važan za vezu kao i nežno vođenje ljubavi pri kome se gledate u oči. Zato, pokažite seksi mačkicu u sebi, isto kao i na početku veze. [...] Sledeći put kada ga vidite, osetićete neodoljivu želju da ga odmah „šćepate”.

‘But the truth is that explosive, animal sex is just as important for a relationship as tender lovemaking while staring lovingly into each others’ eyes. So, release the sex kitten within, just like you did at the beginning of your relationship. [...] The next time you see him, you’ll feel an irresistible desire to ‘grab’ him immediately.’

(16) Pošto već neko vreme nismo čuli za neki novi, divlji, pravi Cosmo nestašluk...

‘As it’s been a while since we heard some new, wild, real Cosmo frolics [...]’

(17) Prislonite ga uz zid i krajnje divlje vodite ljubav.

‘Lean him against the wall and make love wildly.’

Metaphorical expressions *grab* (example [15]) and *wild(ly)* (examples [16] and [17]) encode the low-valued properties of humans, stressing the need for regaining control over our “animal” behaviour and tapping into the LUSTFUL PERSON IS AN ANIMAL metaphor (see Lakoff 1987). Women are wild animals who, contrary to their usual portrayal as weak, unprotected and vulnerable, are now perceived as menacing animals (López Rodríguez 2007: 30) and predators. By viewing women as wild, bestial and out of control, which are the notions underlying the LUSTFUL PERSON IS A WILD ANIMAL metaphor, metaphor creators seem to suggest that women should be restrained, made subservient and brought to their senses. “This need for control ultimately implies the idea of domesticity and servitude, since animals are either tamed, domesticated or hunted” (López Rodríguez

2007: 31). Apart from a rather ungendered term *animal sex* (example [15]) which, depending on the contextual evidence, may be easily applied to both men and women, there is also a highly gendered term, *sex kitten* (example [15]), with favourable overtones, pertaining to a woman's sex appeal. Unlike adult cats, small and young animals such as kittens are utilized as a source domain for attractive women (see e.g. López Rodríguez 2007; López Rodríguez 2009; Baider & Gesuato 2003). However, the conceptualisation of woman as a young and not as a mature animal rests on the dichotomy small/big. In other words, although endowed with positive connotations, the image of women as kittens or pussycats (the WOMEN ARE PETS metaphor) hides the equation of relative size with weakness. Being small, thus less powerful, has a connotation of the danger of being easily dominated and in need of protection. Since "the smaller size and the lesser strength of the animal give man a decided advantage in the successful application of physical force" (López Rodríguez 2009: 93), the ANIMAL metaphor in both English and Serbian serves to preserve traditional man-woman stereotypical roles. In addition, the use of the diminutive *kitten* to stand for a woman does not seem to be coincidental – the most salient properties of kittens are playfulness and volatile mood swings which, when mapped onto women, imply treating them as sexual playthings (see López Rodríguez 2007). Such sexually insulting epithets "represent[s] women as animals to be tamed for men's comfort, and signal[s] that only members of the latter sex/gender group are implicitly considered prototypical human beings" (Baider & Gesuato 2003: 97).

4. Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to compare LUST metaphors in English and Serbian as well as to demonstrate their gendered nature. We may conclude by saying that these two languages share many conceptual metaphors, as evidenced by the metaphorical expressions in Serbian taken from the 2009 issues of *Cosmopolitan*. Moreover, metaphors for LUST in English and Serbian seem to share their gendered nature, showing “the consistent belittling of women and therefore the sexism entrenched” (Baider & Gesuato 2003: 7) in both languages. LUST metaphors may thus be categorised as discriminatory, since they reflect the cultural models encoded not only in language but in the gendered way members of English and Serbian cultures (determined by their respective languages) think about seduction, sexual desire and lust. These metaphors “selectively focus on only one aspect of the female world, namely the sexualisation and belittling of the female human being” (Baider & Gesuato 2003: 7), thus proving to be a powerful tool for communicating cultural stereotypes which are incorporated into men’s and women’s behaviour.

* The paper is the result of research conducted within project no. 178002 *Languages and cultures across space and time* funded by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

References

- Baider, F. H.; S. Gesuato. 2003. ‘Masculinist Metaphors, Feminist Research’, *metaphorik.de* 05/2003.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2004. *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Emanatian, M. 1995. ‘Metaphor and the Expression of Emotion: The Value of Cross-cultural Perspectives’ in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*.10, pp. 163-82.

- Kövecses, Z. 2003. *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G. 1987. *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., M. Johnson 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- López Rodríguez, I. 2007. 'The Representation of Women in Teenage and Women's Magazines: Recurring Metaphors in English' in *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*. Vol. 15, pp. 15-42.
- López Rodríguez, I. 2009. 'Of Women, Bitches, Chickens and Vixens: Animal Metaphors for Women in English and Spanish' in *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*. Vol. VII, pp. 77-100.
- Machin, D, J. Thornborrow 2003. 'Branding and Discourse: The Case of Cosmopolitan' in *Discourse and Society*. 14, pp. 453-471.
- Undie, C., J. Crichton, E. Zulu 2007. 'Metaphors We Love By: Conceptualizations of Sex among Young People in Malawi' in *African Journal of Reproductive Health*. 11/3, pp. 221-235.
- Underhill, J. W. 2007. 'Having' Sex and 'Making' Love. Metaphoric Patterning in Representations of the Sexual Act in Czech, French and English' in *A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theory and Criticism in Czech Studie*. 8/4, pp. 84-113.

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

BILJANA RADIĆ-BOJANIĆ

Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad

NADEŽDA SILAŠKI

Faculty of Economics, Belgrade

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

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

1. Introduction

By political discourse in this paper we mean not only *internal* political communication, referring to “all forms of discourse that concern first of all the functioning of politics within political institutions, i.e. governmental bodies, parties or other organisations” (Schäffner 1996: 202), but also *external* political communication, aimed at the general public, as well as the language used by reporters and political commentators as the main mediators between the political parties and voters. Such a broad approach to political discourse enables us, within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1989; Van Dijk 1993; Wodak 2006; Fairclough/Wodak 1997) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff/Johnson 1980), to see language as a “social practice”, where the context of language use is of the greatest importance (Fairclough/Wodak 1997). Critical Discourse Analysis understands discourse as being “socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people” (Fairclough/Wodak 1997: 258). In this sense, discourse may both help sustain and reproduce the social *status quo* and contribute to transforming it.

“Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between [...] social classes, *women and men* [our italics] and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people” (Fairclough/Wodak 1997: 258). The main principle of Critical Discourse Analysis is the identification and analysis of linguistic manipulations. In other words, “CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)” (Wodak 2006: 4).

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

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

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

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

2. SPORT Metaphors in Political Discourse

In addition to playing an ornamental role in Serbian political discourse, which until the introduction of a multiparty system in 1990 tended to be rather mystified and obscure, SPORT metaphors are much more important if understood as a means of hiding certain aspects of political reality. An inseparable connection between sport and politics has long been observed in literature, while SPORT metaphors are pervasive in political discourse in many countries (see, e.g. Orwell 1968; Lipsky 1979; Howe 1988; Semino/Masci 1996; Thompson 1996; Herbeck 2000; Russo 2001, etc.). There are several reasons for the use of SPORT metaphors in political discourse. A political discourse based on SPORT metaphors requires minimum processing effort by the message receivers (Orwell 1946) and facilitates its comprehension. As claimed by Lipsky (1979: 36), the “athleticization” of politics is essentially a conservative method which prevents an adequate conceptualisation of new policies and new directions in politics. The use of

sports for the description of political activities serves an important purpose of camouflaging the complexity of social and political developments, thereby preserving the *status quo* in the conceptualisation of political life. Conscious, deliberate and manipulative simplifications of political processes aim, in turn, at relativising the significance of political developments and provide political parties with room in which they are able, undisturbed by anyone, to fight for power, without [needing] a wider control of the electorate. Further, ambiguity characterising the metaphorical way of expressing, as well as different interpretations individuals attribute to certain metaphors, allow political parties a wider coverage of the electorate. As Semino and Masci say (1996: 244): “the implications of structuring of one domain in terms of another can influence the way in which large numbers of people conceive of sensitive and controversial aspects of the reality they live in” and can “impose the speaker’s vision of politics onto the electorate” (Howe 1988: 103). SPORT metaphors conceptualise politics as a competition between the opponents taking place according to predecided rules. According to several authors (e.g. Howe 1988: 89-90), SPORT metaphors are common and understandable in a two-party election system, where “one side seeks to defeat the other but cannot eradicate it”, while in countries in which “the number of parties far exceeds the number of contestants in sporting events” (Howe 1988: 90), they do not play a major role in political discourse (*cf.* Semino/Masci 1996). This claim is refuted by the political situation in Serbia during the last decade. Namely, despite an extremely large number of registered political parties, SPORT metaphors are ubiquitous in Serbian contemporary political discourse.

SPORT metaphors often serve as a cognitive shortcut to understanding complex political phenomena. In this process of metaphorisation, *football*, being the most popular sport in Serbia, is the most frequent source domain.

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

As “the metaphors favoured by many politicians combine a very simple explanation with strong emotional effects” (Ungerer/Schmid 2006: 150), it should not come as a surprise that football is a very frequent source of metaphorical expressions used in Serbian politics. As claimed by Meân (2001: 790), “football is [...] a male sex-typed sport with very strong links to masculinity and male identity”. Being “the most important unimportant thing in the world” and the national sport in Serbia, football is inseparately intertwined with the notion of a typical Serbian male. Football enables men to manifest their hegemonic masculinity through “physical strength, aggressiveness, violence, hardness, emotional stoicism, and competitive zeal” (Jansen/Sabo 1994: 8) in the same way in which politics enables them to exert power and fulfil the urge for possessing power. It is a team sport organised in national/regional leagues, which presents an appropriate conceptual framework for the metaphorisation of political discourse, having in mind a large number of political parties active in Serbian political scene. By oversimplification of complex ideological and ethical issues, politics is seen as “a relatively simple domain with clear participants (the party

‘teams’), unproblematic goals (winning), and unambiguous outcomes (victory or defeat)” (Semino/Masci 1996: 246).

“Woman. Sport. These two words rest curiously next to each other like unrelated, detached strangers” (Boutillier/San Giovanni 1983:93). Since football is practically an entirely masculine activity, it comes as no surprise that football metaphors are so ubiquitous in politics, which is, at least in Serbia, also perceived as a predominantly masculine activity. In our corpus of examples we have categorised the conceptually superior POLITICS IS FOOTBALL metaphor into three submetaphors (POLITICAL PARTIES ARE FOOTBALL TEAMS, ELECTIONS ARE A FOOTBALL MATCH, AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTION RULES ARE FOOTBALL RULES). Among various metaphorical expressions used to linguistically realise these submetaphors, due to space constraints, we will use only a few to illustrate the above conceptual mappings. Thus, *key political players* (‘ključni politički igrači’) take up the most important positions in a *political team* (‘politički tim’). *Midfield players* (‘vezni igrači’) are those political parties who, thanks to their enormous coalition capacity, enable the formation of the government. *Penalty area* (‘šesnaesterac’) is a metaphorical expression by means of which the political scene of Serbia is conceptualised. In the *election match* (‘izborna utakmica’) there are *favourites* (‘favoriti’) and *outsiders* (‘autsajderi’), who are (un)likely to *win/lose* in the elections. The first and the second rounds of the presidential elections are conceptualised as *the first and second halves of a football match* (‘prvo i drugo poluvreme fudbalske utakmice’), whereas the second round of these same elections is frequently understood in terms of *extra time* (‘produžeci’). *Dribbling* (‘driblanje’) or *scoring a goal* (‘dati gol’) is a useful statement/move of a politician/political party, whereas a *counterattack* (‘kontranapad’) is the way a challenge from a

political rival is dealt with. Since the rules of elections are conceptualized as the rules of football so that the electorate has the impression of fair play in politics, the corpus exhibits many examples of such metaphoric expressions. Politicians get a *yellow card* ('žuti karton') or a *red card* ('crveni karton') as a caution by the electorate for inappropriate behaviour, a political mistake or a bad political move. If a politician makes a rash decision, a wrong move or a damaging statement which backfires, he/she is said to have *scored an own goal* ('autogol'), whereas an *offside* ('ofsajd'), an illegal position in the game of football, is an attitude or a decision of a politician that puts the government and people in a difficult situation and should somehow be punished.

If women are not ardent football fans, it is quite difficult to guess how they would be able to understand the majority of the mentioned expressions, let alone contextualize them in the field of politics and understand their extended meanings. The terminology mystification has a twofold mechanism: on the one hand, the majority of women are automatically repelled by the lack of knowledge and experience in football and choose not to delve into the subject at all thus abstaining from the political process completely, whereas on the other, the minority who make the effort face the fact that they are vaguely acquainted with the matter and that their understanding and participation cannot go beyond a very superficial one. In the next section we will deal with WAR metaphors in Serbian political discourse in order to further exemplify and confirm the gendered nature of political discourse in Serbia.

3. WAR Metaphors in Political Discourse

Participants in the primary political discourse in Serbia (politicians) and, consequently, participants in the secondary discourse (newspaper

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

Based on the corpus, we have classified the conceptually superior metaphor POLITICS IS WAR into six submetaphors, which will be illustrated by various metaphorical expressions, language used to express metaphorical concepts via words. These submetaphors are the following: (1) THE POLITICAL SCENE IS A BATTLEFIELD; (2) POLITICAL PARTIES ARE WAR ENEMIES; (3) THE ELECTION IS A BATTLE; (4) POLITICAL STATEMENTS/MOVES ARE WEAPONS; (5) COOPERATION BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES IS A TRUCE; and (6) VOTERS ARE WAR VICTIMS/CASUALTIES.

The WAR metaphor clearly and unambiguously shows that Serbian political scene is conceptualised as a *battlefield* ('ratno poprište') in which deeply *entrenched* ('ušančene') political parties *fight* ('bore se') for votes. Political parties wage *cold war* ('hladni rat'), *guerilla war* ('gerilski rat') or *trench war* ('rovovski rat') against one another, in which they make political *manoeuvres* ('manevri'), advised by their election *headquarters* ('štabovi'). Political parties in a political *battle* ('bitka') are political *enemies* ('neprijatelji'), which, pursuing their vested interests, *ally* ('postaju

saveznici’) to come to power with their *allies* (‘saveznici’). Members of political parties, party *infantry* (‘pešadija’), as well as high party officials, party *generals* (‘generali’), are governed by a *soldier discipline* (‘vojnička disciplina’). Party officials sometimes organise a silent *coup* (‘puč’) in which they are *coup leaders* (‘vođe puča’). Political enemies participate in an *election battle* (‘izborna bitka’), supported by their respective headquarters, which shape an *election strategy* (‘izborna strategija’) and *tactics* (‘taktika’) to achieve an election *victory* (‘pobeda’) or *defeat* (‘poraz’). If in the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor words are conceptualised as WEAPONS, then political parties in Serbia have the whole *arsenal* (‘arsenal oružja’) at their disposal. Political *enemies* (‘neprijatelji’) frequently come *under cross-fire* (‘pod unakrsnom vatrom’) or *barrage fire* (‘pod baražnom vatrom’) of their opponents, throw *poison arrows/spears* (‘otrovne strele/koplja’) at one another, *shoot from all weapons* (‘pucaju iz svih oružja’), which is usually preceded by flamboyant *saber rattling* (‘zveckanje oružjem’). Temporary cooperation between parties, usually motivated by their vested interests, is conceptualised as *truce* (‘primirje’) or *ceasefire* (‘prekid vatre’). They *enter into pacts* (‘sklapaju paktove’), *bury the hatchet* (‘zakopavaju ratne sekire’) and sign *non-aggression policy agreements* (‘sporazume o nenapadanju’). Finally, voters are conceptualised as *victims of political wars* (‘žrtve političkih ratova’), *casualties of political battles* (‘žrtve političkih sukoba’), or as *collateral damage of party fights* (‘kolateralna šteta partijskih obračuna’).

As Lakoff and Johnson say, “no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis” (1980: 19). This experience, however, is not only “physical”, but “cultural through and through”, meaning that “we experience our ‘world’ in such a way that

our culture is already present in the very experience itself' (Lakoff/Johnson 1980: 57), cultural basis being by no means less important than the physical one. Serbs lived under war conditions, with certain breaks, for over 15 years. As the introduction of the multiparty political system in Serbia coincided with the outbreak of the first of these wars (the one in Bosnia), we argue that the use of WAR metaphors in political discourse nowadays is the consequence of the immediate physical setting to which Serbs were exposed in that period. The physical setting, in effect, created the cognitive framework for viewing politics in terms of war. However, we also argue that WAR metaphors in political discourse in Serbia are deeply embedded in Serbian historical and cultural background, and that, being "culturally prominent [are] reinforced in everyday conversation" (Ritchie 2003: 131), which only adds to their prominence both in the minds of Serbian people and in their language.

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

4. The Name of the Game: War

Sport itself is frequently conceptualised as war and the sports field is conceived of as a battlefield (the SPORT IS WAR metaphor). It is this intertextuality of SPORT and WAR metaphors in politics (or, "the conflation of

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

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

We also believe that most women voters do not understand SPORT metaphors in political discourse. Although metaphors are a rhetorical device which is supposed to facilitate and simplify the act of message comprehension, we maintain that most women need to put significant processing effort in order to understand the true nature of SPORT (FOOTBALL) and WAR metaphors, often without positive results. As already stated, no

metaphor can be comprehended independently of its experiential basis (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). If we apply this claim to the way women understand SPORT and WAR metaphors in politics, we may be justified to assume the following: if metaphors are a mechanism by which we are supposed to understand one abstract entity in terms of another, concrete entity, deeply embedded in our experiential basis, and if, on the other hand, sport/football, as well as war, are not part of women's entire corpus of experience, then SPORT and WAR metaphors, as used in political discourse, are an obstacle to the women's understanding of political reality rather than a means which helps them comprehend the political developments. This, in return, potentially excludes them from political participation, both passive (via voting) and active (via membership in political parties and holding political positions). Essentially, "the often erroneous perception that politics must, by its nature, take the form of a contest" (Howe 1988: 100) clashes with the female cognitive framework which is not saturated with the concepts of sport and, consequently, war. This results in the incongruence of the political rhetoric and women's experience, reflected in the already mentioned tendency to abstain in the election process on the part of women.

5. Conclusion

Metaphors have a persuasive power since they shape the way we think, by highlighting only certain aspects of our experience, while simultaneously hiding other aspects of it. Our research indicates that SPORT and WAR metaphors in Serbian political discourse often function as a kind of "public *double speak*" (Hardway 1976: 79), which is consciously and deliberately used to manipulate the electorate. We believe that the process of metaphorisation serves a purpose of intentionally hiding many aspects of political reality, trivialising the importance of decisions vital to the society as

a whole, fostering competitive values and behaviour in the society, diminishing the citizens' ability to control political parties and reveal their true interests, while at the same time discouraging women's participation in political life. George Orwell said that "if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (Orwell 1949). Lakoff and Johnson, on the other hand, said that "metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities" and that they "can be self-fulfilling prophecies" (1980: 156). Therefore, it is extremely important for women to become aware of the enormous rhetorical power of language, in order to be able to reveal those aspects of reality in the discourse of political elite which deliberately remain hidden behind the veil of metaphoricity. Without a careful awareness of the metaphors that structure the way we perceive reality, women are less likely even to think of politics in terms of a non-competitive and non-aggressive activity, fitting nicely into the cult of manhood. It is of the utmost importance to introduce new alternative metaphors in Serbian political life, which will reveal some other aspects of politics remaining hidden behind the metaphorical expressions deriving from sport and war.

References

- Boutilier, M.; L. San Giovanni. 1983. *Sporting Woman*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2004. *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N.; R. Wodak. 1997. 'Critical Discourse Analysis' in *Introduction to Discourse Studies*. T. A. van Dijk (ed.). London: Sage, pp. 258-284.
- Hardway, F. 1976. 'Foul Play: Sports Metaphors as Public Doublespeak' in *College English*. 38/1, pp. 78-82.
- Herbeck, A. D. 2000. 'Three Strikes and You're Out: The Role of Sports Metaphors in

- Political Discourse' in *Baseball and American Culture*. Rutkoff, P. M. (ed.).
Jefferson, NC: McFarland, pp. 133-146.
- Howe, N. 1988. 'Metaphor in Contemporary American Political Discourse' in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*. 3/2, pp. 87-104.
- Jansen, S. C.; D. Sabo. 1994. 'The Sport-War Metaphor: Hegemonic Masculinity, the Persian-Gulf War, and the New World Order' in *Sociology of Sport Journal* 11/1, pp. 1-17.
- Kövecses, Z. 2005. *Metaphor in Culture. Universality and Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G.; M. Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Lipsky, R. 1979. 'The Athleticization of Politics: The Political Implications of Sports Symbolism' in *Journal of Sports and Social Issues* 3. (Fall/Winter 1979), pp. 36-42.
- Meân, L. 2001. 'Identity and Discursive Practice: Doing Gender on the Football Pitch' in *Discourse and Society*. Vol. 12/6, pp. 789-815.
- Orwell, G. 1946. 'Politics and the English Language'. [Online]. Available: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm>. [2008, June 24]
- Orwell, G. 1949. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. [Online]. Available: <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/o/orwell/george/o79n/#chapter25>. [17 June 2008].
- Radić-Bojanić, B.; N. Silaški. 2008. 'Sportizacija političkog diskursa – kako metafore prikrivaju političku stvarnost Srbije' in *Zbornik Matice srpske za filologiju i lingvistiku*. LI/1-2, pp. 139-155.
- Ritchie, D. 2003. 'ARGUMENT IS WAR – Or is it a game of chess? Multiple Meanings in the Analysis of Implicit Metaphors' in *Metaphor and Symbol*. 18/2, pp. 125-146.
- Russo, P. 2001. 'Berlusconi and Other Matters: the Era of 'Football-Politics'' in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*. Vol. 5/3, pp. 348-370.
- Schäffner, C. 1996. 'Editorial: Political Speeches and Discourse Analysis' in *Current Issues in Language and Society*. Vol. 3/3, pp. 201-204.
- Semino, E.; Masci, M. 1996. 'Politics is Football: Metaphor in the Discourse of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy' in *Discourse and Society*. Vol. 7/2, pp. 243-269.

- Semino, E. 2008. *Metaphor in Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, S. 1996. 'Politics without Metaphors is Like a Fish without Water' in *Metaphor: Implications and applications*. Mio, J. S., & Katz, A. N. (eds.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Ungerer, F. and H. J. Schmid. 2006. *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics* (2nd edition), Harlow, England, etc.: Pearson Longman.
- van Dijk, T. 1993. 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis' in *Discourse and Society* 4/2, pp. 249-283.
- Wodak, R. 2006. 'Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis' in *Handbook of Pragmatics*. Verschueren, J. and J. Östman (eds.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Media and Beauty Myths

***DEALING WITH THE MORTAL ENEMY – THE WAR
SCENARIO IN THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF SOME BEAUTY
ISSUES IN WOMEN’S MAGAZINES****

NADEŽDA SILAŠKI

University of Belgrade

Abstract: Within the theoretical frameworks of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis I deal with the conceptualisation of some beauty issues in women’s magazines. More specifically, I deal with the use of the WAR metaphor as a way of framing women’s attempts to reduce cellulite. I particularly point out the role and the gendered nature of metaphors in creating realities for women.

Key words: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, WAR metaphors, gendered discourse, cellulite, beautification.

1. Introduction

In this paper I combine two theoretical frameworks. Firstly, I apply the main tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) and later modified to better accommodate metaphors that occur in authentic discourse (see e.g. Semino 2008; Charteris-Black 2004). As metaphors are seldom neutral and void of any evaluative component, I also apply a second theoretical framework, that of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough & Wodak 1997; van Dijk 1993; 1998) to show how the combination of these two theories may provide a synergetic

effect, enabling the researcher to establish whether metaphors carry any ideological meaning in real discourse, in our case, the discourse of women's magazines.

According to the main tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor is not a property of individual linguistic expressions and their meanings, but of entire conceptual domains. Thus at the heart of Lakoff and Johnson's theory (1980) lies the *conceptual metaphor*, defined as an essential conceptual tool which consists of the *source* and *target* domains. Lakoff and Johnson use the TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN formula to describe the metaphorical connection between the two domains. More precisely, the conceptual metaphor consists of a structural mapping between the source conceptual domain in terms of which the target conceptual domain is understood metaphorically, and the target conceptual domain, which is to be understood metaphorically (Turner 1990). It is of crucial importance to draw a distinction between *metaphor* and *linguistic metaphor*. While *metaphor* is now used as the equivalent to *conceptual metaphor*, *linguistic metaphor* (more commonly known as a *metaphorical expression*) is the linguistic realisation of a particular conceptual metaphor. The corollary is that it is our conceptual system, "in terms of which we both think and act, [which] is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 3). However, contemporary metaphor research from the late 1990s onwards has completely shifted the focus away from viewing metaphor as a primarily cognitive phenomenon, placing great emphasis on "the importance of language use in understanding metaphor" (Cameron & Deignan 2006:672). In other words, metaphor now emerges as a phenomenon that is cognitive and linguistic in equal measure, the link no longer being uni-directional (thinking → language) but a two-way interaction between language and thinking

(Cameron & Deignan 2006: 674). In addition to its linguistic form and conceptual content, metaphor possesses a notable socio-cultural dimension. One of its dimensions is the affective force, reflected in “the beliefs, attitudes, values, and emotions of participants” (Cameron & Deignan 2006: 674). Hence in this new “emergentist perspective” (Cameron & Deignan 2006: 674), metaphor is viewed as a blend of linguistic, conceptual and socio-cultural aspects. Charteris-Black (2004: 24) also emphasises the “interconnecting aspects of metaphor”, arguing for the kind of definition of metaphor that incorporates its semantic, cognitive and pragmatic dimensions, this arising from its “underlying purpose of influencing opinions and judgements by persuasion” (Charteris-Black 2004: 21).

2. Metaphor and Ideology

Metaphors play a crucial role in shaping ideologies, defined here as a cognitive phenomenon, “a shared conceptualization of particular aspects of reality” (Semino 2008: 90). However, in the paper I also point to the role ideology plays in “the nurturing and proliferation of metaphors” (Goatly 2006: 25), where ideology is defined, “[b]oth in its neutral and its ‘loaded’ sense, [...] [as] a system of beliefs and values based on a set of cognitive models, i.e. mental representations – partly linguistic, partly non-linguistic – of recurrent phenomena and their interpretations in culture and society.” (Dirven *et al.* 2003: 1).

The importance of metaphors as bearers of ideology has been attracting scholarly attention ever since the publication of Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal book *Metaphors We Live By*. Thanks to their ability “to allow us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 10), metaphors highlight certain, usually positive and desirable, aspects of the concept while at the same time hiding its other,

undesirable aspects. In other words, “when a concept has several aspects (which is normally the case) and the metaphor focuses on one (or maybe two or three) aspect(s), the other aspects of the concept will remain hidden, that is, out of focus.” (Kövecses 2002: 80). Metaphors, therefore, may serve as an important ideological tool. Thus, talking about the role metaphors have in authentic discourse, Semino (2008: 90) claims that “[t]he relationship between discourses and ideologies is a dynamic one: discourses reflect particular ideologies, but also contribute to shape them and change them; ideologies result from discursal and social practices but also determine and constrain these practices.” As discourse constructs the world from a particular perspective, it is “inextricably linked to cognition, transporting the models and schemata by which its participants make sense of reality” (Koller 2008: 105). In this sense, discourse is “essentially a socio-cognitive practice” (Koller 2008: 105). The main principle of Critical Discourse Analysis is the identification and analysis of linguistic manipulations. In other words, “CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)” (Wodak 2006: 4). The main advantage of the cognitivist as well as critical approach to discourse I adopt here stems from the fact that metaphors may reveal much more than speakers actually say, so that the hidden aspects of discourse may be deconstructed and critically revealed more easily.

3. WAR Metaphors

As Semino (Semino 2008: 100) claims, “the WAR source domain has a very wide scope in (Anglo-American) English, since it can be metaphorically applied to any domain of experience that involves difficulties, danger, effort and uncertain outcomes.” In this sense, war used for the conceptualisation of female beautification practices is a very suitable source

domain, since the ideology of discourse aimed at women is based on the ongoing persuasion of women that it is of the utmost importance for them to attain objectively unreachable and trivially defined standards of physical beauty, offered in the form of retouched, airbrushed and optically distorted photos of models, virtually free of cellulite, slim, tall, and attractive by society's standards.

Metaphors of WAR are often used "in relation to particularly serious and intractable problems, and to the initiatives and strategies that are developed to solve them" (Semino 2008: 100), thus emphasising "the gravity and urgency of the problem in question, and the seriousness of the effort that is being made to solve it." (Semino 2008: 100). Losing weight, cellulite, wrinkles and other purported esthetic problems experienced by women may be conceptualised in various ways. However, the single metaphor most commonly applied to weight loss and cellulite in women's magazines is undoubtedly that of armed combat and warfare. In this paper I will be dealing with the ideological impact of the higher order metaphor BEAUTIFICATION IS WAR, following Lazar (2009), and in particular with its highly gendered sub-metaphor WOMEN'S ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE CELLULITE ARE WAR, trying to show how these two evaluatively loaded, masculinised and ideologically coloured metaphors influence the formation of a particular way of thinking, thereby shaping one aspect of social reality. With metaphorical expressions from authentic discourse I will illustrate and show how the WAR scenario in women's magazines helps reinforce an ideological, androcentric worldview and the definition of the only acceptable look women should have in a patriarchal society.

The data for the analysis that follows have been collected from the various issues of the British edition of *Cosmopolitan* in the period 2008-2010 (including advertisements), one of the many women's magazines

which, as reported by Nevarez (2000, quoted in Machin & Thornborrow 2003: 455), “promise women entry into a world which insulates them from the mundane realities of everyday life.”

4. Cellulite as an Enemy

Cellulite is claimed to be “the most embarrassing social stigma known to mankind”. Or, should we say, womankind? I illustrate the WAR metaphorical scenario used for the conceptualisation of cellulite with several examples:

- (1) Tips to battle the cellulite war
- (2) Cellu-Loss is the ultimate formula to fight the war on cellulite!
- (3) Time to win the war against cellulite

I shall now move on to some of the conceptual mappings present in the WOMEN’S ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE CELLULITE ARE WAR metaphor. In this metaphor cellulite is conceptualised as a terrifying menace, a *dreaded enemy* (example [4]), *mortal enemy* (example [5]), or *dreaded arch enemy* of womankind everywhere (example [6]):

(4) *Cellulite*. Dreaded and mortal enemy of women everywhere, of all backgrounds and ages

(5) There are two things that every woman considers to be her mortal enemy: *cellulite* and wrinkles.

(6) Which brings me to the subject of the dreaded arch enemy of womankind everywhere, cellulite.

A host of metaphorical expressions belonging to a militaristically coloured semantic field used for the description of women's "enemy" are aimed at persuading women that it is necessary to "take appropriate (military) action against anything that threatens the achievement of the body beautiful" (Lazar 2009: 213). Cellulite in the WOMEN'S ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE CELLULITE ARE WAR metaphor is personified, as evidenced by the ontological submetaphor CELLULITE IS AN ENEMY, where cellulite takes on human attributes, since it has an intelligent strategy of attack so that it is necessary to outsmart it, as examples (7) and (8) below show:

(7) 10 ways to *outsmart cellulite*

(8) In order to *outsmart your enemy*, cellulite, you must first understand it.

The war against cellulite is made specific in the two sub-metaphors, ATTEMPTS AIMED AT REDUCING CELLULITE ARE A BATTLE and TREATING CELLULITE IS FIGHTING, which abound in metaphorical expressions indicating the seriousness of the cellulite problem and the need to win the war against the enemy. To use the same militaristic vocabulary, there is a whole *arsenal* of verbs used for the purpose of beating the enemy and winning a decisive battle – women need to *eradicate* cellulite (example [15]), to *bust* it (example [13]), *erase* it (example [14]), *beat* it (example [12]), *blast it away* (example [16]), *banish it dead* (example [18]), *whittle it away* (example [20]), to *kill off* a small *army* of fat (example [21]), so that the enemy does not *strike back* (example [22]). Here are some examples which illustrate the above two sub-metaphors in turn:

ATTEMPTS AIMED AT REDUCING CELLULITE ARE A BATTLE

(9) There is no such thing as a 100% guaranteed *cellulite* diet that assures *victory* against your own personal “battle of the bulge.”

(10) *When you are facing a battle against cellulite, make sure you are treating it as you would any other fat loss.*

(11) The time is now to win the battle against *cellulite*.

TREATING CELLULITE IS FIGHTING

(12) Seven solutions for beating cellulite in six weeks

(13) *What is the most effective and tangible way to bust cellulite*

(14) Contrary to popular belief, even liposuction, which is both risky and expensive, removes deeper fat deposits, but hasn't been found to erase cellulite.

(15) Millions of dollars are spent each year on *cellulite* treatment creams and other types of products to eradicate cellulite

(16) *Here are some of the anti-cellulite procedures that some celebrities purportedly use to blast away the orange peel look on their bums and thighs*

(17) These scientists have found out how *cellulite* is formed and *how to attack* and help get rid of *cellulite*.

(18) Banish cellulite dead in its tracks!

(19) Natural ways to combat cellulite

(20) There is no magical formula to whittle away cellulite from your body.

(21) Did you do enough to kill off a small army of fat?

(22) The cellulite strikes back

In this “personal” war against cellulite, as it is called in example (9) above, women should use all the weapons at their disposal in order to fight the enemy. In addition to exhausting exercise routines and unnecessary dieting (unnecessary because cellulite has been reported not to be affected by weight loss and someone “who is their ideal medical weight can have it” [Lyons 2000]), these weapons are, not surprisingly, new products and brands which “are thought of as allies that support and aid women’s efforts to achieve body beautiful” (Lazar 2009: 219), as exemplified by the following examples of metaphorical expressions:

(23) New weapon in the cellulite war

(24) ***The best weapon in the war against cellulite can also give you the best facial treatment.***

(25) This can be another powerful weapon in your anti-*cellulite* arsenal.

(26) Using the secret weapon in your *cellulite* treatment programme.

(27) Suction pump massage is considered to be the wonder weapon in the fight against orange-peel skin.

Brands are presented as powerful, “state-of-the-art weaponry required in the battle to secure the body beautiful” (Lazar 2009:220). They are invaluable *allies* in women’s war against cellulite, serving as the *best*

weapon (example [24]), *wonder weapon* (example [27]), *secret weapon* (example [26]) or *powerful weapon* (example [25]) in their anti-*cellulite arsenal* (example [25]) used in fighting. Women and brands thus join together in a decisive battle, sharing a common cause and enemy. New products and brands become powerful *allies* of women in their constant fight against cellulite, as in the following examples:

(28) In the battle against cellulite, there's a new ally to help recover a sculpted appearance.

(29) The gel is a great ally in the fight against cellulite and localised fat.

Together with new products and the tips to battle the cellulite war, women are conceptualised as *warriors* against the joint dreaded enemy, as illustrated by the following examples of the WOMEN ARE WARRIORS IN THE BATTLE AGAINST CELLULITE and PRODUCTS ARE WARRIORS IN THE BATTLE AGAINST CELLULITE metaphors:

(30) All of us *cellulite warriors* have at some point or the other tried *cellulite* exercises.

(31) Along with diet and exercise, *cellulite* creams are some of the most effective *cellulite warriors* out there.

At the same time, however, women are, ironically, conceptualised as *victims* of cellulite (example [32]), they are the main *sufferers* (example [34]), they are *at the mercy* of the connective tissue under their skin (example [33]):

(32) Unfortunately, women are the frequent victims of cellulite problems.

(33) Women who get cellulite are at the mercy of the connective tissue under their skin.

(34) 99% of the cellulite sufferers are known to be women.

All this could indicate a defeat in the decisive, never-ending battle. Nevertheless, as in a real war, victory against the dreaded enemy is the prime goal of the constant fight. Women may make cellulite *surrender* (example [37]) for some time, but its recurrent emergence can sully their war *victory* (example [36]), preventing them, despite surgical interventions, new brands, rigorous dieting and the achievement of their weight goals, from declaring a final *victory* over cellulite (example [35])!

(35) While further research and larger samples will be needed before we can declare victory over cellulite, it is exciting to see some progress is being made.

(36) Even when you achieve your weight goals, cellulite can sully your victory.

(37) Make stretch marks and cellulite surrender

Metaphors, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim, have the power to define realities, meaning that the prevalent cognitive framework employed in women's magazines not only constructs discourse but the discourse may construct social practice. In our case, this means that WAR metaphors used for the conceptualisation of cellulite construct the kind of worldview in which

women are forced to adopt male practices in order to achieve the body beautiful, which once again proves that “metaphors are used persuasively to convey evaluations and therefore constitute part of the ideology of texts.” (Charteris-Black 2004: 28).

5. Conclusion

My analysis of the WAR metaphorical scenario for the conceptualisation of women’s attempts to remove cellulite may lead to at least two lines of reasoning about its ideological impact. Firstly, Lakoff and Johnson claim that metaphors not only reflect but also create realities, especially social realities, so that they may function as “a guide for future action” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 156) which will fit the particular metaphor. If the process of female beautification is conceptualised as war, and trivial problems such as attempts to remove cellulite as a battle in which all available weaponry is used to achieve the final aim, then we may say that cellulite, “the paragon of marketing, represents what capitalism truly offers humanity – a multi-billion dollar industry which produces cures for a disease which does not exist.” (Lyons 2000: 5).

Secondly, by employing militaristic metaphors from the source domain of WAR, the creators of such rhetorical and “ideological metaphors” (Velasco-Sacristán 2009) reinforce “androcentric views of life, including defining appropriate behaviour and desirable attributes of women” (Sunderland & Litosseliti 2002: 21, quoted in Velasco-Sacristán & Fuentetaja 2006: 1983). This striking masculinisation of the discourse of women’s magazines indicates a highly gendered conceptualisation of certain fields of interest traditionally denoted as belonging to women. The metaphorical WAR scenario thus functions as a powerful part of the overall ideological apparatus for the construction and reconstruction of gender

identity, on the basis of which women are positioned in a society. By the deliberate imposition of WAR metaphors, and, as a consequence of their constant repetition, by the acceptance of such cognitive framework by women themselves, the creators of the discourse of women's magazines confine women to a male domain of experience (war), a "quintessentially masculine activity" (Jansen & Sabo 1994: 9), so shaping a certain kind of mindset, a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines the conceptualisation of woman's body attributes which do not match the ideal. A wide range of metaphorical expressions from the semantic field of war indicates the militarisation of the discourse of women's magazines dealing with female beautification, as well as the fact, entirely in line with the constitutivist view of metaphors, that they have a crucial role in constituting or shaping the reality in which we all live.

As Lakoff and Johnson rightly point out, "words alone don't change reality. But changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions." (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 145-146). The creation of a new reality happens "when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 145). WAR metaphors help perpetuate socially and culturally imposed, unrealistic and objectively unattainable standards of female beauty, causing women to hate their own bodies and eventually to start perceiving their *body*, not cellulite, as their own worst enemy, which is "a radical shift from conceptualising the enemy-as-other to the enemy-as-self, leading to a fractured feminine identity and alienation of women's relationship with their own bodies as constantly problematic" (Lazar 2009: 226).

In this respect, it is necessary that women be made aware of this inappropriate cognitive framework used for the conceptualisation of trivial

beautification issues and of the role socially imposed WAR metaphors conventionally used for the conceptualisation of the attempts to remove cellulite play in structuring our thinking, so that they may understand the impact this cognitive framework has. I would like to end this paper on an optimistic note, though: once women (especially young women, on whom this cognitive framework is so easily imposed) become aware of its inappropriateness, it will then gradually change and thus help reduce the ideologisation of women's magazines, hopefully leading to the redefinition of beauty standards and the disappearance of the feeling millions of young women frequently have – that of being compelled to live up to male-defined norms for female appearance.

* The paper is the result of research conducted within project no. 178002 *Languages and cultures across space and time* funded by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

References

- Cameron, L.; A. Deignan. 2006. 'The Emergence of Metaphor in Discourse' in *Applied Linguistics*. 27/4, pp. 671–690.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2004. *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dirven, R.; R. M. Frank and M. Pütz. 2003. 'Introduction: Categories, Cognitive Models and Ideologies' in *Cognitive Models in Language and Thought*. Dirven, R.; R. M. Frank and M. Pütz (eds.). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 1-24.
- Fairclough, N., R. Wodak. 1997. 'Critical Discourse Analysis' in *Introduction to Discourse Studies*. T. A. van Dijk (ed.). London: Sage, pp. 258-284.
- Goatley, A. 2006. 'Ideology and Metaphor' in *English Today*. 87. Vol. 22. No. 3, pp. 25-39.

- Jansen, S. C.; D. Sabo. 1994. 'The Sport-War Metaphor: Hegemonic Masculinity, the Persian-Gulf War, and the New World Order' in *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 11/1, pp. 1-17.
- Koller, V. 2008. 'Brothers in Arms: Contradictory Metaphors in Contemporary Marketing Discourse' in *Confronting Metaphor in Use – an Applied Linguistic Approach*. M. S. Yanotto; L. Cameron and M. C. Cavalcanti (eds.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 101-125.
- Kövecses, Z. 2002. *Metaphor. A Practical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G.; M. Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lyons, C. 2000. Marxism and Cellulite – a Consumer's Guide to Marketing [Online]. Available: <http://www.redbannermagazine.com/Cellulite.pdf> [2009, October 30]
- Machin, D, J. Thornborrow 2003. 'Branding and Discourse: The Case of *Cosmopolitan*' in *Discourse and Society*. 14, pp. 453-471.
- Nevarez, L. 2000. 'The Coexistence of the Mind and the Mall: Tension in Contemporary Humour Columns in American Vogue' in *Media History*. 6, pp. 161–75.
- Semino, E. 2008. *Metaphor in Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sunderland, J.; L. Litosseliti. 2002. 'Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis' in *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis*. Litosseliti, L.; J. Sunderland (eds.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 3–39.
- Turner M. 1990. 'Aspects of the Invariance Hypothesis' in *Cognitive Linguistics* 1, 2: 247-255.
- van Dijk, T. 1993. 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis' in *Discourse and Society* 4/2, pp. 249-283.
- van Dijk, T. 1998. *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London: Sage.
- Velasco-Sacristán, M.; P. A. Fuertes-Olivera. 2006. 'Towards a Critical Cognitive–Pragmatic Approach to Gender Metaphors in Advertising English' in *Journal of Pragmatics*. 38, pp. 1982–2002.

Gender, Culture, Society

TRAVELLING COMPANIONS. WOMEN UNDER COMMUNISM

ANDREEA PELE

University of the West, Timișoara

Abstract: The following paper discusses an anthology of short stories, entitled *Tovarășe de drum. Experiența feminină în communism*. The paper will highlight the two major themes present in all these stories: womanhood and deprivation. It will discuss the Communist regime's duplicitous stance on gender – proclaiming equality between the sexes, yet, shoehorning women's potential into the roles of mother and worker.

Key words: Communism, deprivation, gender, motherhood, womanhood

1. Introduction

I was nine years old when Communism in Romania fell. Too young to experience the full brunt of what it meant to be a woman under the regime. Nevertheless, I was old enough to remember, now, what kind of life I was about to embark on.

It is little wonder, then, that I read the short stories in *Tovarășe de drum* (Gheo and Lungu 2008) as if I were witnessing testimonials about my mother's, grandmothers' and aunts' lives. And every story was imbued with an unnerving familiarity, which I could not fully comprehend until one of the writers, Nora Iuga, mentioned the bond that exists between people that share the same memories in one of the stories in the volume, *O scrisoare către un prieten [A Letter to a Friend]* (Iuga in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 146).

In the foreword of *Tovarășe de drum*, the volume's coordinators, Radu Pavel Gheo and Dan Lungu, explain that the justification for such an anthology is the fact that efforts to purge the residues of Communism from Romanian society have remained somehow insensitive to the gender experience (Gheo and Lungu 2008: 9). By gender, they mean the women's side of the story, which is heralded in the title: *Tovarășe de drum. Experiența feminină în comunism [Travelling Companions. The Feminine Experience under Communism]*.

Translating the title into English, however, poses a semantic problem, since, in Romanian, *tovarăș* and the feminine *tovarășă* refer, on the one hand, to *companion*, which would yield the friendly "Travelling Companions", but also to *comrade* with its additional meaning, strongly associated with its use by Communists to address someone else, be it man or

woman, in their utopian effort to abolish class and, later, gender difference. The use of the Romanian term is, therefore, not unintentional, successfully conveying the two-tiered meaning of women going through the same experiences under the regime, as well as what kind of regime this was and what views it held on women's role in society. For this reason, I have chosen to refer to the title in Romanian throughout this paper.

The anthology coordinators' intention was to evoke those experiences that were accessible only to women in Communist Romania. Without going into details on the terminological controversy surrounding "feminine" in gender studies, we have chosen to understand the latter part of the anthology's title, *The Feminine Experience during Communism*, as referring to the double straitjacket forced on Romanian women from the point of view of patriarchy and of the Communist regime. What derives from the stories of these women writers are the struggles against the "Communist feminine ideal".

Despite the gendered setting, the collection does indeed succeed in providing its readers with access to a plethora of life snapshots, events, great or small, that marked the biography of these women writers.

There are two major undercurrents that run through the collection: the first, and the most expected, is womanhood, with all its implications during Communism. There are three sub-themes associated with this wide theme, namely the body, motherhood, and abortion.

The second theme permeating the short stories is deprivation. Other themes that the writers interweave with these two are repression, childhood memories, education, the black market, and working life.

This paper sets out to offer an insight into the most notable stories, and experiences, included in this collection, as well as to emphasize the relevance of these stories for women in today's Romania.

2. Womanhood under Communism

In her extensive work on natalistic policies in Communist Romania, *The Politics of Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Romania* (Kligman 1998), Gail Kligman offers a detailed picture of the Communist regime's policies and strategies meant to channel and regulate the contribution of the country's female population. The writers in *Tovarășe de drum* give personalized accounts of what it was like to live as a woman in a totalitarian system that viewed the body primarily as a means to a politicized, pronatalist, aggrandizing end.

Not surprisingly, the stories on Communist womanhood encompass the body, abortion, and motherhood, aspects which will be dealt with in what follows.

2.1 The Body

In exploring this part of the umbrella theme of womanhood under Communism, I have to return to Gail Kligman's work, where she explores Communist policies intended to keep the female body, and hence everything that derived from it, under tight control – because losing or being robbed of this control meant the destruction of Communist society.

One of the first moves of the Ceausescu Communist regime was to ensure that the female body was the property of the state (Kligman 1998: 4) and that nobody, not even those to whom the body rightfully belonged, could rob it of this control.

In *HoRor!Cool*, Simona Popescu, poet and Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Letters, the University of Bucharest, describes this body:

Yes, there is such a thing as the Communist body! It is demure. Its mouth utters “thank you” often. Or “pardon me”. It’s indecently decent. It’s ashamed. To talk. To stand out. To dance like it wants to. Its gaze is lowered. It hesitates whether to laugh or not. It hates its clothes. And its nakedness. It does not know what to do with its youth. *[my translation]* (Popescu in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 196)

There are two purposes attached to the female body in Romanian Communist society: to reproduce and to work.

Reproduction was a duty and service to the state. The body was just a means to an end, and that end product was what mattered to the state. In short, much like private property everywhere, women’s bodies were nationalized.

The Communist state invaded the intimacy of women’s body, as two stories testify. Doina Ruști’s *Ginecologii mei [My Gynecologists]* (Ruști in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 249-260) reveals another method through which the regime sought to destroy women’s ownership of their bodies, that paradigm of private property, namely randomly organized gynecological check-ups. These were an almost prophylactic measure to reinforce party politics and control. Young women were subjected not only to an unwanted medical intrusion but also to emotional abuse by staff exposing who was a virgin and who was not – the source of unspoken social dangers. It was a method by which the Party could gauge and thus control the intensity and frequency of sexual activity outside the family.

Otilia Vieru-Baraboi’s *A-ha* (Vieru-Baraboi in Gheo and Lungu 2008:295-314) also mentions these regular check-ups, describing the “presumption of guilt and adultery that dominated these check-ups, transforming the relationship between doctor and patient into one between victim and executioner” (Vieru-Baraboi in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 303).

It is little wonder, then, that such practices alienate women from their bodies, and what they recollect is most often in bits and pieces that refer by association to their sexuality. This substantiates Gail Kligman's claim that, under Communism, women came to consider their bodies as the enemy within (Kligman 1998: 179). Sexuality was always fraught with the fear of unwanted pregnancy, and this fear was part of everyday life for women for twenty years and more.

Otilia Vieru-Baraboi goes even further in averring the repugnance she felt towards being a woman, a feeling clandestinely fostered by the regime's propaganda, as she points out, in order to discourage the temptation to escape into a healthy, equalizing eroticism (Vieru-Baraboi in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 304) which was, after all, the appearance propped up by the regime.

Parallels with Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984* reveal the dystopic nature of Communist policies. Since one of the regime's battles had been to abolish private property as the source of class difference, the social body became an ungendered worker. In consequence, everybody, male or female, was purportedly equal, especially in their status as party member.

Ioana Ocneanu-Thiéry's short story, *Eu, una, n-am suferit! [I, for one, didn't suffer!]* (Ocneanu-Thiéry in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 177-190) describes this skewed world, a brave new world of epsilons: "sad, stuffy, stultifying and grey" (Ocneanu-Thiéry in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 177) [*my translation*].

In a world where workers, teachers and sanitation workers earned approximately the same amount of money (Ocneanu-Thiéry in Gheo and Lungu 2008:178), the emergence of the term "comrade" comes as an eraser of gender difference in the eyes of society. Its purpose was to replace terms

like “Miss”, “Mrs.”, and “Mr.”, alongside other such equalizing measures: participating side by side in technology class, harvesting, the army, the area of work. Ioana Ocneanu-Thiery ironically mentions her high school qualification as “mechanic” or “pressman-lathe operator”, which “you never know, might come in handy one day” (Ocneanu-Thiéry in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 178) [*my translation*].

In the opinion of the same writer, what Communism did succeed in achieving was equality in misery. Men and women were “comrades” in poverty.

For women, however, life as experience was intensely gendered, as Gail Kligman points out (Kligman 1998: 148).

2.2. Motherhood

As mentioned above, Communism confiscated women’s bodies for the purpose of building a socialist society and ensuring continuity. This happened with the introduction in 1966 of Decree 770, which abruptly curbed legalized abortion, which had been endorsed in Communist society up to then. The state’s attitude towards women and motherhood during this time can be divided into three periods.

First, immediately after 1966, women were extolled as mothers, while propaganda flooded society with a women’s special role and noble mission in society. In the 1970s, women were needed in the workforce and were therefore encouraged to participate in the country’s economic, political and social life, while still in keeping with the State, the Father’s, pronatalist policies. This is the time when the above-mentioned fallacious equality started to be bandied about. However, in reality, women carried the double burden of caring for the family and also taking part in the myth of the working mother. The third stage identified by Gail Kligman starts in the

1980s and derives from the government's inability to curtail the practice of illegal abortion and bring about the population boom it had banked on as a result of Decree 770. This stage sees the advent of full-scale repression masked by pronatalist propaganda (Kligman 1998: 134).

There are two stories in *Tovarășe de drum* about the mother during Communism. Each presents a different perspective.

O poveste de fată [A Girl's Story] by Mihaela Ursa (Ursa in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 277-294) and *A-ha* by Otilia Vieru-Baraboi (Vieru-Baraboi in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 295-314) depict the mother through the eyes of the child, yet from radically different points of view.

The image that takes shape in Mihaela Ursa's memories is that of a hero mother. The writer reminisces about the mother's efforts to bridge the private and public spheres, namely to bring up the children, instill values, placate a demanding mother-in-law, and participate in the world of work.

What immediately stands out is the admiration that the writer has for the mother's efforts, in comparison to other mothers she mentions: she rushed home to nurse her child, she was wise, protective, an uncomfortable role model for the other mothers in the building, an educator, a magic maker during days of sickness.

However, what does transpire if one reads between the lines is the load that the writer's mother took upon herself and the fact that she seemed to accept this burden without demur. In all these aspects, this mother image conforms to and complies with the Communist propaganda.

The image of the mother in Otilia Vieru-Baraboi's story, *A-ha*, is radically different. The mother is mentally and physically impaired, bed-ridden and nurturing the delusion of a personal relationship with Ceaușescu, who had promised her a trip to the Felix Springs and Spa for therapeutic

purposes. This delusion was so strong that it forced the entire family to participate and even to invent non-existent characters. So much so that, at a certain point, the writer herself confesses she had problems distinguishing delusion from reality.

This is almost a small-scale embodiment of the irrationality that overcame Romanian society during the Ceaușescu years, where the fear of being turned over to the *Securitate* was an imminent possibility, where the state's intrusion into and control over the individual's private life was a victory.

Society's attitude towards the impaired is also bluntly recorded. In Communist society, the body was valued as long as it was fit and able:

Since only the healthy people came out for a walk on the country's freshly asphalted streets, builders in the factories of the future where the prototype of the new man was being planned, my mother had to be hidden away. Her incurable paralysis was an act of defiance against the state's medicine (Vieru-Baraboi in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 299). *[my translation]*

When the disabled body is that of a woman, the defiance is twofold: she is deemed an unfit mother and an unfit worker. The author points out the fact that her mother was not the hero mother whose image was championed by the Party propaganda.

Besides the position of the disabled body in a socialist regime so deeply engaged in social engineering, the heart condition that plagued Otilia Vieru-Baraboi's mother offered her an advantage, in the writer's opinion, over other women under the regime: the possibility of lawful abortions performed on hospital operating tables.

This brings me to another important point concerned with women, the feminine experience and Communism, which will be dealt with below.

2.3 Abortion

No discussion about women, their identity and their body under Communism can avoid the subject of abortion.

As mentioned above, women's bodies were in a sense "nationalized", transformed into the property of the state, much in the same way as private property. Reproduction became the mantra of the Communist Republic and women's bodies were turned into an instrument in the policy of encouraging population growth (Kligman, 1998:7). The Ceaușescu regime debuted with a fateful and forcible measure that criminalized abortion, namely Decree 770. Nevertheless, far from eradicating the practice, the ban led to a proliferation of abortion, so much so that estimates reveal a mind-boggling figure of five to seven abortions as an average during a woman's reproductive life (Kligman 1998: 208).

It is a surprise, nevertheless, that there are not more short stories in the anthology discussing abortion. In those instances where it is mentioned, abortion always comes accompanied by one or two inevitable concomitants: namely, obviously, the fear of being discovered and, were that to happen, the secrecy it would subsequently be cocooned in. Gail Kligman mentions fear as one of the regime's favourite methods of keeping the country's population in check (Kligman 1998:14), a fear that became inextricably intertwined with people's everyday lives. Women who underwent abortion were prime candidates for this experiment, their fear of being discovered compounded by the dangers associated with illegally performed abortions. What is more, as Gail Kligman attests, despite the severe sanctions, people, and women in particular, eventually became inured to the status quo. This becomes even

more relevant when we consider that, under Ceaușescu, abortion became a widespread means of fertility regulation, a seemingly “natural” feature of women’s reproductive lives (Kligman 1998: 14).

A common trait of the stories in *Tovarășe de drum* that speak about illegal abortion is the fact that almost always they mention the practice in passing. No story focuses specifically on retelling the drama of one woman. What is intrinsic to all accounts, no matter how brief, is the tragedy and the shame women had to endure.

Rodica Binder’s *Chiar așa? [Really?]* (Binder in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 75-88) mentions two such friends who perished as a result of botched abortions. Both of them were married, one with children. The writer also mentions the secrecy that enveloped the death of at least one of them. She points out an important aspect that accompanies all these stories and investigations into the subject, namely the stark reality that the tragedies ensued from a “collective disaster” (Binder in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 83). That initial disaster, the regime’s views and the Decree, snowballed into an even greater one which saw the deaths of more and more women and the births of fewer and fewer children.

In Iulia Popovici’s *X și Y [X and Y]* (Popovici in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 219-232), it is the aunt whose repeated abortions eventually affected her kidneys, afterwards making it impossible for her to ever carry a pregnancy to term. This writer also points out how the aunt’s abortion was the family’s great secret (Popovici in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 222).

Simona Popescu’s *HoRor!Cool!* mentions several stories: Adela, “the most beautiful girl in class”, who allegedly perished because of an illegal abortion; another nameless colleague who became pregnant and somehow sorted herself out.

It is important to highlight here the writer's indifferent attitude to the story, which could be considered as symptomatic of the systematic destruction of human relationships in Communist society: "I don't know how they dealt with it. I never asked" (Popescu in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 212).

In an atmosphere of fear-induced suspicion and duplicity, people became entangled in a web of lies and deception (Kligman 1998: 242). Thus, in order not to be held accountable by an arbitrary, state, the majority went to great lengths not to know, and to even greater lengths to mask what they did know. There was never just one single version of the truth, there were only rumours. This added another dimension to an already oppressive reality.

Giving birth to a child out of wedlock was also criminalized. In the same fragment as the one in which she speaks about the previous two women's stories, Simona Popescu mentions such a case, that of another colleague who gave birth to a child alone in the house (Popescu in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 212).

In Doina Ruști's short story, pertinently entitled *Ginecologii mei [My Gynecologists]*, the writer recounts how a hemorrhage put her under suspicion of trying to procure an abortion, giving a gynecologist the right not only to summon her for a checkup but also to perform a conclusive curettage under the supervision of "a man in a dark suit from the Office of Prosecution" (Ruști in Gheo and Lungu 2008:256).

The state's presence in Romanians' and Romanian women's lives is ubiquitous. Much like the man in the dark suit, it induces fear. It is a constant reminder that their life, and their death, was the property and served the interests of the state and that any transgression was punishable.

As an indication of how important The Decree was in shaping Communist society, it was one of the first Communist laws to be abrogated in the days after the 1989 revolution.

3. Deprivation

If the stories collected by Radu Pavel Gheo and Dan Lungu evoke different aspects of what it was like to live as a woman under Communism: recollections about growing up, becoming mothers, facing hardships as students, the perils of a sex life in a time in which contraception may not have been explicitly prohibited but contraceptives were notoriously hard to find, and memories of significant other women in the writers' lives, a common denominator for all of them is the way they deal with the deprivation that ran rife through Romanian society, especially in the 1980s.

In *The Politics of Duplicity*, Gail Kligman reveals that public posturing by and for everyone became a *modus operandi* and a *modus vivendi* for the regime (Kligman 1998: 242), which resorted to falsifying reality in order to bolster the Party elite's hold on power. This reality included facts about the country's economic progress. By the 1980s, however, the reality being experienced by Romanians, was grim. Rationing, queues, rampant shortages, the Communist regime had complete control of society.

As mentioned before, all the writers experienced deprivation. The most often mentioned forms of deprivation are the shortages of water, heat and power. Alina Radu, in *O zi din viața Alinei Viktorovna [A Day in the Life of Alina Viktorovna]* (Radu in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 233-248), Adriana Bittel in *Servus, Reghina [Hello, Reghina]* (Bittel in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 89-106), and Sandra Cordoș in *Din umbra vitorului luminos [In the Shadow of the Bright Future]* (Cordoș in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 129-140), to name but a few, recount the struggles they faced to fulfill one of the most basic everyday needs: washing. Hot water was one of the rarest

commodities in the 1980s. All these writers mention how washing up, washing clothes or washing your hair was an activity that took hours upon hours of sustained effort.

Servus, Reghina identifies another epitome of life in the Communist 1980s: queuing. Food shortages paralleled the dearth of electrical power, heating gas and water. Adriana Bittel's diary records interminable queues for, again, basics, such as bread and eggs.

The shortages that characterized everyday life for the majority of the population led to the proliferation of contraband, whether it was the contraband of information or of goods. *Servus, Reghina* points out how important it was to have "friendly acquaintances", such as waiters, cooks, sailors, workers in various factories that made medicines or shoes or processed meat, for instance (Bittel in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 101).

Sandra Cordoş's story of a young mother during Communism is again relevant: everything for the new baby was procured through complex networks, not bought, since there was nowhere to buy it from (Cordoş in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 129). Clothes, books, music, the ubiquitous and illicit Impulse spray and Fa soap, these are the petty, yet priceless, things that a Romanian woman's life was populated with.

Adriana Babeţi is the only writer who adds a comic dimension to the situation. Her story, *Sarsanela* (Babeţi in Gheo and Lungu 2008: 17-46) – roughly translatable into English as *The Luggage Saga* - alludes to a moniker that is familiar to Romanian women who have lived under Communism: the woman with bags. With poignancy and humour, she paints a picture of herself constantly shuttling bags of books, food, even wood – in the old tradition of women in her family.

As previously mentioned, the 1980s correspond to the repression launched by the State against its population after previous propaganda-driven methods had failed. Gail Kligman speaks of the regime's penchant for using symbolic violence to keep people under control (Kligman 1998: 14) – fear of an unwanted pregnancy, fear of the Securitate, fear of being spied on. To this dimension we may very well add deprivation and the resulting tensions as a means of keeping the population engrossed in the most mundane of preoccupations, since it is known that a person who is too worried about how he or she will fare the following day will be kept sufficiently busy not to remember they are not free.

4. Conclusion

Freedom and democracy came after 23 years of living under the Ceaușescu regime and after 42 years of Communism. We have been free and democratic for over 20 years, yet we are still in the throes of purging out a system and a mentality that has set Romania back at least 50 years, from an economic, cultural, political, technological and social point of view.

Even after the regime's fall, Communism's duplicitous stance on gender – proclaiming equality between the sexes, yet shoehorning women's potential into the role of mother and worker – is still short-changing generations of women, for whom concepts like “gender issues” and “feminism” sound outlandish, awkward almost, because they involve assuming a position, which is the very thing that Communism sabotaged.

The stories in this anthology are a sobering reminder of what we escaped from after 1989 and how much of that mentality we still have to shake off.

Finally, I have to add that I recommended the book to my mother. She smiled wryly, looking from the book to me, and said, “No, thanks. I lived it.”

References

- Kligman, G. 1998. *The Politics of Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Romania*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gheo, R.P.; Lungu, D. 2008. *Tovarășe de drum. Experiența feminină în communism*. Iași: Polirom.

VIRAGOS AND PARIAHS: INDIA'S WOMEN

REGHINA DASCĂL

University of the West, Timișoara

Abstract: The paper attempts to document an unsettling paradox inherent in Indian history and culture: the feminine is worshipped and deified on an imaginative level, while real women are disparaged, the most egregious forms of indignity being inflicted upon them in real life. The paper will also illustrate how India exemplifies the possible coexistence of formidable manifestations of female empowerment on the one hand, and of murderous neglect of women's needs and rights, on the other.

Key words: virago, amazon, goddess, sakti, widows, child marriage, foeticide

Viranganas – an Old Story with Modern Variations

One of the enduring paradoxes of Indian society is the great divide between the exalted image of the divine feminine and women's inferior status on the social level. While the Great Goddess is supremely important in Hindu theology, women's position in society leaves a lot to be desired and is still rather uncertain in a basically patriarchal and caste-oriented society, where caste is transmitted through the male line of the family. As Madhu Khanna puts it in 'The Goddess-Woman Equation in Sakta Tantras' (109-123) Indian women have been kind to religion, but religion has not been favourable to them (109). To this day Sita and Parvati rank supreme as ideal examples of feminine virtue: faithful, submissive, devoted entirely to their husbands, selfless, harbouring no desire of their own, rendered passive instruments for others. Parvati has a sole aim - that of winning Shiva as her

husband and with that end in mind she performs fierce austerities for 60.000 years.

This irenic and submissive hypostasis of femininity is not prevalent though. In the epic story of the *Mahabharata* the good king Yudishthira reluctant to engage in a bloody battle is encouraged to fight the usurpers of his throne with appropriate anger and the most eloquent instigator is his wife Draupadi (this episode reminds us of the famous tussle in *Bhagavad-Gita* - a small section of *Mahabharata* - between two contrary moral positions: Krishna's emphasis on doing one's duty and Arjuna's focus on avoiding bad consequences).

The *Sruti* Hindu scriptures which like the *Upanishads* are sacred writings postulate that the eternal soul has no gender whatsoever. There is only one truth that it proclaims and absolute divinity is preached in both masculine and feminine forms. It is this absolute divinity that is the source of an array of manifestations that include feminine deities such as Parvati, Saraswati or Lakshmi. Androgyny seems to reign supreme here where masculine forms are purported to carry feminine qualities, whereas some masculine deities are in fact incarnations of the feminine. In very general terms, absolute divinity according to Hinduism is an amalgamation that cannot be predicated upon form or gender.

The laws of Manu in the 2nd century laid the foundations of Indian women's condition, of a gender order based on husband-deifying ideology, the denial of women's autonomous and independent status, abolishing female property, forbidding widow remarriage, disqualifying girls to perform rituals in favour of their fathers.

Regardless of the cultural resistance that such shastric sanctions may have engendered as far as women's status is concerned, Hindu women today

have made great strides in their religious community. In Pune, India, women can enter priesthood through the Shankar Seva Smiti and Jnana Prabodhini, schools specializing in training female priests - and this is not a revolutionary concept that can be solely related to contemporary women's concerted efforts towards emancipation. During the Vedic times, it was common for both men and women to wear the sacred thread that symbolized their priestly title. But over time, this sacred thread became the rightful property of man alone, whereas the idea of a woman in menses conducting pujas or ceremonies became gradually unacceptable as it allegedly tainted the purity of holy rituals.

In the garb of Prakriti, Mother Nature we encounter the nourishing, motherly and wifely nature of the feminine, the mother as source of all, the indomitable power and potency, the absolute expression of fecundity. This hypostasis is, however, counterbalanced by Maya, Cosmic illusion, the seductress, thus making it mandatory that her boundless and threatening potency be controlled by the divine male principle. It is probably because of this ambivalent and dangerous nature of the feminine that caste membership became entirely dependent on patrilineality. It can also partially account for the wretched status of widows, who in the absence of the regulating influence of the male, represent an anarchic potency - unleashed and uncontrollable. (Gombrich Gupta 2000: 95).

Durga whose mythology is covered in *Devi Mahatmya* - the classic text of Hindu goddess worship, is the creation of the gods who dreading defeat at the hands of the demons produce a flood of energy which finally takes the shape of a woman, who is further on given weapons and a lion as vehicle and thereupon assumes male features; she is Amazonian, independent, autonomous. Durga has a milder, benevolent and maternal manifestation as wife of Shiva, while displaying nevertheless a remarkable

capacity for aggression, with her ten arms, each bearing a different weapon, and her eight accompanying demonesses.

The Chandi image personification of *prakriti* 'nature', 'matter' is bifurcated into the demon-slaying mother, Durga and the punitive, unpredictable mother, Kali. Her name means 'the black' one and she has four arms ending in bloodstained hands, fang-like teeth and protruding blood-dripping tongue, destroying armies of demons by devouring them; Kali's function is to intervene like an *avatara*, i.e. an 'incarnation', to restore the balance of the cosmos.

In the 19th century Durga became one of the most popular deities, Durga pujas becoming ubiquitous forms of worship; Kali, on the other hand had been hitherto the goddess of marginal groups: dacoits, thieves, thugs and prostitutes (associated because of their sexuality with the devouring and castrating *vagina dentata*). The rising importance of Kali and Durga in an age when attention was focused on women cannot be a coincidence. Madame Cama - a cross between Durga and Kali, smuggled revolvers in 1908, inciting to violence in the service of independence and anti-colonialism; she also glorified terrorism and was regarded by the people of India as a reincarnation of the goddess Kali. She was often seen as a symbol of Mother India waiting for Mother Kali to liberate her (Kumar 1993: 49). Durga, riding on her tiger served as comparison for two of the most famous viragos or viranganas of Indian history: the Rani of Jhansi and Indira.

Another version of the goddess is *Tripurasundari* or *Tripuraone* - one of the most sublime personifications of the goddess, who has a triadic nature (akin to the great Celtic goddesses), in accordance with the triadic nature of all things earthly and divine. Shiva is her consort and together they stand for the union of the two complementary elements; the entire universe is

composed of such polarities from atom to galaxy; everything has an androgynous kernel, an amalgam of the two: Shiva, male, static, inert and *Shakti*, the dynamic principle of creation. It is interesting that all women share a continuity with the goddess, irrespective of caste, creed, age, as they are the physical incarnation of *Shakti*.

Although by 600 the female goddess starts to compete with overriding male deities, between the 9th and the 15th centuries she makes a sweeping comeback, feminizing and galvanizing Hinduism. Tantra is an esoteric system of spiritual advancement carried out by cultivation of physical and psychic resources rooted in the ancient Hindu philosophical concept of *shakti*, which stands for the more potent and energetic manifestations of the feminine divine. Shakti features as the traditional role of the divine female as intercessor, relating the divine conceived of as the ultimate transcendental reality (being transcendental nothing can be predicated upon it) to creation; according to the *Upanishads* (800-300 BC) the supreme god is this unique eternal reality that can be conceived as Shiva, Visnu and other manifestations, whilst *shakti* as power, potentiality, sovereign, divine authority becomes the complex concentration of divine and human prowess (Gombrich Gupta 2000: 93).

Sakta tantrism gave rise to a scriptural corpus, it rewrote goddess theology, her relation to male deity, cosmic functions etc. To mark their superiority the goddesses were often depicted seated, standing or in copulation with their male consorts. For the first time these texts speak in favour of women's dignity, their divine nature, but more importantly, they actualize it on the social level, as all women are seen as embodiments of the goddess (Shaw 1994: 44-45). We cannot underline enough the importance held by the Tantric system in furthering the status of women, because

particularly in the most revered codes of conduct – *dharmasastra* - women's subordination is obvious and although both in *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* we come upon idealized versions of femininity, the epics prevalently advance male interests and causes. (see Gombrich Gupta 2000: 87-108).

Tantrism is nothing short of a pro-woman code and it represents a first effort of this kind in Hindu religion, aiming to introduce an ethos of equality and respect for women, taking a strict stand against wife beating and sexual abuse of women. All aspects of women's anatomy and physiology are considered sacred; women can become priestesses, gurus, hold positions of power and as female saints, they can impart initiation - *diksa*. All in all, it marks a subversion and undercutting of the dominant Brahmanical values, it is a rare instance of gender inclusive dharma in Indian religious history, speaking directly to women's experiences.

The rise of *bhakti* as a spectrum of faiths asserting the unconditional love between humans and divinity further buttressed *Shakta Tantra* and *bhakti* became the most popular and influential religion of the time, defying gender and caste divides, so that even *sudras* (the lowest caste of labourers) could become gurus. The *bhakti* movement was a nonviolent but firm and effective protest against the brahminical canon which first decreed that *jnana* or knowledge through the sacred texts is the only means to salvation and then denied the right to seek or acquire such knowledge to *sudras* and women (Chitnis 2000: 259).

Women as Poets and Philosophers

The argumentative tradition that can be traced back to such remote times as those of Ashoka, the great emperor of the 3rd century BC who converted to Buddhism and who advocated religious tolerance and reciprocal

accommodation of diverse polities and doctrines, or of the great Mughal emperor Akbar in the 16th century contributed to the creation of an ethos of tolerant and peaceful coexistence with difference in India. Provided the argumentative tradition is used with deliberation and commitment it can feature as a powerful weapon against social injustice, abuse and destitution. Although it is mostly men who tended to rule the roost in argumentative moves, women have also made important contributions to this dialogic tradition.

In ancient India some of the most celebrated dialogues have involved women, with the sharpest questioning often coming from women interlocutors. In one of the *Upanishads* of the 8th century BC, entitled *Gargi*, a woman scholar provides the sharpest edge to the intellectual interrogation. She enters the fray without any special modesty: “venerable Brahmins, with your permission I shall ask him two questions only. If he is able to answer those questions of mine, then none of you can ever defeat him in expounding the nature of God” (quoted in Sen 2005: 7).

Distinguished women poets like the famous Mira Bai of the 16th century wrote on interreligious tolerance, like Kabir, Ravi-das or Sena. The emperor Akbar and his poet Tansen are said to have visited Mira of Merta (kingdom of Mewar) a devotee of Krishna from childhood, who upon being forced to marry the ruler of the land, flees to Vrindavan to become reunited with her divine lover. Many think that she is the creation of poets rather than a woman in flesh and blood, yet she continues to fascinate and to hold in her thrall popular imagination.

Her myth was taken up by Indologists such as H.H. (Horace Hayman) Wilson who in 1828 in *The Religious Sects of Hindus* wrote amply about her, resorting mostly to hagiographic accounts. It was a time when colonial mentality had not yet been solidified in the Brits’ minds, nor

the homology between sexual and political dominance (Martin-Kershaw 2000: 167). Her myth was also rekindled a generation later by the nationalist, revivalist movement against the British Raj, when the myth undergoes a process of rajputization (the Rajputs being a famous martial tribe of North India), she being recast as a heroic defender of Indian values against the foreign oppressor.

Amazons and Pariahs

The Rani of Jhansi is the paradigmatic virangana, assuming roles available only for men, leading armies in times of crisis, dressing as men, a counter example to the passive victim representations of the colonist. She becomes a pan-Indian cultural heroine with universal appeal and Gandhi himself found her strength and devotion exemplary. Hermann Goetz, who lived in India for almost 20 years and was a scholar of Indian precolonial history, archeology and art history finds her worthy of comparison to Jesus Christ: she is intelligent, strong, politically astute, a religious reformer and active missionary. In her time she was compared to Joan of Arc, a comparison penned by the very man who defeated her in the decisive encounter at Gwalior - the British Commander Sir Hugh Rose.

The viranganas are generally portrayed as having the courage and skills of men but also as devoted wives as long as their husbands are alive. Like Boudicca's story, Rani's begins with an injustice (Fraser 1988: 271-296). The small Maharatta principality of Jhansi in the hill country of North India had had a history of friendship and benevolence towards the British rulers. Lakshmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi married Gangadhar Rao in 1842; similar to most stories of future Warrior Queens in her childhood she was a tomboy, wrestling with boys, disdaining the company of girls.

Despite the constraining injunctions upon women made by Manu, the Rani came from a culture whose powerful intelligent women were not unknown. Some of her roughly contemporaries were the Begum of Bhopal described to Queen Victoria by Lady Canning (Queen Victoria's lady-in-waiting and wife to the Governor General of India) in 1861 as a really clever and upright character. When the order of the Star of India was founded, she was one of the 25 knights appointed to it. Hazrat Mahal the Begum of Oudh was a formidably clever, 'tigress woman', who was referred to by the *Times* correspondent W.H. Russell as 'Penthesilea', she was Queen Regent and she defended heroically Lucknow against the British. (Fraser 1988:277) After her enthronement she was received by Queen Victoria.

Upon her husband's death and much to her dismay, the Rani sees the estate of Jhansi annexed to the East India Company, in keeping with the policy of lapse, as there were no biological inheritors to the deceased prince. However the couple had adopted a son and in Hindu religion adoption was highly respected at the same time entitling the adopted son to full succession rights. The Rani sent two petitions to Dalhousie, the Governor General of India, but to no avail. For the next 3 years she withdrew to a private life. In 1855 Lord Canning replaced Dalhousie and two years later during the Mutiny of 1857, she was asked by Captain Gordon to protect both communities against the mutineers. In the turmoil of events the City Fort was taken and Captain Gordon was killed. She was subsequently accused of complicity in the massacre, although she herself could do nothing but yield to the sepoys. The Rani was soon lambasted as 'the Jezebel of India'. When Sir Hugh Rose was sent against the remaining rebel encampments Rani mounted the tiger of Durga, recruiting a large army and leading them in the siege of Jhansi in March 1858; the historical records of the 14th Light Brigade

described her as a perfect Amazon in bravery, just the sort of daredevil woman soldiers admire.

The famous Rani became a battle cry for many other Indian women in the decades to follow and recently the martial imagery and indomitable spirit of the great Virago was evoked in at least two contemporary events. Irom Sharmila, a 28-year-old girl from the state of Manipur - a troubled state riddled with inter-ethnic conflict, in north-east India, decided to take action against the discretionary killings of the Assam Rifles. The latter is one of the Indian paramilitary groups controlling Manipur and they gunned down 10 people at a bus stop in Malomon on November 1, 2000. The army claimed it had fired against insurgents, although eyewitness accounts challenged that. On November 4, Irom started a fast-unto-death demanding a repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958, which empowered the army to kill without being questioned. She was arrested for attempting to commit suicide and - like suffragettes in Britain and America a hundred years earlier, was force-fed.

For the last 10 years, the government repeats the farce of arresting her on the same charge every year, after a formal release for a day or two. This is because the charge of attempt to suicide does not entail imprisonment of more than one year even if convicted. Irom Sharmila continues to be under arrest till date and is still being force-fed.

While Irom Sharmila has barely made a bleep on the Indian media radar, a Gandhian social activist like Anna Hazare stole the limelight. He declared fast-unto-death at the beginning of April this year in order to support the passage of the Lokpal bill (meant to put an end to India's generalized corruption) and to have the civil society strongly represented on the drafting committee.

Why has it come to that, one wonders. The contemporary Manipur Rani pointed an indicting finger at the army, one of those institutions that the general public tend to credit absolutely and so her heroic resistance can be cast as unpatriotic, whilst Hazare with his impressive retinue of followers - candle vigilantes of the educated middle, upper-middle and rich dare not take up issues of human rights violations, or adivasis' traditional right violations: "It is easier to shout from the rooftops about corruption while being part of the very same corrupt system in day-to-day life. And the politician is the favourite whipping boy for these classes. And will corruption end with the Lokpal bill? No. Hazare's fast is for drafting of a water-tight bill, which will take at least three to four months. Once the bill becomes an act, it does not dent corruption unless it is enforced. Enforcement is the responsibility of the same corrupt machinery and system we have" (Sankaran 13 April 2011).

Yet Rani with a more sharply emphasized Kali side to her is invoked by a unique women's group that resorts to violence in order to fight violence and by their inspirational founder Sampat Pal. She founded the *Gulabi Gang*, 'the women in pink saris', "pink" standing for women and "gang" for not being submissive! There are several thousand women in pink saris, each of them poor and illiterate. The Gulabi Gang protects the powerless from those who abuse their power. They retaliate against the violence perpetrated by brutal husbands, they crack down on those who abandon their families; they fight corruption and force reluctant police officers to register cases for underprivileged people.

The Pink Saris represent for many women in India, where violence against women is rampant, their last hope for justice. Over the years the group has grown in size and power and so too have their opponents. At first it was just five women, all old friends, yet within a span of five years, the group has grown into a powerful brigade of more than 20,000 women, including 10

district commanders, who run the gang's outposts across the district of Bundelkhand—an area that spans 36,000 square miles. These local Pink Gang stations are meeting places for women to discuss their problems and their doors are always open. Their hopes rise quite high these days when they aspire to gain political clout so that their authority be endorsed beyond the streets. These female vigilante groups “seek some form of social or legal sanction for their existence,” says Atreyee Sen, a fellow at the University of Manchester and the author of *Global Vigilantes*. “Taking part in formal politics [can] legitimize [their] role.” (Pratten; Sen 2008)

The Pink Saris do not take on abusive husbands only today, they challenge corrupt policemen and dishonest politicians—often putting their group in the center of controversy. While I spent almost four weeks in India earlier this year (in January 2011) the case of a 17-year-old girl, Sheelu Nishad made headlines: she had been gang-raped by a group of men, including one she identified as a member of the local legislature. Nishad went to the police, but instead of being questioned, she was arrested—it turned out her attacker had already called the police, accusing her of theft. Her father went to the Pink Gang for help, acting on the advice of some neighbours.

A kind of charivari was organized in front of the police station, and later in front of the politician's house. So effective was their intervention that Dwivedi, the politician was arrested, and Rahul Gandhi, the heir to the Gandhi family's political throne, traveled the 370 miles from New Delhi to meet the girl. So far, the Pink Gang had acted primarily outside of the political system—as vigilantes and activists, to the ire of local politicians and they incurred the anger of many of the latter. They've been called “militant Maoists” by local police (an accusation that was later retracted) and charged with things like assault and defamation. But they've also gained political clout so that in October, a record 21 Pink Gang members won *panchayat*

elections — the equivalent of local council elections. In these positions, the elected Pink Gang officials oversee construction and repair work of the local roads, provide for sanitation and drinking water and implement development schemes for agriculture. “Before, the village chiefs never used to listen to our issues, but with the Pink Gang in power, life will become easier,” says Usha Patel, a wiry woman who spent many days rallying support for her district commander. “Finally, the poor are getting their rights.” (Fontanella-Khan 26 February 2011).

In recent times the participation of women in both intellectual pursuits and political leadership has been remarkable, many of the dominant political parties being led by women. The first woman president of the Indian National Congress Sarojini Naidu was elected in 1925, the second, Nellie Sangupta in 1933. From Pandita Ramabai in the 19th century, a brave advocate for women’s education and for the social inclusion of widows or Bhicaiji Rustomji Cama, involved in the revolutionary movement in India and abroad in the first decades of the 20th century, to Aruna Asaf Ali - also known as the Grand Old Lady of the Independence Movement and the Heroine of the 1942 Movement - the history of India provides innumerable examples of women’s intense participation in the public life of the nation. (Kumar 1993). The modern and contemporary history of India abounds in examples of great women politicians, although one cannot help thinking that many of these successful women of India have attained the highest offices despite Indian government and society rather than because of them.

In the wake of the latest general elections - April-May 2009 - Meira Kumar became the first Dalit and the first woman Speaker of the Lok Sabha (the lower chamber of the Indian Parliament), whilst another politician, Pratibha Patil, has served as the President of India since 2007. Strong women politicians have left an indelible mark on regional politics: Mayawati Naina

Kumari, born a Dalit and educated to be a teacher has been elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (India's most populous state) four times, she is the leader of BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) and is considered to be present day's Indira Gandhi; Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed is one of the few female politicians from Kashmir who is recognized across all India, former CM of Jammu and Kashmir and leader of the People's Democratic Party. Sheila Dixit is the CM of Delhi since 1998. Sushma Swaraj is BJP's most prominent female politician; Mamata Banerjee is the founder of Trinamool (Grassroots) Congress Party and currently railway minister (a ministry that became the supreme testing ground for ministers, its former leader Lalu Prasad Yadav performed nothing short of miracles in the field (Misra, 435-436)). She is expected to make history in the West Bengal - where uniquely in the whole world the communists have ruled the state uninterruptedly for 34 years - by winning the state elections in the feverishly anticipated results of May 2011.

In July 2009, Nirupama Rao became the second woman to hold the post of Foreign Secretary, the head of Indian Foreign Service. Prior to this, she was India's ambassador in China. She has also held powerful diplomatic positions in Sri Lanka, Peru, Moscow and Washington. No doubt Nirupama will play a key role as India passes through sensitive times with the constant spectre of terror.

Jayalalithaa, a very colourful and volatile politician, former star of the Tamil and Telugu cinemas, former CM of Tamil Nadu and leader of the AIADMK is a fierce contender for power in the state of Tamil Nadu that goes to polls on April 13 2011 for the 234 assembly constituencies. Sonia Gandhi, a formidable representative of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty navigated her party to a grand victory in the national as well as several state elections. She proved her power to hold together a diverse group of combative men and women who now are given the job of governing India. All these women and many

more like them in the fields of business, arts, fashion and entertainment are living proof of the astonishing extent to which Indian women overcame gender roadblocks to achieve incredibly high goals (Patil 26 December 2009).

Yet millions of Indian women live in abject, shocking poverty, are victims of domestic violence, unjust treatment at workplaces, harassment and utter despair. Millions of Indian widows face social exclusion, ostracism and extreme destitution (Saravana 2000); according to the latest census 54% of them are illiterate and female feticide, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, dowry murders complete this grim picture. The maternal mortality rate continues to be high - 450 deaths per 100,000 live births with wide regional disparities; early marriage is the bane of society still with girls being seen as 'burden' on their parents, to be thrown off at the earliest.

According to some recent data provided by the 2011 Census, the total number of married girls less than 15 years old is 154899 while those between the ages 15-19 is also staggering, 1251950. This prevents girls from growing into mature adults who could carry out not only family responsibilities with aplomb but contribute to society more fully. Even though child marriage is illegal in India, the practice of marrying children at a young age continues to be accepted by large sections of Indian society. Nearly half of all young women marry before the legal age of 18, and the situation is even more acute in rural areas. Child marriage perpetuates power imbalances between men and women, both in and outside the home. It limits girls' choices about their own sexual and reproductive health, isolates them from familiar social networks and restricts their ability to make decisions about their own lives. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, passed by the Indian Parliament in 2009, is a landmark step in keeping girls in school and out of child marriage. For the first time in India's history, children

will be guaranteed their right to quality elementary education by the state, with the help of families and communities.

The legislation includes specific provisions for disadvantaged groups, such as child labourers, migrant children, children with special needs or those who have a “disadvantage owing to social, cultural economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor.”

Provisional findings of the 2011 census data revealed that the number of females per thousand males in the age group of zero to six years reached its lowest level since India’s independence – 914, with the worst offending states on the list being Punjab and Haryana. In places like Jhajjar (situated barely 40 miles from Delhi and its satellite Gurgaon, the so-called Millennium City that has become known for its call centres and international companies housed in tall, glass-fronted offices) the number is even worse just 774, placing Jhajjar at the forefront of what some have termed India’s “gendercide”, a preference for sons and an attendant offensive against daughters that has led to a sharply skewed gender imbalance.

Sexual assaults, crime and the role of women in society will all be issues that have to be addressed. With that said, the good news however, is that a large part of Indian society is slowly moving away from that way of thinking. Even though some families may see their daughters as a burden, many more consider them to be an incarnation of the Divine - “Ghar ki Lakshmi, betiyaan,” they say, or “the wealth of the home, resides in the daughter.”

The whole planet worries about vital resources being insufficiently tapped, from crude oil to natural gas and education, but what about the critical resource of women’s skills, and talents and genius? There are over 500 million women in India, and only 5% of Board directors are women, and there are only 10 percent women in top-management in corporate India. As

Poonam Barua, the founder of “Forum for Women in Leadership” and chair of WILL Forum said in her keynote address at the *New Delhi Women in Leadership* Conference of May 2010 “Women, Weather, and Web will determine the course of the world in the coming years”.

Even as India boasts of reserving 50 percent seats for women in panchayats (village councils) and awaits passage of a bill to reserve 33% of seats in parliament and state assemblies for the fairer sex, women MPs feel that true gender equality will be achieved only when the social mindset changes, because although their representation in figures is bound to increase still women’s representation remains marginalized.

Indian civil society is very vibrant and active in the field of gender issues and my own experience of women’s NGOs in Kolkata, West Bengal and Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala enabled me to understand the great determination resilience and total commitment that animate such organizations. *Jeevika Development Society* (*jeevika* means ‘livelihood’ in Bangla) was founded in 1990 and it has greatly contributed ever since to radically changing the communities of marginalized communities throughout 37 villages in the District of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal. *Jeevika* believes that access and control over financial resources, an increased degree of economic autonomy together with an ever increasing awareness of women’s rights as human rights are basic pillars in achieving women’s empowerment.

They boast highly successful microsavings and credit programmes spanning around 450 Women’s Self-Help Groups (WSHG) and encompass over 5000 women. Livelihood and incoming generating programmes in the area of embroidery, tailoring, entrepreneurial training through IT, the initiation of the System of Rice Intensification agriculture - all contribute to

paving the road to autonomy for Bengali women. Advocacy for women's rights, conducting gender and empowerment workshops, theatre, self-defence, entrepreneurial skills training for the community complete the wide-ranging activities of Jeevika.

Thanks to Dolon Ganguly and her wonderfully committed friends I could see for myself how the *Jeevika* holistic concept of empowerment has changed beyond recognition the lives of village women. Their microfinance model is unique in that credit systems are used specifically as a platform for women to address all issues afflicting their lives from domestic violence and rape to labour market discrimination and panchayat participation. I visited the village of Rasapunja on January 7 2011 and attended a meeting of group nr.50, made up of 13 members. The local village council is run by a woman and during the meeting women discussed and approved applications for loans (whose purposes varied from investment in daughters' education, to starting a small business, redoing their houses etc), debated a case of domestic violence and suggested various approaches to it; 10 of the members paid back installments from their loans.

Boosting self-confidence, gaining a voice, becoming a decision-maker are all important accomplishments of these programmes. To counter the ever increasing instances of domestic violence a quite unique Rapid Response approach was developed by training that led to a spin-off village based women's squad *Alor Disha* ('Leading Light') which acts as a neighbourhood watch taking up specific complaints regarding violation of the human rights of women and children.

Anchita Ghatak's *Parichiti* ('identity') strives to address an important group of India's women who are marginalized and rendered invisible from legal and political viewpoints: domestic workers. This large group of women

despite their being an essential part of the exploitative, informal economy, work without contract, with no social benefits, they are ununionized, unorganized and although they are a staple topic in everyday conversation they are direly underrepresented in the public discourse. Subsequently, they are exposed to egregious forms of exploitation and abuse without any possibility or prospect of seeing their grievances addressed let alone redressed. Raja, Anchita's husband started *Jeevika* years ago and they have become key gender activists over the years.

Conclusions

India is a most elusive customer for all those who would like to pin down her reality. It is a country that is made up of an array of countries and it lives in several centuries simultaneously; a country and a people that encapsulate many contradictions and paradoxes stemming from its being a multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious society and all these become even more poignantly relevant when we consider India's women.

My analysis and my direct experience reveal a mixed picture, there is good and bad in it, great strides have been made, there are more girls in school, there are more women working and there are more women today that are determined to break barriers and reach higher than ever before. However, the bad thing is that the potential and opportunities become fewer down the economic and social ladder, particularly in rural areas and in urban slums and it saddens me to think that in a predominantly Hindu society, where on one hand, women are exalted through the reverence of goddesses, on the other, they continue to be excluded and marginalized simply due to their gender.

References

- Biswas, S. 2007. "India's 'Pink' Vigilante Women" in *BBC News*, 26 November.
- Buncombe, A. 2011. "The Ground Zero of India's 'Gendercide'" in *The Independent*, 15 April.
- Chitnis, S. 2000. 'Exploring Tradition and Change among Women in Marathi Culture' in *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*. M. Bose (ed.). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 251-269
- Deopura P. 2011. "Gender Discrimination - a Cultural Bias, not Religious Truth" in *The Washington Post National*, 14 April.
- Fontanella-Khan, A. 2011. "India's Pink Vigilantes" in *Newsweek*, 26 February 2011
- Fraser, A. 1988. *Boadicea's Chariot*. London: Weidenfeld&Nicolson.
- Gombrich Gupta, S. 2000. 'The Goddess, Women and their Rituals in Hinduism' in *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*. M. Bose (ed.). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 87-106.
- Khanna, M. 2000. 'The Goddess-Woman Equation in Sakta Tantras' in *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*. M. Bose (ed.). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.109-123.
- Kumar, R. 1993. *The History of Doing. An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India. 1800-1990*. London, New York: Verso.
- Martin-Kershaw, N. 2000. 'Mirabai in the Academy and the Politics of Identity' in *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*. M. Bose (ed.). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 162-182.
- Misra, M. 2007. *Vishnu's Crowded Temple. India since the Great Rebellion*. London: Allen Lane.
- Pratten, D. and A. Sen. 2008. *Global Vigilantes*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sankaran, G. 2011. "Do Those against Corruption Know about Irom Sharmila?" in *Daily News &Analysis*, 13 April.
- Saravana, S. 2000. *Violence against Women in India. A Literature Review*. Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) March 2000. [Online]. Available: [http://www.crdi.ca/uploads/users/10286562430_Violence_Against_Women_in_India_By_Sheela_Saravanan_\(ISST\).pdf](http://www.crdi.ca/uploads/users/10286562430_Violence_Against_Women_in_India_By_Sheela_Saravanan_(ISST).pdf) [2009, March 5].
- Sen, A. 2005. *The Argumentative Indian. Writings on Indian Culture, History and*

Identity. London: Penguin Books.

**LOVE AND COURAGE AND OUR GENERATION: TWO
STORIES OF INSUBORDINATION**

RAMONA BRAN

University of the West, Timișoara,

Abstract: Pregs Govender and Zubeida Jaffer are two South African feminists and human rights as well as political activists, authors respectively of *Love and Courage* and *Our Generation*. Their autobiographies prove the power of women to overcome racial and patriarchal obstacles. The present paper explores the anti-apartheid struggle they fought in Durban and Cape Town, and the triumph of their insubordination.

Key words: gender, South Africa, anti-apartheid

1. Introduction

Pregs Govender and Zubeida Jaffer tell their stories in order to validate their own experiences, but also to expel pain and suffering through self-narration. Thus, storytelling becomes a means of empowerment and of engendering social change. Their autobiographies, although penned in different styles, reflect on issues of wifehood, motherhood and anti-apartheid activism. Both of them strongly experience a double bias: being both women and non-white. Memory is the dominant theme in their work, and the medium of storytelling is as important to these two women writers as is the content of their stories. What is more, both Govender and Jaffer “unveil silences that a previous school of black women autobiographers were unwilling or unable to address” (Lewis 2007).

Consequently, in this paper I shall look at the ways in which Govender’s *Love and Courage* and Jaffer’s *Our Generation* push back the

boundaries of male intellectual activism. Both texts show how women's political involvement and resistance can bring about solid action to ensure gender equality in South Africa, and can generate a productive insubordination to gendered authoritarianism. Most importantly perhaps, according to Lewis (2007), they manage this at the level of the family, as well as at the level of state politics.

2. Love and Courage

Pregs Govender is a coloured South African woman, of Indian descent. She is raised as a Hindu in a poor neighbourhood of Durban, but grows up to become a teacher and a feminist activist. She tells her story chronologically, and we find out first about her early life and the class and racial discrimination she experiences, then about her involvement in student politics and in the trade union movement. Growing up in Cato Manor, one of apartheid's specially designated "Indian areas", she is influenced by her father and grapples with various gender and social injustices:

I grew up wanting to be like my father [...] I did not register the critical difference between us: he was a man in a man's world. He escaped the drudgery of the essential everyday cleaning and ironing, of cooking and raising children in Durban's humidity. Like most other men, he had the choice of leaving these chores to his wife while he could be politically active, socialize and have fun. In contrast, girls were expected to be virgins who would grow into faithful wives. Girls and women who broke social codes courted disgrace for themselves and their families. In this world, my father's affair was no big deal. For me, it felt as if the world was tumbling down (2007: 38,39).

As her story unfolds, we find out about Govender's role in the build-up to the dismantling of apartheid, but also about her personal experiences as a wife and later on as a single parent struggling to raise two children. Staying true to her first name, Pregaluxmi, which literally means "love and courage", she has the courage to become a key public figure, as a leading member of the Women's National Coalition and as a member of the first parliament after 1994, and to love again, remarry and have a third child.

Growing up, Govender constantly questions Hinduism, the caste system and the roles assigned to men and women. During her years in a Catholic school, she rebels against the inflexibility of the nuns. Later on, while in Indian Girls' High, she shows resistance to "the Indian teachers who seemed more European than the white nuns" (2007: 42). It is here that she writes her first political speech against apartheid, thus discovering storytelling as form of resistance. Pregaluxmi wants to study journalism, like her father and three of her uncles, but her mother opposes this choice, arguing that such a job is "too unstable for a woman" (2007: 52). Forced to accept her mother's decision, she goes on to major in English and history and become a teacher.

In the chapter entitled "The personal is political", Govender describes her traditional wedding ceremony in the Cato Manor temple. She recalls having disliked the

thali that Jayendra tied around my neck like a noose while the priest herded his mother Sanna and all her sisters behind her; the fact that my new husband had to step on my foot to symbolise the hierarchy of a good Telugu marriage; the coconut that I was told was symbolic of the bride's virginity- only the bride was expected to be virginal, not the groom (2007: 61).

Her husband is a promising trade union leader and soon after their marriage they have two children: Parusha (“the flowing waters”) and Yashodan (“the one who helps others”). However, Jayendra is often away on work and starts to have affairs, so Pregs is left alone to balance work, raising the children and political activism. Nevertheless, in 1982 she finds the time to found *Speak*, the first feminist magazine in South Africa. She and the other women activists attend women’s meetings and write articles with children playing around them: “While trying to change the political, we tried to integrate the personal; for most of us there was little choice” (2007: 67). After deciding to get a divorce, Govender moves to Cape Town and then to Johannesburg, and struggles as a single parent.

Being a very active member of the WNC (Women’s National Coalition), Pregs Govender meets another dedicated woman, Frene Ginwala, who challenges her fellow activists to consider the question “Is the change we are all talking about going to mean simply adding some black men where white men sat before?” (2007: 126) The answer they all choose is ‘No’ and, as a result of their activism, women’s rights are integrated into the Interim Constitution for a new South Africa (1993) in a way that few constitutions in the world managed to achieve. In 1994, Govender is elected to Mandela’s Parliament and Frene Ginwala is voted Speaker of this new South African Parliament: “In the most powerful seat in the National Assembly, she was a powerful symbol - a woman in a sari, not a suit” (2007: 145). Together with other women they make up 30% of MPs and break the phallic cult in parliament, illustrated by phrases like “maiden speech” or “wives’ gallery”. Over the next few years ANC women caucus and change the all-male gyms and the working hours and secure a parliamentary crèche. Moreover, as a member of the finance committee, Govender makes sure the economy is viewed from a gender perspective:

In 1994, insubordinate women had not only been elected to parliament in defiance of the truism that women's place is in the kitchen and the bedroom, but we were presumptuous enough to talk of a Women's Budget (2007: 162).

Following her political success, in 1996 Govender experiences personal gratification as well when, after a speech delivered in parliament, she gets a call from her mother who thanks her for "speaking out for her" (2007: 157). However, despite the fact that she is chair of the Women's Committee in the second parliament, Govender chooses to resign after a controversial arms deal is passed. She is appalled that 70% of South Africans live in poverty, yet the people they have sent to parliament concern themselves primarily with financial interests:

Power and politics have traditionally been the domain of our fathers and grandfathers. I stand here today in my grandmother's sari - a woman who was a midwife and market gardener who was widowed young and left with four sons and my mother. I decided to wear it to honour her power, and the power of all grandmothers, mothers and sisters who tried to enter the traditional domains of power outside their homes. Women who had tried to do this while remaining whole and intact - in a world that has very little respect for women, especially poor and working-class women. [...] It is critical for each one of us to recognise, to value and to respect our own agency, our own power and each other's power; and to redefine power: not as the power of fear and hate, but as the power of love and courage. Not to be afraid that we can silence the patriarch in our minds and hear ourselves think and be (2007: 251, 252).

At this crossroads in her career, Govender turns to activism against gender inequality, against mentalities that sex with a virgin can cure

HIV/AIDS and that women are both the cause (the whore) and the cure (the virgin) of this malady. She also takes up writing as a means of liberation: “After leaving parliament I’d planned to sit, reflect and write. I reflected and I wrote - I wrote and wrote” (2007: 251). Having settled things in her public life, she remarries and has a third baby named Saien (which means “blessing or blessed”).

Govender’s autobiography is thus a complex analysis of power, gender and patriarchy, uncovering the “ugly facts” behind what was often commercialised as “successful reconciliatory post-apartheid nation-building” (Lewis 2007).

3. *Our Generation*

Zubeida Jaffer is a black South African woman, raised as a Muslim. She grows up in the Western Cape, where she becomes a journalist and an activist. In her autobiography, *Our Generation*, she also blends historical with personal narrative. She juxtaposes crucial events in recent South African history, such as Ashley Kriel’s funeral or Nelson Mandela’s release from prison and his winning the 1994 elections, with her experiences of torture in jail or of giving birth to Ruschka, her only daughter. In fact the book debuts with Jaffer’s labour, which becomes the central image of her memoir. This “moment references itself to the years and weeks leading up to this event” (Shathley 2003), giving us the chance to experience not only the labour but also Jaffer’s time in detention while she was pregnant, her furtive meetings with her husband in hiding from the Apartheid Special Branch, her own time in hiding and the election of a new trade union leader. These events are not presented in any linear logic; rather they follow in a sort of “dynamic of felt pain” (Shathley 2003), accounting for the text’s “fragmentary treatment of

time” (idem). In this sense, the book has a very cinematic feel, an idea reinforced by the ending, in which Jaffer chooses to tell in a few sentences the rest of the life stories of the main characters. Her a-chronological writing style is very different from Govender’s, and the way in which she shuttles backwards and forwards emphasizes the physical and emotional trauma she went through during the apartheid years.

At the beginning of her journalistic career Jaffer is arrested because, while working as a reporter for the Cape Times, she writes that students at the University of the Western Cape (established in 1963 as a separate university for Coloured people) had burnt an apartheid flag and raised an ANC one. In prison she has to solve a crucial dilemma - to give her torturers the information they seek, or to stay true to her beliefs and save her dignity: “Not only am I a woman but a pregnant woman, and he (Frank Mostert, the investigator) is going to use this to his advantage” (2003: 11). Eventually, she has the strength to choose the latter course and refuses to give in to Mostert’s threats. A few months later she is released, but tragic events continue to affect her life. Ashley Kriel, “the Che Guevara of the Cape Flats”, a great orator and ANC activist, is killed. His funeral is held at the New Apostolic Church, but it is not a peaceful moment as the police attacks the mourners with teargas and trap them inside the building. In addition, because many public spaces are segregated (most beaches being “white-only” for instance), black South Africans take to the streets and protests intensify. Cape Town is divided - private spaces are for hiding from the oppressive regime, whereas public spaces are for protests and become a scene of battle. After a rally intended to reclaim the beaches which are “God-given, and belong to all”, Jaffer writes:

Protecting the sea from the (black) people is a row of policemen standing all along the water's edge, reining in barking dogs on long leashes, it is a sight I'll never forget for as long as I live (2003: 63).

What is more, Jaffer is fully aware at all times of the double bias she is facing due to the fact that she is both black and a woman. Thus she frequently refers to instances of gender discrimination. Below is a witty comment she makes in relation to the above-mentioned protests and to anti-apartheid activism in general:

I find it fascinating that as the protests become more prominent, so do the male leaders. Not to suggest that they were not around when the hard work had to be done but they shared the hard work equally with women during the darkest days. In many instances, the burden fell more heavily on the women as they often could move around more freely and were less easily detected by the police (2003: 68).

After the demise of apartheid, on New Year's Eve 1992, "people of all colours and classes fill every space of the wide expanse of sand" (2003: 98). Jaffer feels the gratification she has longed for all those years, but still believes she and her people should take revenge on apartheid activists in order to set the record straight. During a conversation with Albie Sachs, however, she realizes that only by forgiving can she and her generation break the cycle of violence and ensure that her/their children will not have to carry the same cross. Consequently, when Mandela is sworn in, Zubeida goes with her father to Pretoria to hear his inaugural address and, while looking at the new South African flag, concludes that the unity of the South African people has at last been achieved:

I remember how awful we thought those colours and design were when they were first presented to us. Black, green, and gold alongside red, white and blue. Now a joyous roar affirming its beauty rises from the crowd (2003: 110).

Besides dealing with political and social issues, Jaffer also looks at the intricate relationship between gender and Islam in her country and community:

I find myself reflecting on how often the basic guidelines of religion play second fiddle to an obsession with controlling women. Instead of examining the needs of the most needy, men are reminded to keep their wives in check - the wives must cover their heads and be good Muslim women (2003: 29).

In childhood she loved cycling and playing soccer until Sheikh Nazeem, her religious teacher, mentor and family friend warned in class: “Young girls can hurt themselves on bicycles” (2003: 72). In addition, she enjoyed playing soccer in the street together with the boys. However she soon found out that this was acceptable when they were young children, but when a girl became a young lady, when she had her first period, she was expected not to play soccer anymore. “It was all very frustrating”, she concludes (*idem*). So the city is not only divided between blacks and whites, but also between men and women. Jaffer often fights with Sheikh over the years (“He wanted us to wear tightly pinned scarves covering our foreheads and all our hair” whereas she refuses to “display proof of her relationship with God through her dress. There is no such imposition on men”, 2003: 114) and even rejects the Muslim religion at one point because of these constraints, but turns to it again during her detention.

Furthermore, when she tries to get a divorce, Jaffer finds out that a Muslim man can ask for a divorce while a Muslim woman can only ask for an annulment on certain grounds. After the Sheikh finally pronounces the divorce, he tells Johnny (Zubeida's former husband): "You are a free man. Free, by implication, to take another woman." Johnny understands the implication and they both smile" (2003: 92). This prompts Jaffer to write:

I hope I will see the day when a sense of equality and fairness permeates all the rituals of a religion that I hold very dear [...]. It will require persistent pressure from enlightened women and men. (idem)

4. Two Stories of Insubordination

Jaffer prefaces her work with a poem by Njabulo Ndebele, South African academic and writer of fiction. "It is the fairy tale in me, / the story book/ that is the pure tale of my being", he writes, and this prompts Jaffer to tell her tale. She writes her book for two main reasons. Firstly, while alone in her prison cell she turns to writing as a means of placing events in a clearer perspective and of getting through the hard times. "I will write myself better, even here in jail", and "I always find it much easier to write down my problems. It helps me think" (2003: 35) she says, and self-narration becomes her (only) way of survival. Later on, during her cathartic, televised testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, she says: "I am very aware that this is just one little story amongst so many others. So if I tell the story, I am telling it to illustrate what has happened to so many other women" (2003: 127).

Secondly, she records her memories as a legacy to her daughter, who was an unknowing witness of the terrible pain her mother went through. Jaffer feels compelled to pass her story, which is also the story of her

generation, on to her child who represents the next generation, in order for them to understand the past and learn from it. Thus, while driving one day and looking in the rear-view mirror she makes a promise, which she keeps: “One day when you are big and we are free, I will tell you the whole story. [...] For now the story is stored in my mind, my little baby” (2003: 37).

Reflecting on the plight of a Dutch woman who witnessed her mother’s trauma at the end of the Second World War, Jaffer realizes that hers is a story that must be shared, and not only with her child: “I take the image of that woman into my heart, carrying her with me as a constant reminder that this is not the kind of future any of us should wish for our daughters” (2003: 90).

Govender too celebrates the spirit of her mother and grandmothers, and of generations of insubordinate women “who refused to conform to dominant ideas about wifely subservience, and who defied apartheid, racism and patriarchy” (Lewis, 2007). Her book can also be read as a message to her daughter, and therefore to future generations of South African women, who should be unstoppable.

6. Conclusions

Both Govender and Jaffer occupy an important place in a genre that has become crucial for South African literature - autobiography. Thus, the confessional presents itself as a national form of recording memory. South African women make their voices heard in this way and reveal their huge potential to “subvert official, state-driven and masculinist narratives of nation and community” (Lewis 2007). Despite the greater visibility of male heroes in South Africa’s struggle (such as Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, or Albie Sachs), the two personal narratives we have been dealing with in this paper successfully convey the central roles of women activists in abolishing

apartheid. The two narrators exemplify the idea that “the personal is political” and provide patterns of female determination and insubordination.

References

- Britton, H. E. 2005. *Women in the South African Parliament: From Resistance to Governance*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Corneilse, C. 2009. *Living Feminism in the Academy: South African Women Tell Their Stories*. Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC
- Govender, P. 2007. *Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media
- Jaffer, Z. 2003. *Our Generation*. Cape Town: Kwela Books
- Lewis, D. 2007. ‘Post-Apartheid Herstories: Zubeida Jaffer’s *Our Generation* Cape Town: Kwela, 2003 and Pregs Govender’s *Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2007’ in *Feminist Africa*. Vol 11 [Online] Available: http://www.feministafrica.org/uploads/File/Issue%2011/11_16_Review%204.pdf
- Mire, A. 2000. *In/Through the Bodies of Women: Rethinking Gender in African Politics*. in *Political Science Review*, Vol 8. [Online]. Available: <http://www.polis.sciencespobordeaux.fr/vol8ns/arti3.html>
- Motapanyane, M. J. 2009. *The Politics of Feminism in South Africa: Gender Consciousness and Political Agency in the Twentieth Century*. Ottawa: Heritage Branch
- Shathley, Q. 2003, ‘Weapon of Choice: The Contiguity of Genre in Zubeida Jaffer’s *Our Generation*’ in ARISA 2003, Volume 6 [Online], Available: http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/religion/documents/ARISA/2003_E3.pdf

DEMARCATING THE BOUNDARIES

REMINA SIMA

Millennium High School, Timișoara

Abstract: The paper points out the prerogatives that each of us has both in public and private life. Its aim is to show how the link between the two is forged by different, particular means. The article also focuses on the importance of the two concepts co-existing and not being exclusive of each other.

Key Words: family, private, public, state

Introduction

The paper approaches social aspects in women's and men's lives. In order to show this, references to the public and private spheres will be made within family and state life. In terms of identity, I shall try to point out through my paper its significance and importance. If we were to give a definition of this concept of identity, we would say, according to Macmillan dictionary, that it is to recognize somebody and to be able to say who she/he is. The two concepts, the public and private areas, began to be distinct in the 19th century; up to that point the two spheres had contained each other. Nowadays, everything that we associate with our family, our intimate life, is private, while our career, our role in society, is public. There has been a tendency all through history, to ascribe specific duties to men and women, as if they had been born with them as something innate. The private sphere was associated with women and the public one with men, the frontier between them could hardly, if at all, be crossed.

Education for Women

Education is the issue that opened the door for women into the public area. Reghina Dascăl presents Christine de Pizan as an outstanding supporter of women's education in the 15th century:

For a woman to write for a wide audience and to deal specifically with the subject of women was extremely rare in that century. Despite the complex nature of the society of those days, its female half was identified according to a value system and a hierarchy set up by the male half. Christine de Pizan dealt with the subject many times. Her *Book of the City of Ladies* was entirely devoted to

demonstrating the worth and talents of women, while its sequel, the *Book of the Three Virtues*, also known as the *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, was conceived of as a very pragmatic behaviour guide for women, frequently advising self-fashioning and agency under the guise of deference to male authority and power. Christine's work can be seen as "feminist" in the broad sense that she offered a defence of women against their misogynist critics. However, her purpose was not as ambitious as that of modern and contemporary feminists: altering the structure of institutions, demanding equal employment opportunities and legal and political

rights for women. In a culture fraught with misogyny in which women were frequently attacked on moral grounds, Christine fought the battle for women at the point at which they were being assailed by their critics (2008: 19-20).

In relation to women's education there was a belief according to which women were inferior to men in terms of intellectual capacities and this made them unable to deal with academic subjects. Mary Wollstonecraft showed the lack of choices open to a woman who had only been educated in accomplishments and failed to find a husband:

What was needed was an education which would enable girls to enter business and therefore free themselves from the need to be supported by a man (cited in Montgomery, 2006: 83).

Work has from the very beginning been at the forefront of writings on women's history. When work was defined as labour which received monetary reward, much of a woman's work was discounted. However, until the middle of the 19th century most women were paid for their work.

There is no doubt that women's work did contribute to the national economy, as radical politicians pointed out, though women were also disproportionately to be

found among the poor. By the middle of the 19th century, men dominated five sectors of the economy- mining, building, transport, clerical and general labouring - while women were only prominent in two- domestic service and unoccupied though the latter encompassed children. In terms of numbers, women were most often to be found in manufacture, agriculture, domestic service. In all areas, however, men had the most important jobs, thus in agriculture men ploughed, mowed, harvested and took care of animals while women planted, weeded and gleaned.(Montgomery 2006: 118).

The rise of clerical work at the end of the 19th century seemed heaven-sent. It gave women the chance to work without losing essential feminine qualities (it was clean and it did not debar a woman from marriage). Secretarial work was initially a male occupation and once it was taken over by women, its standing was devalued. Women had to be content with low pay, as otherwise they might be tempted to abandon their true vocation of wife and mother (Montgomery 2006: 119).

While the media gives the impression that nowadays women have unlimited opportunities and have made unprecedented career advances, the reality of the workplace is much more discouraging. While women have made significant progress in a few areas, the majority of them face a sex segregated labour market that devalues the work that most women do, that is, housework, childcare, nurturing. This is extremely demanding in time, energy and skill. When women become mothers, they pay a price, as Ann Crittendon states in *Women and Work within Women – Images and Realities- a Multicultural Anthology* edited by Amy Kesselman, L. D. McNair and N. Schniedewind, “when mothers do the necessary work of raising children and sustaining families, the reward is often professional

marginalization, a loss of status and long term losses in income and benefits due to lost time in the workplace” (2003: 179).

Although women appear in almost every occupational category, they are woefully unrepresented in higher- paid positions. In fact, the picture of working women is decidedly mixed. Gains have been real and important but, many women have not been affected by them. Unfortunately, there are still families in which the governess is the woman confined to that small world that makes her feel unfulfilled. Even nowadays, there are women who face the problem that has no name, as Betty Friedan called it.

Public only has meaning in relationship to what is not public, namely the private sphere. The Greeks made a distinction between the polis or the state on the one hand, and the *oikos*, or the family, on the other hand. From Plato and Aristotle’s first analyses of society onwards, politics has always been constructed as a public practice, separate from either the individual or the family. Plato accepted the following division of public and private: a man’s virtue lies in administrating the state, while a woman’s virtue is “to order her house and keep what is indoors and obey her husband” (1953: 71).

According to Plato, women can have a role in the public area, but in that case they have to totally give up domestic chores. In other words, he sees no link between one area and the other.

Aristotle was the first to challenge Plato’s point of view of the family, as he believed very strongly in the need for both a public and a private sphere. His account of the development of political society begins with an account of what he calls “first societies”, namely families. The purpose of the private sphere is to meet biological needs. The public sphere or the *polis* goes beyond the needs of mere life, existing rather for the sake of a good life. Public and private life come together in Aristotle. On the one hand, there is the private sphere, in which merely natural needs (food, shelter) are met in a domain

inhabited by wives, but ruled over by men: on the other hand, there is the public world of reason and culture which meets the higher spiritual needs of men.

As Barbara Arneil states, women are excluded from the public sphere, that is political life, altogether, because this was considered to be a man-dominated area; wives do not exist as citizens in relation to men and other women, they exist only in relation to their husbands. The same author has stated that feminist theory in the latter half of the 20th century began to realize how potent this duality (private-public) was for the ways in which male and female roles are constructed and the means by which women, because of the very understanding of what is political, may be excluded or made invisible.

According to Grewal and Caren Kaplan, the state is an abstraction that refers to a set of relations, practices and institutions; states are not monolithic, uniform or unitary; each state consists of a variety of institutions, operations and functions; states make decisions for the labour market; they also attempt to contain different groups' demands in the face of political mobilization, including the demands of those who seek to escape from state power or to negotiate their relations with the state. The state, according to the same authors, represents the main organiser of the power relations of gender through its legislation, policies and the way it is involved in the construction of public/private realms. Considering the situation as it exists, it is clear that the impact of state action and inaction is gendered, affecting men as a group, and women as a group, differently. Different feminists conceive of the state and of women's actual and potential relations with it in different ways. Liberal and equality feminists urge state action for women's equal rights. The state is dominated by men, but increasing women's access to the public sphere and power can alleviate gender inequalities. Socialist feminists see the state as propagating the dominant class as well as gender interests and often

also race and ethnic interests. They are therefore more ambivalent towards the state and the possibility of using it to achieve feminists goals. Radical feminists, who prioritize ending the oppression of women and see the state as part of that oppression, are often hostile to any further intrusion of the state into women's lives.

Conclusion

In early times women faced a crisis in their identity: they wanted to accomplish more than what traditional society ascribed to them. Great progress has been made, but there are still many women nowadays who face difficulties in this respect. A range of areas are not wide open for them, for example politics. Today it is not desirable to assert about a person that he/she belongs exclusively to one sphere or the other, that is, either to the public one or to the private one. The two intermingle in our lives, but the responsibilities are not always equal for men and women. The ideal for us is to see who we really are and what we can really achieve.

References

- Arneil, B.1999. *Politics and Feminism*. Great Britain: Blackwell.
- Aristotle.1980. *Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dascăl, R. 2008. *Christine de Pizan Essays*. Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest.
- Friedan, B.1965. *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Penguin Books.
- Kaplan, G. and C.2006. *An Introduction to Women's Studies*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill Companies.
- Kesselman, A. McNair,L.D.and Schniedewind, N. 2003. *Women Images and Realities – a Multicultural Anthology*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Montgomery, F. A.2006. *Women's Rights- Struggles and Feminism in Britain 1770-1970*. Manchester:Manchester University Press.
- Plato. 1953. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The Conundrum of Gender

**A FANCY EXTERIOR: APPEARANCES
OF CHARM AND STYLE IN THE
PROTAGONIST OF BYRON'S *DON JUAN***

ROXANA DIANA CRUCEANU

University of the West, Timișoara

Abstract: The concern of the present paper is the analysis of Don Juan's so-called 'elegance', which, at a certain point, becomes misleading and is often regarded in criticism as a sign of the hero's emancipation. If Juan seems to progress in questions of clothing, discourse, gestures, manners and skills, i.e. in everything that has to do with the exterior side of dandyism in particular and Don Juanism occasionally – we will pursue him during his most fashionable moments to demonstrate that evolution is halted at the level of form.

Key words: dandyism, anti-dandyism, appearance, essence, arrivisme, snobbism.

Introduction

Acquiring – after a whole cycle of adventures – a fashionable’s aspect and a Don Juan’s fame, the hero of the final Byronic masterpiece is more than once perceived as one who “learns discretion and worldly wisdom”, “ready to consider more seriously his own behaviour” (Boyd 1958: 38) at the end of the poem. Hence, our concern is to analyze Juan’s crust of elegance, which at a certain point becomes misleading and is often regarded in criticism as a sign of emancipation.

His relation with refinement will be watched through the filter of a masculine concept which he courts, with insufficient determination though: dandyism. If Don Juan seems to progress in questions of clothing, discourse, manners and skills – namely in everything that has to do with the exterior side of dandyism – we will follow him here during his most glamorous moments, constantly jeopardized by ridicule, to demonstrate that evolution remains only at the level of form.

Dandyism versus Imitation

When tracing the path of Juan’s coxcombry, the first clear symptoms are to be found at Catherine’s court, where there are no dreams left, only business-like love affairs, which leave Juan exhausted, dissipated, jaded and longing for beauty. If we accept the theory that dandyism is born out of ennui, this was indeed the right moment for Don Juan to start being a fashionable. Hopelessly lost in “royalty’s vast arms” (X. 37), he must have felt what Baudelaire (1964: 27) called “the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality”. But incapable of bringing any enterprise to an end, Juan will fail in his dandy approach as he has failed in all other respects. We will focus on the gestures that cancel out Juan’s extravagant attitudes and therefore demolish his dandyism, a drama that would have affected him

deeply, had he realized it. For, although he never wished to be a libertine or act like one, there is no doubt that he tried hard to be a beau, at least in the last part of the poem.

Before starting our argumentation, it is worth providing the portrait of an authentic fashionable, so as to establish the contrast between Juan's attempt and the true creed. And who could be more appropriate for exemplification than Brummell, the very emblem of dandyism:

Though Brummell had a solid reputation based on leadership in fashion, his clothes were only part of a surface perfection that ramified into every aspect of his public life. He was a creature entirely devoted to the management of impressions, and the perfection of every aspect of his behaviour was a device for evoking and controlling the effects he made on others and benefiting from them. His life centered not on occupational achievement, not on a family or private life of any sort, but on those most Goffmanesque of things – situations, scenes and encounters. He was famous for his entrances and exits, for the subtlety with which he opened his snuff-box, for his ability to conquer a scene played with princes and dukes by the arch of an eyebrow, for the exactness of his deferentiality, and for the lighting aptness of his remarks. He became a master of manipulating social settings with ultimate subtlety and often great contempt. (Smith 1974: 730).

Brummell, the initiator of a whole dandy 'school', is known to have cherished deeply all the aesthetic little nothings, which were transformed with talent into things of extraordinary importance, while serious matters were treated as a bore that spoils the sweet harmony of high life. The secret of his success lies in the seriousness and conviction with which he played his part, with no other purpose than that of being a dandy. Whoever dreams of being a

Brummell without having that Brummellian nonchalance can be an arriviste, a snob, but not a beau.

The common feature is given by the fact that, as Jean D'Ormesson (1971: 283) states in *Arrivisme, Snobbism, Dandyism*, following Barbey D'Aurevilly's ideology, careerists, snobs and dandies ask others to help them live by looking at them, because they need to be recognized by their public. To that we must add that whereas the dandy deserves the attention he demands because he is the creator of a revolutionary style whose echoes have endured over time and which continues to be recycled under one form or another, the arriviste and the snob have no merits whatsoever. They are abusers, profiting from favourable circumstances instituted by other people's originality.

Imitation is a leitmotif with Juan, a natural talent from this point of view. During his pilgrimage, he adapts himself quite easily almost everywhere, not by imposing his own style – which would raise him to the level of a dandy – but by behaving in the manner of the respective culture – a sign of snobbish attempts to gain admission. A brief review of Juan's experiences reveals that he is a snob long before being a fashionable. It begins on Haidée's island, where he finds no difficulty in becoming acquainted with the Oriental kind of life, although he is a Westerner with a different background; then in Russia he manages to be one of them for a while and, instead of defying the Russians, prefers to leave when unable to play by their rules any longer; finally, England receives him in the dandy period and Juan does not refuse himself the pleasure of being an English beau. Never is he himself, except for the moments when he is desperate, in tears, frightened, confused, i.e. when his innate weakness is stronger than any attempt at simulacrum.

The most evident proof of Juan's tendency to reproduce instead of making is fashion. Referring to snobbism as a degradation of dandyism, Émilien Carassus (1971: 54) enumerates some stereotype definitions in this regard, among them the one saying that the dandy launches the mode and the snob amasses it. Nothing could describe Juan better. Wherever he goes, his dress and conduct are in accordance with the trends of the place. He does not institute the reign of his idiosyncrasy: he simply does not possess such a modality of expression. Juan is literally engulfed by the styles of the different systems he is integrated in. Can he be remembered for at least one peculiarity, in the tradition of the great dandies? Scarcely. He is a conformist entirely and often worse than that.

The snob is incapable of elaborate improvisations in his attire; he is not the artisan of the image he fabricates. The dandy gives precise directions to his tailors, who are simple executants. The snob is too inexpert for that, perfectly content when managing to be a good replica of the fashionable. The help of the knowledgeable is welcomed. For Juan, the skilled 'counsellors' are his ladies. As in every other respect, women's intervention is decisive: they transform Donny Johnny into a dandy by having him put on the fanciest garments. In other words, he does not dress, but is dressed for success. He would never have looked like a Turkish beau, had it not been for Haidée, nor would he have become a smart Russian military man had Catherine not commanded it. In England, when he finally ventures to combine colours and items of clothing on his own, Juan is no longer in danger of not being appreciated: the first impression has already been favourable and Juan is placed in the class of the beaux. The merit for this belongs especially to the huge diamond that could pass for a personal dandy emblem, but which turns out not to be personal at all. Although "it had been fairly earned" (XI. 39), the jewel was offered by "Catherine in a moment of ivresse" (*ibid.*) and

selected in accordance with the empress's tastes. It is the type of gift which brings to mind Bataille's (1998: 129) comment upon the valuable goods and money given to female prostitutes as presents and subsequently invested by these women in luxuries or gems so as to increase their desirability. Dandy? Not in the least. Snob? Apparently so, yet very little in reality, if we follow the thread of D'Ormesson's (1971: 283) argumentation, which demonstrates that any imitator of the dandy must be as rigorous as the original: egoistic, obsessed with themselves, capable of anything to succeed, haunted by their own image, convinced that they make their own destiny, the arriviste, the snob, the dandy, through the most antithetic approaches, are all the slaves of a certain projection for which they sacrifice everything, even their happiness.

Some of these attributes are possessed by Juan; what is missing, however, is the programmatic spirit. Apart from the projection of the primal fusion with the mother, for which he does sacrifice everything, the boy has no concrete plans in the material spheres of existence. He is flattered when appreciated, looks for this intensely and becomes more cynical towards the end of the poem, but his childish side is too powerful to let him be as determined and ruthless as the dandy, the arriviste or the snob. Under these circumstances, it is easier to tell what the hero is not than what he is: he is not a Don Juan for sure, he is not a dandy, – despite the appearances of charm and style in the final cantos – he is not a careerist and he is not a real snob. What is he then on the social scene? A clown who mimes several typologies of personages without convincing or being convinced himself of the authenticity of his act. Fitz-Fulke's strategy for corrupting him proves that the gilding of his sophistication is very thin and transparent to connoisseurs who are not misled by his cheap airs. It is hard to believe that the duchess would have had the courage to plot the phantom masquerade with a dandy, a libertine, an arriviste or a snob. Experienced as she was, she must have

realized that none of these would have bought it: the libertine because he does not believe in such legends; the fashionable because he will always trifle with everything; the snob or the arriviste because they are too cerebral to waste their time with such unimportant matters. Hers is the final and most relevant exposure of Juan as a fool, which, along with the other buffoonish gestures, unmasks him and demonstrates that his new pretences of refinement are simply that: pretences.

The Intrusion of the Ghost

It would not be relevant for our purposes to recall here the risibility of Juan's behaviour in his early youth because he was not selling himself as a polished man of the world back then. He will not even be blamed for the lack of dandy finesse and majesty shown at Catherine's court, when he already "lived [...] in a hurry / Of waste and haste and glare and gloss and glitter" (X. 26) like a dandy, but looked like "Russia's royal harlot" (ibid.), an image that kills automatically in Juan the first signs of exterior dandyism or of what is sometimes perceived in criticism as "initiation in a sense in which none of his previous affairs had been" (Ridenour 1963: 134). Nevertheless, he cannot be forgiven for the lack of elegance demonstrated at a time when he had theoretically reached the climax of his urbanity, i.e. in London. An example in this regard is that of the perfect rider who is disclosed as not so flawless after all. Reading that the 'gifted' hunter "broke [...] some statutes of the laws of hunting" (XIV. 33), one's expectations would normally be directed towards some stylish innovations in accordance with dandy inventiveness. Unfortunately, Johnny "rode o'er hounds [...] now and then, / And once o'er several country gentlemen" (ibid.), dragging the dandy name and pride through the mire. And let us not overlook his august descent in England, spoilt by a shade of avarice, so uncharacteristic of a dandy. Juan

who is “careless, young and magnifique, / And rich in roubles, diamonds, cash and credit, / Who did not limit much his bills per week” (X. 70), a fashionable by now, “stared [...] a little” (ibid.) when a long list of expenses was presented to him, and “though he paid it” (ibid.), the breeding is not that of a dandy who would have taken the money out of his pocket with the most genuine indifference, without a muscle moving on his face.

The grand demonstration of anti-dandyism, however, begins later, once the ‘threat’ of the ghost is felt and Juan is completely deserted by his many ‘talents’. He is now more ridiculous and foolish than ever, doubly so as he falls from the top of his brand new aristocratic extravagance. With his self-confidence and carelessness already seriously shaken by Aurora – although a true dandy or Don Juan “should have known” (XVI. 93) that “he had gained at least her observation” (ibid.) – and afraid of the phantom, the blasé diplomat returns to a state of confusion he had tried to get rid of. As soon as the power of the charmer, embodied now in Miss Raby, overwhelms him, Juan reverts to his old teenage habits. He is puzzled, anxious, “restless and perplexed and compromised” (XVI. 12), longing for something he cannot understand thoroughly. “If he had known exactly his own plight, / He probably would have philosophized” (ibid), because he was “somewhat pensive and disposed / For contemplation” (XVI. 15), thus repeating quite closely the scenario of the distress experienced before the affair with Julia. His attitude starts being expressive again, after a brief period of impassibility, foreshadowing in a way the intense corporeal manifestations that are to follow at the encounter with the Black Friar. The dandy’s inexpressiveness, as a vector of convincing others of one’s dominance and power of decision-making, vanishes when “Juan [...] sighed” (XVI. 12) while thinking of Aurora, which means that a fellow who used to cry a lot cannot possibly be transformed into a fashionable overnight.

In this state of inner devastation, the arrival of the spectre can only deepen the hero's vulnerability. The mask of tact and precision drops; a cascade of anti-dandy gestures replaces it. "Juan was petrified" (XVI. 22); he "felt his hair / Twine like a knot of snakes around his face / He taxed his tongue for words, which were not granted" (XVI. 23); walked back to his chamber "shorn of half his strength" (XVI. 25); "rubbed his eyes" (XVI. 26) and read something in an attempt to collect himself, without much success though, since "his hand shook" (XVI. 27) on the newspaper. Defeating naturalness in any form it may take is one of the main dandy objectives. Artificiality is not only a sign of distinction but also the desperate struggle of these men to control their life and sometimes their death, so as to prove that they are perfectly able to prevail over their human condition, or at least to ignore it. Juan's uncontrolled mien contradicts every principle of a dandy, who would not let himself be so unrefined, even if he were in private.

Juan, deprived of substance as he is throughout the poem, was yet gifted in the English cantos with a façade of class and dignity. At this particular point, he is forced to give it up rapidly, an allegorical warning of the fact that any usurper of the dandy distinction will be exposed in the end. The demolition of his exterior classy respectability, gained after many years of humiliations, takes place gradually, worsening with every move he makes. The day after the incident, our fashionable "dressed, and like young people, he was wont / To take some trouble with his toilet, but / This morning spent less time upon't. / Aside his very mirror was put" (XVI. 29). Juan, who had got used to all the dandy habits, could not have omitted the ritual of dressing, which took hours of these pedants' lives daily, until all the items of the turnout were harmonized to perfection. The renunciation of this object of coquettishness, the only friend-enemy indispensable to the narcissistic beau

for the composition of his disguise, is the renunciation of a space of illusory reflection, the imaginary dandyland of building-destruction.

The mirror put aside is a metaphor of Juan's invalidation as a fashionable. Symbolically, it becomes synonymous with dandyism here, so that the verse may read as 'aside his very dandyism was put '. There is no wonder then that "his curls fell negligently o'er his front, / His clothes were not curbed to their usual cut, / His very neckcloth's Gordian knot was tied/ Almost an hair's breadth too much on one side" (ibid.). It is precisely because of these details that the title of fashionable cannot be claimed any longer. An average mortal is forgiven for such small inadvertencies. The dandy, by contrast, is crucified. Scholars agree that a disarranged curl, a wrong fold are a sacrilege. Not to mention the tie, the ingeniousness of which is vital. Along with the gloves, it is the accessory most central and cherished, defining the man who wears it and who is free to choose among the many possibilities of tying it: in the American style, in the Oriental way, in Byron's poetic manner, Irish-like, etc. The art of arranging this ornamental element brings noble distinction. The proportion between the collar and the neck cloth is carefully calculated; the knot, indeed as complicated as the Gordian one, is done and undone until faultless. Consequently, Juan's imprudence is unpardonable; now his aspect is totally compromised and he will make his entrance as untidy as his tie.

The presence of the other guests has no effect whatsoever upon Juan who, at least in public, should have remembered his role. But, after having overlooked his get-up, he neglects his demeanour. His gestures are clumsy and careless again. The great dancer, hunter, emancipated aristocrat who could hold his cup so graciously and take his tea with such art, burns himself on the drink under the very eyes of his admirers. This being the case, his dandy reputation is endangered. "So much distrait he was that all could see /

That something was the matter” (ibid.), which is highly compromising for the dandy, trained not to deliver his state of mind to his spectators, who would find in such situations an opportunity of teasing the teaser. Johnny’s luck is that Lord Henry is drolly preoccupied with his muffin, while the ladies manifest either maternal concern (Adeline) or indulgent surprise (Aurora). The female dandy shocker Fitz-Fulke who “played with her veil / And looked at Juan hard” (XVI. 31), is the only one on the watch, probably to guess his true nature and decide if her game will continue or not, but she will restrain herself from mocking him, as she “nothing uttered” (ibid.). With a generally benevolent audience, Juan is spared a shameful dethronement, although some stings do not miss their mark. To start with, Lord Henry “said Juan had not got his usual look elate” (XVI. 32), a mild remark in comparison with the insult the young man has to bear later on when „perceiving smiles around/ Broadening to grins” (XVI. 87). The reaction is caused by Juan’s overt absent-mindedness, deepened exaggeratedly, to the point of not hearing his neighbour’s repeated asking of the banns. Now the remains of his dandyish vanity are incommoded by the ironic laughter of his companions at table, “as nothing can confound / A wise man more than laughter from a dunce” (XVI. 88); not sufficiently though to produce a change in his gestures, which remain as awkward and un-dandy as before. Juan takes too big a piece “with such hurry that he could curb it” (XVI.88).

In fact, with the exception of his regained self-possession and wittiness for an instant after Adeline’s ballad, the whole day is an exercise in unsophistication for Juan. His previous simulated placidity is no longer feasible; coordination between words, tone and facial expression is too difficult for Juan to achieve at this point. The wild emotion on the inside bursts through to the outside, with a greater force than that of diplomacy: ““What friar? said Juan and he did his best / To put the question with an air

sedate / Or careless, but the effort was not valid / To hinder him from growing still more pallid” (XVI. 35) than he already was. Of all the components of body language, maintaining a constant colour of the visage – irrespective of one’s state of mind – and refusing all those sudden changes that ordinary people find difficult to avoid, represents the true mastery of the dandy soul. The control of a glance, of the voice, of the posture, etc., is simpler than preventing organic reactions like blushing or pallor. In his fight with the natural, the dandy, who aspires to the inexpressiveness of the mask, will eradicate such unwanted reactions more than anything else. Juan, a novice in matters of dandyism, overwhelmed by worries, betrays himself especially by these abrupt passages from one emotion to another. Fear made his cheeks yellowish, then “he coloured more than once” (XVI. 88) with fury and embarrassment. A dandy turned red is not a dandy at all, because he has ceased to look smart.

Consequently, he cannot speak intelligently either. Therefore Juan keeps silent most of the time, not with that dandy superiority which is more suggestive than words, but with the incapacity of the resourceless man who discovers “his usual spirits gone” (XVI. 105). As if to keep the audience alert, the absent vocabulary will be replaced by a multitude of gestures and attitudes, all wrong, bizarre and droll, in accordance with “Juan’s nervous feelings on that day” (XVI. 51). The acute perceptions of a dandy – who behind the display of passivity has his attention and senses alert – are lost. Our hero is sincerely detached from everything, “observing little in his reverie” (XVI. 106), inelegantly dominated by his private problems, which a fashionable would have the civility to ignore. Instead, “Juan took his place he knew not where, / Confused in the confusion and distraught / And sitting as if nailed upon his chair. / [...] He seemed unconscious of all passing there”

(XVI. 87). Untrained at a deep level to have a dandy's finesse of understanding and interpreting the smallest sign of an interlocutor, Juan misses the opportunity of his life when "he really rather took amiss" (XVI. 92) Aurora's discreet encouragement. In this tacit confrontation between the two, it is clear that he is the fake dandy, a usurper of a vocation fitter for the girl who "did not blush in turn/ Nor seemed embarrassed. Quite on the contrary; / Her aspect was as usual" (XVI. 94). After the mirror deserted in a hurry, the negligent aspect and the conduct at random, the brief interaction between him and Aurora exiles him once again from dandy territory.

For the dethronement to be unequivocal, Johnny, finally alone, retired in his room, is 'caught' almost naked, a hypostasis in which a fashionable should not even be imagined: "He was undrest, / Saving his nightgown, which is an undress, / Completely sans-culotte and without vest; / In short he hardly could be clothed with less." (XVI. 111). Once again, the crowning is symbolically undone, for a dandy without his attire has neither prestige nor glamour, not to mention that he is mentally castrated. Finally, the last dandy element, which is also Juan's *pièce de résistance* in building a fashionable's exterior, is taken from him. The remains of his appearance of charm and style vanish along with the beau's garb.

Unaware of his hopeless situation, Juan does not give up so easily. "Expectant of the ghost's fresh operations" (*ibid.*), he will not abandon the dandy 'obligation' to play with fire. But, whereas the dandy accepts dangerous provocations with a sort of indifferent pleasure, our Johnny "sate with feelings awkward to express" (*ibid.*), which were soon to concretize, bearing a name incompatible with dandyism: terror. After "the monk made his blood curdle" (XVI. 113), Johnny forgets on the spot that the fashionable must not be impressionable or show amazement. His lack of tact during the day appears insignificant in comparison with the huge mistakes the young

aristocrat is making now: “Were his eyes open? Yes, and his mouth too” (XVI. 115); “Don Juan shook” (XVI. 118) and, although ashamed of himself, he “shuddered” (XVI. 120) harder.

After elucidating the mystery of the phantom, the powerful emotions and the night of passion with the duchess sweep away Juan’s strength of recomposing his fake dandyism, so that, the following day, he looks “wan and worn, with eyes that hardly brooked” (XVII. 14) and with a “virgin face” (XVII. 13). All these are symptoms that – beside demonstrating a new love affair in which the female dominates, “a final entanglement that represents a descent into compromise rather than the achievement of an ideal” (England 1977: 183) of dandyism, we would continue – have an additional role: that of disclosing Juan as a fraud in matters of dandyism to his English friends, who might have had their doubts the day before. The disarranged look for the second time consecutively can no longer be taken as an accident, not with a beau at least. As for the virgin face, it has a connotation difficult to overlook: a dandy will have any mien but infantile. This aspect only would suffice to contradict Boyd who perceives Juan as “growing in two short, crowded years from the dreamy adolescent to the experienced, serious and saddened young diplomat” (1958: 43).

There are two scenarios for Juan at this crossroad in his existence: to continue his ascension in the social landscape, saved as usually from this deadlock by fate, or to be treated with contempt, expelled from the exclusivist gynocracy – condemned thus to endure at least the sufferance of the great dandies, since he was unable to share their glory. Irrespective of the possible denouement, the certainty that mere appearances are too complicated for the hero to handle, remains.

Conclusion

For Juan, even the title of “Poet of Cloth” (Carlyle 1984: 204), rather unflattering for debasing a cumulus of originalities to so little, would be a too high praise. First, because we have already seen that women are the poets of Juan’s clothes, directly or indirectly. Second, because a dandy’s vestments become poetry due to the fact that he, the fashionable, makes them special by filling them with his dandy character. With Don Juan, the situation is vice versa: there are the clothes which give him the dandy touch.

Dandyism – which Juan desired so much to embrace, probably after unconsciously feeling tired to be the slave of everybody’s moods instead of being the king, – is a more complicated game than that of hypocrisy and dissimulation, reduced to playing at being the contrary of what one is, whereas the essence of the dandy art is to be only what one plays. Not succeeding to understand the subtle difference of meaning, to go beyond the surface comprehension of this complex principle made up of revolt, refinement and paradoxes, he will fall into the area of the ludicrous. It is an end that any imitator – not only Juan – risks considering that the delineation between dandyism and clownery is very thin, unless the performer has a structure based on double consciousness, a genuine sort of indifference towards both himself and the others, a vocation for this type of sophistication. Although the fashionable is not a revolutionary in the literal sense of the word, – he, who takes the fake more seriously than reality, would loathe being the exponent of common causes – his lifestyle is an entire revolution, a perpetual act of negation, because he will swim against the stream in everything he chooses, a thing that Johnny is far from imagining. Surely, many dandies haunted by oedipal residues may refuse anti-introspectiveness, which Juan also does constantly, but unlike our fellow, they oblige themselves to know the world, so as to defy it properly.

Barbey d'Aurevilly (1995: 43) probably makes the most relevant observation about the dandy's august abstraction, remarking that dandyism is as profound as genial, whereas comedy is tiresome, for aping does not mean identifying oneself with this profession. Speaking about Brummell, who was born to be a dandy and nothing else, d'Aurevilly wonders what the greatest fashionable of all times would have become, had dandyism been taken away from him. Keeping the question and playing a little upon words, the same can be asked about Juan: what would he be in the final cantos if apishness were taken away? The answer is simple to give: a confused, frightened child.

For that, we find it difficult to agree with Mihaela Gheorghe (2004: 69) who, speaking about Juan's dandyism, claims that calmness and serenity are the effect of a gained interior harmony worth envying, after having lived some decisive experiences so early. This calmness and serenity are not authentic; they are mere affectations of a man who wants to sell himself as a great fashionable. And let us not mistake non-identity for interior harmony, which, had it existed at least to the extent of making the hero realize who he is and what he wishes, could have transformed Don Juan into one of those beautiful revolted, memorable for their polished eccentricity.

References

- D'Aurevilly, B. 1995. *Dandysmul*. Iași: Polirom.
- Bataille, G. 1998. *Erotismul (Eroticism)*. București: Nemira.
- Baudelaire, C. 1964. 'The Dandy' in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. London: Phaidon Press, pp. 26 – 29.
- Boyd, E. F. 1958. *Byron's Don Juan: A Critical Study*. New York: The Humanities Press.
- Byron, G. G. 2004 (1819 – 1824). *Don Juan*. London: Penguin Books.
- Carassus, É. 1971. *Le Mythe du Dandy*. Paris: Armand Collin.
- Carlyle, T. *Sartor Resartus*. London: Dent.

- England, A. B. 1975. *Byron's Don Juan and Eighteenth-Century Literature: A Study of Some Continuities and Discontinuities*. London: Associated University Presses.
- Gheorghe, M. 2004. *Dandysmul*. Cluj-Napoca: Limes.
- D'Ormesson, J. 1971. 'Arrivisme, Snobisme, Dandysme' in *Le Mythe du Dandy*. Carassus É. (ed.). Paris: Armand Collin, pp. 277 – 285.
- Ridenour, G. 1963. 'Don Juan: "Carelessly I sing"' in *Byron. A Collection of Critical Essays*. West, P. (ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp. 123 – 137.
- Smith, T. S. 1974. 'Aestheticism and Social Structure: Style and Social Network in the Dandy Life' in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 39, No. 5, pp. 725 – 743. [Online]. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094317> [2010 February 15].

'I MAPPED THE KNITTING-BALL'.
**WOOLF VERSUS CUNNINGHAM: FEMININITY AND
ANDROGYNY IN LITERARY CARTOGRAPHY**

ELISABETA ZELINKA

University of the West, Timișoara

Abstract: In this article, I will analyze Michael Cunningham's and Virginia Woolf's masculine and/or feminine auctorial devices of building their novels (*The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*), according to the feminine or masculine writing style. Thus I will attempt a comparative analysis of the two novels, from three different standpoints, all in accordance with the feminine and masculine auctorial devices applied in writing: the build-up and shape of the novels, the interweaving of (circular) narrative strands and finally, the symbolic shapes of the characters' trajectories (literary cartography).

Key words: literary cartography, circularity, androgyny, symbolic chromatics, Time, phallic architecture.

Introduction:

Cunningham's novel *The Hours* presents a fluid and ludic construction and shape, tightly linked to his auctorial style of superimposing his subversive, feminine narrative strands. In opposition to Woolf, Cunningham obeys the exclusive attributes of the feminine writing style, by fluidifying and superimposing his three strands. He therefore saturates his

novel with such protean dynamism that it becomes tangential to the feminine principle of chaos. I will further analyze the feminine and/or masculine beginnings and endings of the two novels, and prove that it is again Cunningham who applies a more feminine style: his strands are winding, feminine and subversive, yet circular in shape.

***The Hours* - its Feminine Opening**

Cunningham applies this labyrinthine style, leading the author through his feminized, maze-like novel and its intertwined strands. At the same time, he touches upon the symbol of the cycle and of the androgyne as early as in the shape of his (circular) pastiche, after having completed a series of feminine, interwoven, yet circular strands. His concluding message then emerges, namely that his *feminine principle is engulfed by the principle of androgyny*, as the latter prevails over the former if the reader considers his novel as a whole.

Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* does not take on the shape of a circle, although she also deals with the issue of androgyny, yet in a much lesser and fainter way. Her novel evolves linearly from a masculine beginning to a masculine closing, thus approaching the phallic and masculine connotations of the straight line, by contrast with Cunningham's androgynous circle.

Michael Cunningham constructs his pastiche in a typically feminine fashion: he dissects it into three apparently parallel narrative strands, yet they prove fluid, interknitted (feminine) and convergent in the dénouement. To make the structure even more fluid and feminine, Cunningham further cuts his three strands into twenty-two intertwined chapters (the *Prologue* included) and two additional segments, of paramount importance for the

comprehension of his novel: *Acknowledgements* and *A Note on Sources*. All in all, he subdivides his novel into twenty-four sections.

It is imperative to mention at this stage that Cunningham, as an androgynous writer himself, does *not* allow the feminine principle to omnipotently govern his literary construction. True, he adopts a clearly feminine style, he gives his novel a feminine beginning and a feminine end, the itineraries of his characters and the symbols they adopt are also feminine, with certain androgynous tendencies. Nevertheless, the spherical shape of his novel, due to the feminine beginning and end, confers upon Cunningham's novel a prevailing androgynous connotation. Thus I argue that *The Hours* has an androgynous overall structure, containing, as its embryonic core and nuclear seed, the sustaining feminine trajectories and motifs within the novel. Hence the symbolism of the round, androgynous knitting ball, which contains and is made up of the feminine, winding, chaotic and fluid thread.

Following this argument, Cunningham opens his novel with a feminine, diffuse and 'incoherent' auctorial device: he 'starts with the end', that is, he opens his novel with the end of Virginia's life. Her last, suicidal day (in 1941) opens the novel, then abruptly, Cunningham bridges over a chasm in time and glides into the 1990s, after which he comes back to Mrs. Woolf's strand, not to 1941 but to 1922, when Woolf started creating *Mrs. Dalloway*. This subversive and 'incoherent' fluidization of time, plot, characters and novel build-up is an exclusively feminine auctorial device. It is one of the above-mentioned feminine devices *within* the overall androgynously shaped novel.

I argue that Michael Cunningham's novel presents a feminine opening and a feminine closing, and thus his novel is cyclical, round, symbolizing the androgyne that he himself, as a homosexual writer,

represents. Firstly, the novel opens with an exclusively feminine episode, the *Prologue*: a female genius commits suicide by drowning herself in the river Ouse. Next, the three central tropes of the novel's beginning are tightly connected to the feminine principle: water, feminine *par excellence* (Jung and Kerényi 1994: 99-104, 122-123), and chaos/madness/suicide. Thirdly, Virginia Woolf was a bisexual woman in real life and thus represents the androgyne, similarly to Cunningham. Yet in the Thanatotic opening episode, her bisexual androgyny is totally omitted and only her feminine side is underscored by the overwhelmingly feminine symbolism: water and madness/irrationality. These exclusively feminine symbols eclipse her androgyny and inscribe their feminine auspices into the reader's soul.

Symbolic Chromatics in the Opening of *The Hours*

Secondly, another feminizing element in the opening of *The Hours* is the colour yellow. It is one of the first colours which opens the novel and is then obsessively reiterated throughout the entire book: the river is "yellow-brown", "the yellow surface of the river (more yellow than brown)" (4-5). Yellow also opens the first chapter (*Mrs. Dalloway*) in which Clarissa Vaughan admires the window box of the old lady next door, in which a "rogue dandelion" (hence yellow) has sprouted, among the red plastic geraniums. Consequently, yellow becomes Cunningham's third most frequently used colour (thirty-one times, only exceeded by brown and white). Yellow is not a random colour applied by an androgynous postmodern writer. It carries a multiple symbolism.

According to Stephanie Forward (2000: 300), yellow carried deep anti-patriarchal connotations in British society. Yellow signified women's

rebellion against the traditional hallmarks of femininity (hysteria, physical weakness, mental instability) and against heteropatriarchy.

Cunningham applies the same symbolism in the opening of Laura's strand too: her kitchen is yellow (the symbolic topos for her rebellion), Mrs. Latch's furniture is yellow. Most importantly, Laura's two cakes (symbols of her struggle against heteropatriarchy) are also decorated with yellow roses. She throws the first cake away, culminating in an androgynous kissing scene with Kitty, and thus shoulders the above-mentioned symbolism of yellow. She rebels against the old-fashioned gender roles of her heteropatriarchal society, in which she is smothered so as to act as the subdued, yet contented wife and mother. She symbolically bakes a second cake, again adorned with yellow roses, thus signifying that she is completing an act of gender rebellion and that she will start a new life (her second cake). In this way, yellow stands for the rebellion and revival of Laura's gender rights, for her fight for her quashed women's rights and for her sexual liberation.

In Clarissa Vaughan's New York-ese strand, yellow receives its contemporary symbolism: feminine Nature (Mother Nature), optimism, feminine vitality, love for life, all deeply connected to Clarissa Vaughan, the very symbol of feminine vitality (Chevalier and Gheerbrant Vol. 2 1995: 81-83). In the opening of the novel, Clarissa resembles a deeply feminine figure, reminiscent of Mother Nature, as she carries home the bouquets of cream and yellowish lilies and peonies for her party. Secondly, yellow as a feminine symbol of (feminine) Nature, of feminine procreation and of the resurrection of feminine Nature (Vol. 2 1995: 82), welcomes the reader in the opening of the novel: the very first flower in the novel is yellow. The live dandelion in the flower box of the neighbouring old lady symbolically prevails over the red plastic (thus dead) geraniums. Consequently, yellow appears in the

feminine opening of *The Hours* as a feminine symbol of Mother Nature, of the rebirth of Nature and of procreative life prevailing over death.

Following the same train of thought, Clarissa's contemporary symbolism of yellow is tightly linked to the LGBTQ culture, whose representative she is. Yellow is a central element of most LGBTQ symbols: it represents gender and sexual equality, freedom and acceptance (*Human Rights Campaign*, available at: <http://www.funtrivia.com/en/subtopics/LGBT-Signs-and-Symbols-200193.html>), the challenges that the LGBTQ community has to face, as well as the sun, radiance or even polyamory, bisexuality and androgyny (Evans, available at: <http://www.isomedia.com/homes/jene/flag.html>). Yellow is a constant in all subtypes of LGBTQ flags and tokens: *The Rainbow Flag* (with all its versions), *The Victory Over AIDS Flag*, *The Bear Pride Flag*, *The Polyamory Ribbon*, *The Polyamory Flag*, different Pride bracelets and rings, as well as in the Jewish Nazi homosexual triangles.

Thus yellow widens out from the feminizing symbolism on Virginia's and Laura's strands to a larger scope of significance: not only is it a symbol of femininity and feminization, but one step further, a symbol of androgyny and androgynization.

Cunningham's Feminized Architecture

Next, the entire description of downtown Manhattan loses its phallic potential: the vertically soaring, concrete and metal skyscrapers are never mentioned as either choking or looming. On the contrary, this very topos of mushrooming skyscrapers, the capital of phallic architecture in the Occidental world, produces absolutely no feeling of masculine or heteronormative choking. On the contrary, people enjoy the utmost gender

freedom and may love and live androgynously (Richard, Clarissa, Louis, Oliver St. Ives, Walter Hardy, Mary Krull). Despite its phallic architecture, Manhattan is a topos of sexual and gender fulfillment for Clarissa, as she crosses Washington Park with her bunch of flowers.

To conclude, Cunningham's opening indeed presents some disparate symbols of androgyny, yet the paramount devices he deploys confer a prevailingly feminine opening upon *The Hours*: the feminine, water-related symbols, the nature-related symbols, the multiple implications of the colour yellow, the time frame and the literary topoi. They all carry the stamp of feminization, complemented by the trope of the androgyne.

Mrs. Dalloway - a Deceiving Opening with Phallic Architecture

Analyzing the opening of Woolf's novel, we may at first fall into the trap of believing that *Mrs. Dalloway* has a feminine beginning (Zelinka 2006: 51). I would argue that this is only an auctorial device to trick the reader and lure them into a closer analysis. As the reader opens the novel, they are indeed confronted with an apparently feminine set of symbols. The maiden encounter with Clarissa, the very first sentence of the novel ("Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (5), provides the feeling of a very determined and purely feminine woman, correctly fulfilling her feminine obligations. Secondly, Clarissa seems to be extremely feminine and heterosexual, completely lacking (repressing) her androgyny, a "charming woman" (6).

Nevertheless, upon closer analysis, the opening of the Woolfian novel proves much more complex and masculine. All the above-mentioned feminine elements that Clarissa identifies with are irrevocably annulled by the superimposed masculine coordinates of Clarissa's topos. The most

important such masculine background elements are the choking phallic architecture of the City and the choking, concentric “leaden circles” of Big Ben looming over the whole city as a masculine omnipotence. Clarissa’s youthful femininity is also choked by the heavy traffic in the London streets: the minute she observes the heavy omnibuses in Piccadilly, she feels “unspeakably aged”, lonely and dangerously alone (10-11). As she walks towards crowded Bond Street, her femininity is further demolished, as she is reduced to her Thanatotic apprehension of death. The choking, masculine background persists: the masculine, heavy, oppressive airplane, the sumptuous, metallic VIP automobile, which terrifies passers-by with its masculine, war-like boom, and the (most certainly) masculine VIP. All these create the prelude to Clarissa’s marital crisis which annuls her smothered androgyny (her youthful love, Sally).

Time and Gender Crises

Clarissa’s gender crises (marital- and androgyny-related) erupt the moment she completes her first cycle and arrives home from the florist’s. Thus Clarissa’s true androgynous gender identity is swallowed up by the masculine canons and the sexual etiquette of her time, obliging her to smother her androgyny and force herself into a heterosexual/heteropatriarchal marriage which makes her feel like a “virgin” or like a “a nun who has left the world”, while the marital bed becomes too “narrow” for Clarissa and Richard (33-34). Thus her femininity is quickly annulled by the vast set of exclusively masculine symbols which clearly outnumber and outweigh the feminine identity, in the very opening of the novel.

It is vital to mention that the most important architectural element in Woolf’s novel, omnipresent Big Ben, is again a phallic symbol *par excellence*. Also, it plays a pivotal role in the lives of the characters, not only

as a psychological factor but as a concrete, real building in the centre of the characters' city, physically governing London. It seems to link the plot and all the characters into an invisible web. It is a tall and majestic building, royal and phallic, even frightening, as the reminder of inexorable (and masculine) Time. In her real life, Woolf herself saw and respected Big Ben as a highly impressive architectural element in her *axis mundi* city, London, which she adored (Wilson 2000: 12). Clarissa, too, sees Big Ben by no means as a neutral but as a clearly phallic element, even corporeally associated with a masculine, muscular man: "the sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour struck out between them with extraordinary vigor, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb bells this way or that" (54).

In contrast with Cunningham's feminine opening in New York City and Los Angeles (both capitals of phallic skyscrapers), Woolf's literary topos, London, has only one phallic tower, Big Ben. Nevertheless, this single tower is masculine enough to smother and choke Clarissa and other characters during the whole day of the novel. At the opening of *Mrs. Dalloway* (and throughout the novel), Big Ben functions as a masculine/phallic symbol of the heteronormative social code which smothers Clarissa's latent lesbian desire and androgyny. Unlike in Cunningham's opening, in Woolf's opening Clarissa feels choked by phallic Big Ben's masculine "leaden circles dissolved in the air" (6).

Interestingly enough, Woolf annuls the single exclusively feminine element in her literary topos, the Thames. In real life, Virginia Woolf was much attracted and tempted by water: she compared her own literary style to water "splashes" (Bell 1972: 106), she compared her fits of madness to "crashing" water or to "swelling" waves (110-112 and Woolf 1980: 36, 49), she entitled her 1931 masterpiece *The Waves*, and she committed suicide by

drowning herself. Still, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf completely omits the Thames, this being even more surprising due to its centrality within her literary topos.

Big Ben bears masculine connotations on another level as well: it is the quintessential symbol of Time, once again a clearly masculine element in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In real life, Woolf herself viewed Big Ben as a solemn, majestic (masculine) architectural masterpiece (Wilson 2000: 167). Time is conveyed in her novel as a masculine/phallic and threatening element, in perfect alignment with Big Ben and with the entire time frame related to Wednesday-Wodan. The connotations of the masculinized Norse mythology (Wednesday-Wodan) are overtly threatening, bellicose, as opposed to Cunningham's more feminine temporal frame, Saturday-Saturn. In Woolf's novel, the use of the masculine pronoun "his", instead of a possible neutral 'its' adds to the exclusively masculine and ferocious connotations of Time. Thus it becomes clear how omnipresent, masculine Time and Big Ben create an exclusively masculine topos, consequently choking Clarissa's femininity right from the beginning of the novel.

Nevertheless, the symbolism of yellow is much more timid in most of *Mrs. Dalloway*, or in many instances does not even suggest any feminine connotation at all. The most important anti-patriarchal instances of yellow are the following: Clarissa's ballroom curtains are yellow (mentioned three times in the novel) and her hat is also yellow. Bearing the symbolism of yellow, the very moment she takes off her yellow hat, she becomes partially conscious of her gender and marital crises, of her missing lesbian/androgynous element. Woolf suggests this by associating this illuminating 'yellow' moment with Clarissa's uneasiness in her heteropatriarchal marriage: she feels like a

nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower [...] There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. At midday they must disrobe. She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be" (35).

Even Clarissa's vocabulary suggests her gender frustration and her sexual tension: "nun", "withdrawing", "attic room", "pierced the pincushion", "tight stretched", while the bed becomes "narrower and narrower".

If Woolf creates a clearly masculine opening for her novel in 1925, Cunningham, rewriting it in 1996-1998, feminizes the novel from its first sentences by creating a clearly feminine beginning with certain well-inscribed androgynous symbols. In contrast to their different beginnings, both novels have identical endings: they both close with feminine endings.

The Hours and Mrs. Dalloway - Feminine Closures

In the case of Cunningham's work, the ending is overtly feminine, governed by feminine symbols such as death, suicide, psychological instability, and suicide against the contrasting background of a fit of madness. Moreover, despite her son's death, Laura becomes the epitome of feminine vital force, a vital force which refused to be defeminized by heteropatriarchal canons, and thus she prevails over the dead family she had once deserted and divorced.

Moreover, Cunningham places the final tableaux of his novel under the absolute auspices of the feminine. The last chapter is utterly dominated by female characters, female same-sex love and feminine same-sex affection. Even Julia seems to be reconciled with her mother.

Additionally, a general peace of mind and calmness settle upon the novel at its end, when the four reunited female characters symbolically align to survive the moment of Richard's madness and death (again a feminized trope).

Clarissa's plane is the single one, where an overall state of feminine homey-ness, coziness and harmony pervades the four women's nest: food, hot tea, empathy and accommodation for the suffering old mother. The women's apartment is filled with a feminine-specific, resigned and peaceful emotional vibration, governed by feminine-specific mutual affection and sympathy. Surprisingly, Cunningham returns to two traditional gender roles of the woman: firstly, traditionally speaking, it is the woman (and not the man) who is responsible for creating the warm, cozy atmosphere within the conjugal nest, even if these women in Cunningham's novel are androgynous.

Another exclusively feminine auctorial device deployed by Cunningham is the interweaving of the three fluid/feminine narrative strands in the final tableau. "The reader" (Laura), "the character" (Clarissa) and "the author" (Virginia), as Cunningham terms them (Peregrin 2003: 30-31), are all reunited in Clarissa's living room. Laura is the reader of Virginia's novel, while Clarissa and her strand bear the closest resemblance to *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and to Clarissa Dalloway, the character.

Like Cunningham's ending, Woolf's closure too is feminine. Thus we may underline a process of feminization within the bisexual writer's novel: starting out from a masculine opening, Woolf evolves to a feminine end. Nevertheless, it is of paramount importance to mention that Woolf's process of feminization, of deploying a feminine end in her novel, still bears the marks of the choking taboos of the social codes of the 1920s. Her

feminization of characters and of the entire novel is lesser and fainter as compared to that of Cunningham, who openly deconstructs and exposes all sexuality-, gender- and LGBTQ-related taboos.

Therefore Cunningham begins with a feminine opening, develops his novel onto three strands overfilled with androgynous symbols and tropes and comes back to a predominantly feminine ending. Thus he describes a cycle/circle starting out from the feminine and coming back to the same feminine principle. This cycle/circle is a symbol of the androgynous, round, spherical construction of Cunningham's novel, particularly strengthened by the overtly androgynous topics in the bulk of his novel. His spherical, cyclical novel is an epitome of Cunningham's own androgyny, which is intensely mirrored in his fiction.

Woolf's novel, on the other hand, contrasts with Cunningham's cyclical build-up. Woolf starts out from a masculine beginning and does not come back to the same trope, according to the principle of cyclicity, but rather switches to a feminine ending. Thus her evolution and build-up is not androgynous/spherical, but linear: from the masculine to the feminine. This naturally implies a certain feminization in the Woolfian literary build-up, yet the feminine principle cannot enjoy the same importance and prime role that it possesses in Cunningham's pastiche. Moreover, Woolf's androgynous topics within the novel are much vaguer as compared to Cunningham's feminine/deconstructive style, at a distance of seventy-three years.

Conclusion

Regardless of their real-life androgyny, the two authors live in different moments of history. Therefore they prove different levels of courage in defulating their androgyny within their masterpieces. Cunningham overtly reflects his androgyny in his entire spherical / androgynous novel, in terms of

shape, build-up, narrative plans, characters and their trajectories, colours and architecture. Woolf on the other hand, is much more veiled, adopting a more masculine literary style: the shape of *Mrs. Dalloway* is linear, the characters are closer to heteronormativity, while the London architecture is entirely phallic, lacking any feminine elements, most importantly the Thames.

References

- Bell, Q. 1972. *Virginia Woolf. A Biography*. San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Caird, M. 2002 (1891). 'The Yellow Drawing-Room' in *Women Who Did*. A. Richardson (ed.). London, New York: Penguin.
- Chevalier, J. and A. Gheerbrant. 1995. *Dicționar de simboluri*. Vol. 1. București: Editura Artemis.
- Cunningham, M. 1998. *The Hours*. London: Clays Ltd.
- Forward, S. 2000. 'Study in Yellow: Mona Caird's The Yellow Drawing-Room', in *Women's Writing*, Vol. 7/2.
- Jung, C. G., K. Kerényi. 1994. *Copilul divin. Fecioara divină. Introducere în esența mitologiei*. Timișoara: Amarcord.
- McLaren, A. 2002. *Sexualitatea secolului XX. O istorie*. București: Editura Trei.
- Peregrin, T. 2003. 'Michael Cunningham after *Hours*' in *Gay and Lesbian Review*, Mar/Apr. Vol. 10/ 2.
- Perkins Gilman, C. 1992 (1892). *The Yellow Wallpaper*. London: Virago.
- Showalter, E. 1981. 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' in *Critical Inquiry*. Vol.8/2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Showalter, E. 1993. 'A Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory' in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Robyn R. Warhol and D. Prince Herndl (eds.). New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Wilson, J. M. 2000. *Virginia Woolf's London*. London: Tauris Parke.
- Woolf, V. 1992. *Jacob's Room*, London: Penguin.

- Woolf, V. 1980. *Jurnalul unei scriitoare*. București: Editura Univers.
- Woolf, V. 1968. *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Zelinka, E. 2006. 'Virginia Woolf - *Mrs. Dalloway*. A Psychoanalytical Reinterpretation of the Canon' in *Gender Studies*. Vol.1/5, Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest.
- Zelinka, E. 2008. 'Virginia Woolf's Oriental Discourse in *Orlando* (1928)' in *Gender Studies*. Vol.1/7. Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest.
- Zelinka, Elisabeta. 2009. 'The Woolf - Cunningham Literary Trajectory. Feminization of Time' in *Gender Studies*, Vol.1/.8. Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest.

Webography:

- Cunningham, Michael. 2005. *USA TODAY Book Club: Michael Cunningham*, "Interact with People in the News", in USA TODAY.com, 01.21.2005. [Online]. Available: http://www.usatoday.com/community/chat_03/2003-03-27-cunningham.htm [2009, September 01]
- Evans, Jim, *Polyamory Flag*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.isomedia.com/homes/jene/flag.html> [2009, September 01]
- Human Rights Campaign*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.funtrivia.com/en/subtopics/LGBT-Signs-and-Symbols-200193.html> [2009, September 01]
- Schiff, James. 2004. "Rewriting Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*: Homage, Sexual Identity, and the Single-Day Novel by Cunningham, Lippincott, and Lanchester", in *Critique*; Summer 2004, Vol. 45, Issue 4, pp. 363-382, also available online at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb3229/is_200406/ai_n7902492 [2009, September 01]
- Setoodeh, Ramin. 2003. Interview with Michael Cunningham "Life after 'The Hours': Stanford alumnus Michael Cunningham talks about Hollywood and his future", *The Stanford Daily*, April 4, 2003. [Online]. Available: <http://daily.stanford.edu/article/2003/4/4/lifeAfterTheHoursStanfordAlumnusMichaelCunninghamTalksAboutHollywoodAndHisFuture> [2009, September 01]

Wood, M. 1998. "Parallel Lives", in *New York Times*. November 22, 1998. [Online].
Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/11/22/books/parallel-lives.html> [2009,
September 01]

**MARK RAVENHILL'S PLAYS – WOMAN'S NOURISHING ROLE
IN A BARREN HOMOSEXUAL WORLD.**

HILDEGARD KLEIN

University of Malaga

Abstract This paper studies the emotional sterility in the characters' lives in Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* and *Some Explicit Polaroids*. The plays portray mainly a world of homosexuality, where women are not needed sexually, but where their presence is required to nourish the morally and physically disaffected male figures. Thus women assume the role of substitute mothers to

give “these boys” parental guidance and affection, to the detriment of their own happiness.

Key Words: Ravenhill, feeding, drug addiction, consumerism, sex, violence, masculinity in crisis, homosexuality.

Introduction

In the 1990s a wave of young, unknown dramatists, among them Mark Ravenhill, produced a renaissance in British theatre. It was a generation of Thatcher’s children who employed new formal dramatic structures to confront political realities in post-Thatcher Britain by presenting shocking forms of violence, explicit sex and crude language. They used the theatre to vent their frustration and anger on capitalist consumer society established by Thatcher’s Conservative Government. Most of the 1990s plays portray a generation of disaffected youths who lead meaningless lives in an urban world of consumerism, lacking any social or political principles. This new impulse in British theatre prompted by novel playwrights was labelled, among other epithets, as “in-yer-face” theatre, coined by Aleks Sierz (2002).

Ravenhill established himself as an enthralling playwright with his controversial play *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), staged a year after Sarah Kane’s notorious *Blasted* (1995). Both plays were decisive in opening up innovative, fresh ground in British theatre. As the title of Ravenhill’s play indicates, it portrays a world dominated by consumerism and sex. The characters’ emotional emptiness seeks pleasure in a commercial culture of takeaway food, drug consumption, and mostly loveless sex. In *Introduction to Plays*:1, Rebellato explains: “[T]he sexual explicitness in these plays is part of his (Ravenhill’s) scandalised portrait of an apolitical generation with no values but economic ones, media-fixated and self-obsessed, fucking while Rome burns” (Ravenhill 2001:xiii). The young characters are trapped in an

emotional emptiness that “points toward a deeper void in isolated lives that draw nothing from social, moral, or historical sources of meaning” (Kritzer 2008: 39).

I have chosen to write about two of Ravenhill’s plays, *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999), since both plays portray the effect of extreme capitalism on young individuals and both show the disappearance of the notion of society provoked by Thatcher’s policies. The characters lead solitary lives because they have no families to cling to, existing in a society of absent or threatening fathers and missing mothers. Both plays present a similar pattern, which consists of a group of young people, Lulu, Robbie, Mark (and Gary) in the first-mentioned play, and Nadia, Tim and Victor in the second, who come into contact with older people – Brian in *Shopping and Fucking* and Nick, Helen and Jonathan in *Some Explicit Polaroids*. In an interview with Monforte, Ravenhill says that the young characters in *Shopping and Fucking* try „to make up for the loss of a family”, by “forming [those] family units, playing roles within them, and the need to tell stories socializes them” (2007:93). He adds that “the young characters are in a world that’s without politics, without religion, without family, without any kind of history, without structures or narratives, and as a consequence they have to build up their own structures” (93). In fact, the young people in both plays are in want of a nuclear family and have started to build a surrogate family, composed of a woman and two homosexual/bisexual men, in response to a need for shelter and safety. Using an episodic structure, we view a series of incidents in the characters’ lives and listen to the narration of seventeen stories in which they try to make sense of the world.

Similarly, in *Some Explicit Polaroids*, the young characters, Nadia, Tim and Victor, do not have a sense of history or cultural politics, while the older characters, Helen, Nick and Jonathan, do. Most of the characters in this play, as in *Shopping and Fucking*, show a need to form a relationship and to look after somebody, or to be looked after. Ravenhill has pointed out that the two plays are optimistic, because they show “how human beings can never be completely isolated – they will always try to form groups” (2007: 93).

The Nourishing Role of Women in Ravenhill’s Plays

Both in *Shopping and Fucking* and in *Some Explicit Polaroids* we are presented with a kind of *ménage à trois* but without the male desire for a heterosexual relationship. Here the sexual drive is directed at another male, though it mostly lacks any emotional association. Therefore, in the absence of a meaningful heterosexual relationship within the group, the question ought to be raised as to why Ravenhill has included women as members of the “family”, and what their position or role is. In my opinion, women do have an important function in both plays, which I attempt to illustrate in this work. In this sense I disagree with Michelene Wander’s assertion: “Lulu could be excised from the play and it would not be substantially different”, and “[w]omen do not exist here – except as implicitly absent mothers” (2001: 229). To my mind, adopting the position of an “absent mother” is precisely the significant role endorsed by women in Ravenhill’s two plays. In fact, throughout *Shopping and Fucking* Lulu is quasi obsessed with feeding the members of her group, even with stolen food. Providing nourishment and feeding is doubtlessly one of the vital occupations associated with motherhood. Significantly, the play starts and ends with a scene where Lulu, Robbie and Mark feed each other some takeaway food. They are in a “*Flat* –

once rather stylish, now almost entirely stripped bare” (Ravenhill 1996: 3). Here I share Wandor’s view: “This descent from a secure, ‘stylish’ home to a bare space heralds the emotional barrenness which shapes these people’s lives” (227).

The members of the group – Lulu, Robbie and Mark - are named after the pop group Take That, and “Lulu’s name was not only a reference to the single she recorded with Take That, but also an in-joke: in 1994, Ravenhill had written a BBC World Service radio adaptation of Wedekind’s *Lulu plays* (Sierz 2001:130). These consist of *Earth-Spirit (Erdgeist)* (1895) and *Pandora’s Box (Die Büchse der Pandora)* (1904). Wedekind’s creation of the mesmerizing female character, Lulu, has attracted important writers, who adapted or translated it, Mark Ravenhill in 1994, Edward Bond and Elisabeth Bond-Pablé in 1993. The latter’s translation was published as *Lulu: A Monster Tragedy*, with a historically illuminating introduction about Wedekind’s life and work. Bond’s Notes, titled „Using *Lulu*”, are enlightening because they explain the fascination with Wedekind’s Lulu and its relevance to our time, a hundred years after its original publication. *Lulu* is a play “about sex and money” (Bond 1993:63), as are those of Ravenhill. When the play was written, “Europe was obsessed with sex and money and fascinated by the recent murders of Jack the Ripper. The murders combined sex with money and violence [...] and the victims were poor prostitutes” (Bond 1993:63). When Lulu was a child, she was sold for sex [...]. She comes from the gutter, lives in mansions and ends on the street. [...] In the end her body is turned into cash when Jack the Ripper cuts out her womb to sell it (63).

Ravenhill’s Lulu does not suffer the tragic fate of Wedekind’s Lulu, but she can be compared with this character in terms of her struggle to

overcome adversity, and because of her involvement with some kind of economic transaction. “In scene after scene, the boys foul up and it is Lulu, the woman, who holds things together” (Sierz 2001:130). Indeed, Lulu is the comforting centre of the group and her pragmatism and strength lead her to solve the many economical and emotional problems that arise among them. *Shopping and Fucking* starts with Lulu and Robbie “*trying to get Mark to eat from a carton of takeaway food* (Ravenhill 2001:3). Being a drug-addict, Mark cannot abide food. To distract him, he is asked to narrate his “shopping story”, a fantasy in which he buys Lulu and Robbie for twenty from a ‘fat man’ in the supermarket. The owner now rejects them with the argument that they are trash (5). Mark, the new owner, decides to leave the group to cure his drug-dependency. His departure compels Robbie and Lulu to survive on their own, which ironically recalls Mark’s catchphrase ending his shopping story: “And we live out our days fat and content and happy” (5). Robbie, in love with Mark, blames him for not responding to his feelings, while Lulu tries to console Robbie by assuring him that they are free now, not owned (7). The stress on “not owned” is of extreme importance in the commercial world portrayed by Ravenhill, where human beings are bought and sold.

Out of economic necessity – Robbie has been fired from a fast-food service job - Lulu enters the world of drug-dealing and becomes involved with the middle-aged gangster Brian. He wants her to strip for him. When she reluctantly removes her jacket, “*two chilled ready meals fall to the floor*” (12). Accused by Brian, she defends herself: “We have to eat. [...] I’m not a shoplifter. By nature. My instinct is for work” (12). Lulu agrees to an audition, convinced that Brian is offering her an acting job as she is a “trained actress” (11). However, she finally learns that the work consists of

selling three hundred Ecstasy tablets. She proposes to sell them with Robbie, who gets high on the tablets and, on an impulse of idealism, gives away the rest to some addicts. Brian threatens the couple with torture, and mobilised by the need to raise the money they owe him, they start to sell telephone sex.

In the meantime, Mark has had “Lick and Go” sex (observe the commercial-like slogan!) with another addict in the toilet of the drug-rehabilitation clinic and is consequently dismissed (19). He falls in with Gary, a 14-year-old rent boy, who has run away from the repeated and violent abuse of his stepfather. Reluctantly Mark becomes involved because of the boy’s helplessness and terrible pain. They talk about the meaning of love and feeling, which is either alien to them or instinctively rejected to avoid emotional involvement. For both Mark and Gary sex is a simple commercial transaction. Gary relates primarily to Mark because he is driven by his fixed desire for a father figure. He cannot articulate his traumatic experience and internalized oppression, and so he dreams about a strong, firm and cruel bloke to take him away (65-6). He wants to enact his trauma by having his father, or the bloke he is looking for, penetrate him with a knife. In agreement with trauma theory and Freud, “through repetition a trauma from the past may eventually be recognized and mastered” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) in Buse 2001:174). Unfortunately, Gary does not have the tools to find emotional liberation in the re-enactment of the pain endured during the abuse, and so he seeks release in death. The climax of the play is reached when Mark brings Gary to Robbie and Lulu’s flat, provoking Robbie’s obsessive jealousy that turns into nastiness and violence.

The play reflects the crisis of masculinity that started in the 1960s, enacted by Jimmy Porter in Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1957). In search of his sexual identity, he is torn between a normal male’s sexual attraction

towards his wife, Alison, and a latent homosexual desire for his friend Cliff. As Wandor (2001: 43) observes: “[In] order to establish his manhood, he has to attack women”. Ravenhill’s play, too, as most of the nineties boys’ plays, is “about definitions of maleness” (Sierz 2001:130). The boys portrayed, Gary, Mark and Robbie, have not grown up, and it is Lulu, the only woman of the group, who is “forced to play mummy” (130) and to give them support, while she implores them to become adults. Lulu, dimly aware of the dilemma of the group, longs for a different, “normal” life. Mother-like, she is mostly comforting, but she can also be violent when the boys misbehave. After the E tablets episode, Robbie was violently beaten up by one of the addicts. Lulu’s first reaction is to dress his bruises and to console him, even through masturbation. An instant later, though, she gives vent to her anger at his unrestrained behaviour and throws the bottle of disinfectant into his eyes while voicing the following significant thoughts:

Boys grow up you know and stop playing with each other’s willies. Men and women make the future. There are people out there who need me. Normal people who have kind tidy sex and when they want it. And boys? Boys just fuck each other (39).

After Mark’s departure, she had voiced her nostalgic feelings as regards her connection with Robbie, wishing to be “back to before. Just you and me” (31). It appears that Robbie had maintained, “before”, a heterosexual relationship with Lulu. However, being bisexual and suffering from gender confusion, he definitely feels more attracted to men and has become infatuated with Mark. It is made clear that Lulu’s overwhelming need for affection and genuine love is not satisfied, but, in want of a real family, she sticks to her surrogate family and takes refuge in her mother role.

Lulu tells Robbie that she wants to be free, that she does not want to live like this, selling sex on the phone (58). During a break from their phone work, she tries to feed Robbie with microwave food. In response to his rejection, because “it doesn’t taste of anything”, she offers a satire of globalisation: “You’ve got the world here, an empire under cellophane [...] China. India. Indonesia” (61). With this mocking argument she insists on Robbie eating and pushes his face savagely into the food.

Notably, Lulu’s nourishing role is not restricted to food but can be interpreted as a symbol of guidance and peace-making among the boys. This becomes of paramount importance when the three men, out of obsessive jealousy, start to fight, Robbie leaping on Gary, starting to strangle him, Mark attacking Robbie, who goes on attacking Gary. Significantly, throughout the fight, Lulu tries to protect the ready-cooked meals that get crushed. She finally manages to stop their violent fight, asking “Why is everything such a mess?” (63) Though she is referring to the crushed food, the question can be extended to the *messy* situation of their lives. The four members of the group finally sit down to play a truth and dare game, which culminates in Gary’s offer to reimburse the money they owe Brian if they penetrate him with a knife. Lulu initially joins in the fantasy game, watching the two men inflicting violent anal sex on the blindfolded Gary. However, when she becomes aware of the fatal outcome of the end-game, she breaks off, together with Robbie. It is a frightening image when Mark decides to act on his own leading the blindfolded Gary out of the room. I share Sierz’s, view who considers Gary a symbol of neglect, abuse, urban drift (2001: 131). Ravenhill, in turn, states that Gary “seems to be the victim, but actually it’s the others who have become victims because he’s led them to a point where he expects them to do something which horrifies them” (2007: 31). In this sense, Kritzer alleges: “Like money, sex is a function of power that turns

people into objects of exchange and teaches them complicity in their own oppression” (2008: 41). In fact, Ravenhill wants to show that sex without love or care lacks creative potential and psychological regeneration for the characters, but “has become merely a habit that fosters disgust and self-annihilation” (2007:41).

The play ends with the arrival of Brian, who has transmuted from gangster to evangelist, preaching his capitalist gospel “money is civilization” (87). Being the only mature character in the play, Brian knows about old values, but his moral lesson advocates the most excessive spirit of capitalism (Sierz 2001: 132). In his presence, Lulu quotes some significant lines from Irina’s speech (Act IV: 329) in Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*: “One day we’ll know what all this was for, all this suffering, there’ll be no more mysteries, but until then we have to carry on living [...] we must work” (88). There is an important parallelism with Irina’s emphasis on the importance of work, and her longing to make sense of life, and Lulu and her flatmates’ bleak situation. Finally Brian leaves exultantly, offering them the holdall of money (87). Lulu and Robbie sit down to share another ready meal, joined by Mark. There is blood on his face, which points towards his implication in Gary’s supposed death. It is a desolate, frightening ending, but in Ravenhill’s opinion the final image is optimistic because of “them feeding each other and looking after each other” (2007: 95). Yet the question has to be asked, what will become of them in the future, selling sex on the phone and dealing drugs?

Some Explicit Polaroids (1999) is again a cutting critique of nineties trash culture, junk food, pornography, and drug consumption. This post-Thatcher youth culture is contrasted with the 1970s leftist politics, when there was personal commitment and political action. This activism is represented by Nick, just released from prison. He was sentenced in 1984 for

his assault on Jonathan, whom he considered an immoral capitalist entrepreneur. Nick feels confused about the many changes introduced in society between 1984 and 1999. He has been frozen in time and is bewildered at the new *zeitgeist*, materialized in Helen's character, who had a romantic liaison with Nick and shared his radical activism. However, she has adapted to the altered social situation by becoming a New Labour councillor with ambitions to become an MP. Nick visits Helen, now middle-aged, to renew their association, but she denies him shelter. During Nick's absence, Helen had a number of relationships with some blokes, but also with a woman. Furiously, she rejects his criticism about her lifestyle and the abandonment of her ideals by asking him to state just one concrete objective their radical activism achieved (238). Nick's bewildering situation can be compared to Karl Thomas' in Ernst Toller's 1927 expressionist play, *Hoppla, wir leben! (Hurrah, we live!)*. Karl was imprisoned for his role in the 1919 Spartacist uprising in Germany. Released after eight years, he has to rediscover society, but he fails due to the disloyalty, conformism and corruption of his ex-revolutionary comrades. This disillusion leads to his suicide. Nick, fortunately, does not suffer Karl's destiny, but, with the help of Helen, will find a new possibility to face life when she finally recalls the value inherent in the socialist alternative.

In contrast with the older characters, the young generation represented by Nadia, Tim and Victor lack the notion of history or the knowledge of narratives, which produces a sense of loss and emptiness. Like the young people in *Shopping and Fucking*, their family-like group consists of two homosexual men and a woman. They convey yet again the image of the post-Thatcher generation. howe kritzer (sic) states: "Nadia, Tim and Victor deny their pervasive sense of emptiness through the construct of 'happy world'

(269) – a reference to their cohort as Generation Ecstasy” (2008: 45). This hedonism and self-indulgence is reinforced by their “ironic illusion with perverse pride in their consumption of junk food, pornography, and other products of ‘trash’ culture” (45). Nadia is a lapdancer who has established an association with Tim, an HIV positive who exists thanks to life-prolonging drugs, and Tim’s lover Victor, an economic migrant from Russia. Victor is obsessed with his “fucking fantastic body”, and dreams of becoming “a huge porno star” (239). Not only guys, but also his father and brother “go crazy for his body” and take Polaroids of it (241) (hence the title of the play). Tim has adopted a mock father role towards Nadia and Victor, while Nadia, in turn, assumes the role of mother by looking after the terminally-ill Tim. Furthermore, in her nourishing role she tries to convince Victor that Tim has feelings, that he is not simply a consumer product. Having associated with two homosexuals, Nadia searches for sexual pleasure outside the group, but she receives violence rather than love. She is viciously beaten up by her boyfriend Simon in the street and this is how she becomes involved with Nick, who helps her back to her flat. He feels indignant at her reaction, because, rather than joining in Nick’s anger at Simon’s brutal behaviour, “a sexist bastard” (254), Nadia wants to forget things that “would be hurting” her (253). She claims throughout to be “a nice person” and to think in a positive way. This leads her to excuse her boyfriend’s cruelty – “Simon’s a friend who I shag once in a while” (247) – by pointing out that he had a difficult childhood. Once again, Ravenhill presents the theme of masculinity in crisis, where men have not grown up. Like Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*, Simon uses violence to show sham virility. Has he been traumatized in his childhood, as Gary in *Shopping and Fucking*? He is certainly emotionally deprived and his vulnerability, or weakness, turns into

aggression. As Ravenhill and the theatre of the 1990s shows, people suffer from isolation and try to hide their emotions and feelings so that they express themselves through bodily violence (Klein 2005: 157-69). Nick is terribly enraged at Nadia's acquiescence and acceptance of her victimization. She desperately attempts to justify Simon's behaviour because he is frightened, and "a child inside" (254). In her role of victim, Nadia is convinced that she cannot abandon this suffering "child", who needs to be nourished and cared for. Nick wants her to react against Simon's brutality and to face reality, but at that moment she can only laugh at his anger and sense of injustice.

As a child Nadia is herself physically abused by her paedophilic father, but, shockingly, she does not count him as such (257) which goes counter to Gary's experience that traumatised him for life. Nevertheless, Nick is convinced that her self-delusions about being happy are lies. Indeed, "the hectic fantasy of Tim, Nadia and Victor's 'happy world' seems fatuous when confronted with the realities of HIV infection, domestic violence and loveless sex" (Sierz 2001: 146). In spite of the mutual attraction and love that has arisen between Nadia and Nick, he finally leaves her and her two associates because he "can't handle [...] this happy stuff" (275). He cannot look at Nadia's bruises covered with make-up, while Victor gyrates wildly around in a cage in a nightclub high on drugs exhibiting his "fantastic cock" (274) and Tim is being fed with heavy painkillers.

Nick's departure makes Nadia reflect on the recurrent pattern in her life of people abandoning her. However, she feels that contact with Nick and his love has made her grow. In my opinion, Nadia is instrumental in convincing Nick to stick to his old values, not to embrace their "trash" culture and fake happiness. To forget her loneliness, Nadia clings to Tim, who is her "very best and closest friend" (265), begging him not to desert her. When he finally dies, his loss plunges her into despair. Sierz refers to "the

deep and painfully emotional core” (2001: 147) of the play, when Tim refuses to take his pills because of the endless postponement of death. Thus he wishes to resume control over his life: “I want to know where I am” (288), by “choosing objective reality over happy world” (Kritzer 2008: 45). Nadia and Victor tried persistently, but in vain, to feed Tim the pills and it is only when the two pretend to have sex with each other that he gives in. However, a few hours later he is dead. There is a great sense of loss pervading this play, because the two homosexuals, Tim and Victor, acknowledge deep feelings and love when it is too late. Tim reappears at the end of scene ten as a ghost, pleading for Victor to masturbate him. “Masturbating a corpse is a powerful image of futility, and Tim’s realization, too late, that he does love Victor makes the scene a gut-wrenching one” (Sierz 2001:147). For the first time, Victor, who always pretended not to feel anything, suffers the ache of his lost love for Tim. His death forces Nadia and Victor to face reality at last. Victor has decided to work as a model in Tokyo, leaving Nadia on her own, who, afraid of solitude, asserts that even being hit by Simon is better than to be alone: “Bleeding but somebody’s there” (301). Jonathan comes to her aid when once again she is badly beaten up. This chance encounter helps her understand that her self-delusions about being happy are lies, thus echoing Nick’s previous assertion. The only thing remaining to Nadia is the perishable Polaroid photo of Victor.

Nick, in the meantime, is leading the life of a vagabond, drinking heavily to forget his inability to adapt to the new times. He even yearns to return to prison. Helen is now willing to take him back on condition he makes peace with Jonathan. When Jonathan is confronted with a shattered individual unable to fight any more, he forgives him his past injury. Both express nostalgic feelings about their mutual struggle and the time they spent together (310). Nick is now free to return to Helen. He wants to look after

her, love her, and she in turn wants to invigorate his character: “I want to make you into what you used to be” (314). Helen’s “nourishing” role resides in helping Nick to grow up and to take responsibility for their lives, which includes the necessity to feel anger. Helen “chooses Nick as her living memory” (Sierz 2001:146) and both reconnect to their past experience as political activists. “Nick and Helen had a history at the beginning of the play and they seem to be starting a new possibility of a different narrative at the end, whereas the other characters don’t have any real sense of their own narrative, of their own history” (Ravenhill 2007: 94). This impression is different in the case of the younger characters, especially Nadia, who is trapped and alone in the world of the play. Her nourishing role in the trio was rewarded by Tim’s brotherly love, and the loss of it makes her scared of solitude. Nevertheless, “Tim’s death has given them (Nadia and Victor) a common reality and a memory that they will take with them into the future” (Kritzer 2008: 46).

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to stress once more that Ravenhill’s plays express our need to be members of a society, and the profound yearning for company. “Despite the characters’ desire to be their own people, their attempt to refuse meaning, to glory in the escape from moral responsibility, reality and each other, Ravenhill affirms our fundamentally social character, that we are only ourselves when we are with others, forming human social bonds that are not driven by economic exchange” (Rebellato, xviii). Helen takes Nick back because she needs to adhere to her past memory. Lulu stays with Robbie and Mark because she craves company, backing the boys up even by sacrificing part of her personal happiness. Nadia’s fate is bleaker, because she is left alone after Tim’s death. Hopefully, she will try to establish a new

association with somebody who can share her experience, rejecting violence as represented by Simon and projecting her nourishing care and love on to somebody who is capable of reciprocating feeling.

References

- Aragay, M., H. Klein, E. Monforte & P. Zozoya. 2007. *British Theatre of the 1990s. Interviews with Directors, Playwrights, Critics and Academics*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bond, E. 1993. "Using *Lulu*" in F. Wedekind. *Plays: One Spring Awakening. Lulu: A Monster Tragedy*. Transl. and introd. by E. Bond and E. Bond-Pablé, London: Methuen
- Buse, P. 2001. *Drama + Theory. Critical Approaches to Modern British Drama*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Chekhov, A. 1954 (1951). *Plays*. London: Penguin.
- Klein, H. 2005. "Perpetrators and Victims in British Controversial In-Yer-Face Drama of the 1990s", *Gender Studies*. 1/4, pp. 157-70.
- Kritzer, A.H. 2008. *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain. New Writing: 1995-2005*. E. Aston & B. Reynolds (eds). Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ravenhill, M. 2001. *Plays: 1. Shopping and F***ing. Faust is Dead. Handbag. Some Explicit Polaroids*. Introd. by D. Rebellato. London: Methuen.
- Ravenhill, M. 2007. 'Interviewed by E. Monforte' in *British Theatre of the 1990s*. Aragay, M.; H. Klein et al. (eds). Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rebellato, D. 2001. 'Introduction'. M. Ravenhill. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen, pp. ix-xx.
- Sierz, A. 2001. *In-Yer-Face Theatre. British Drama Today*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Wandor, M. 2001. *Post-War British Drama. Looking Back in Gender*. London: Routledge.

Women Writers Subvert the Canon

**FEMALE APPROPRIATION OF THE PLOT IN
CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE**

VLADISLAVA GORDIĆ PETKOVIĆ,

NATAŠA KARANFILOVIĆ

University of Novi Sad

Abstract: Appropriation of the plot by a female narrator supplies familiar plots with new gender dimensions and discursive repercussions. Gloria Cigman's *A Wife There Was* rewrites *Canterbury Tales* as the Wife of Bath's memoir, in Coetzee's *Foe* the female narrator turns Robinson Crusoe's story into a political parable, and Mirjana Đurđević's *Kaya, Belgrade and the Good American* reinvents the author's self.

Key words: appropriation, Cigman, Coetzee, Đurđević, feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism.

1. Introduction

Appropriation of the plot has been a wondrous postmodernist strategy on the verge of the stylistic practice American writer Kathy Acker used to call "playgiarism". In her book *My Death My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini* (1994) Acker provides a fictional autobiography of the Italian filmmaker, appropriating his tragic fate and its multiple repercussions for her specific artistic purposes. When Pasolini was killed, in 1975, the murder produced something of a shock in the Italian artistic and literary establishment. The event in itself was mysterious enough to migrate almost at once from fact to fiction, assuming mythic proportions and allowing for several diverging versions. The enigma of the murder produced an empty space, soon to be filled by several possible stories, reactivating the myth of the fallen artist, lost by his own walking on the verge of political and personal transgression. The story is told backwards, by Pasolini himself, who first of all solves his murder

and then retrospectively narrates his own life. Acker exploits Pasolini's profile as an artist to tell her own story of marginality and bravery.

Far less radical than in the case of Acker, appropriation is a continuous reediting and reinventing of the text which in most cases revives the marginal and the hidden. "Women writers in the nineties also became interested in reimagining classic American literature from a female perspective," Elaine Showalter claims in her *A Jury of Her Peers* (Showalter 2009: 502), and she reminds her reader of Susan Sontag's *Alice in Bed* (1993), a play which brings together Henry James's sister Alice, Margaret Fuller and Emily Dickinson in a surreal tea party which reminds us of *Alice in Wonderland* and echoes Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, as Alice James is imagined by Sontag as a thwarted female genius Woolf called Shakespeare's sister. Sena Jeter Naslund's novel *Ahab's Wife: or, The Star-Gazer* (1999) springs from the author's desire to write about a woman's spiritual quest and to rewrite a specimen of the great American novel which would, unlike *Huckleberry Finn* or *Moby Dick*, have some important women characters in it. Naslund constructs Una, Ahab's wife, fashioning from a few brief passages where Ahab refers to his wife and child the entire world of a woman who is an adventurer in her own right. Una disguises herself and goes to sea, where she deals with whaling, shipwreck and survival. There is even a character called Susan, a pregnant slave Una helps to escape across the frozen Ohio River, as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Naslund mentions fourteen books that inspired her novel, Morrison's *Beloved* among others. *Ahab's Wife* has been praised by scholars and critics as a kind of „feminist corrective”.

Setting out to write a novel complementary to *Moby Dick* is supremely ambitious for an American writer, but Sena Jeter Naslund presumed to do it because Captain Ahab's obsessive pursuit of the white

whale is specifically about men whereas her heroine is the wife Ahab refers to as a “sweet, resigned girl” whom he wedded when he was past 50 and left behind when he went to sea. In Jeter Naslund’s novel this girl becomes an adventurer, Una Spenser, bold enough to stand up to her father and admit her crisis in religious belief or to run away to sea disguised as a cabin boy. She survives months adrift in an open boat after her ship is wrecked by a (black) whale. She “marries” without the bother of a formal ceremony - three times. She lives where and how she pleases, abandoning those who would hold her back, driven on by her desire for experience, will to survive and carelessness of mores.

2. The Wife of Bath: from self-sacrifice to self-gratification

A fine example of the postmodern strategy of appropriation can be found in the first novel by medieval scholar Gloria Cigman, *A Wife There Was* (2007). Heavily based upon Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, the novel tells the story of Alison, picturing fourteenth century England as an exciting but dangerous place full of hunger, war and death. Such an environment offers meagre prospects for a woman who wishes to live and learn, both to drain the cup of experience and to enjoy it. The third millennium vision of Chaucer’s famous Wife of Bath is as an unwanted daughter raised as a boy, rebellious and disobedient but also fragile and troubled with spiritual conflicts. Living in a turbulent age also means living a turbulent life, and many troubles come her way – forbidden love as well as forbidden pleasures, adultery and abortion, adventure and peril. Gloria Cigman appropriates Chaucer’s heroine with her distinctive qualities, picturing her down to the tiniest detail, acquainting us with Alison’s friends and foes, even with her illegitimate daughter who was, curiously enough, raised by the Prioress Eglentine.

The first important change the novel *A Wife There Was* introduces is the plot itself: the heroine is endowed with a detailed life story and furnished with details such as all the names, characters and places which could not have been embedded into the paratactic structure of *Canterbury Tales*. The juxtaposed individual portraits and tales connected only by the pilgrimage motif provide the reader of Chaucer's masterpiece with a representative panorama of fourteenth century society, starting from the top of the social scale and the highest point of the moral scale and going downwards, but not much space was available for developing the respective private histories of people belonging to clergy, nobility or commoners.

In a manner much more developed than Chaucer's, Gloria Cigman elaborately shows how the Wife of Bath uses the institutions of church, pilgrimage and marriage to channel her passionate temperament. Her heroine's radix trait is an uninhibited appetite for physical love and travel, seen in the first word in her prologue (*experience*), and her desire for *mastery*, which dominates in her tale. The Wife of Bath's doctrine of marriage based on female supremacy could never be stated openly in Chaucer's work. Gloria Cigman decides to elaborate the doctrine not only as a reaction to the traditional view of marriage imposed by the church fathers and common law, but also as a strategy to cope with difficulties and unexpected twists and turns of fate.

Whereas Chaucer's Wife of Bath is well acquainted with the Holy Scripture and dedicated to deconstructing it in the major part of her prologue by picking and choosing the quotations and episodes which support her way of thinking, Cigman's Alison undermines the patriarchal codes with more wit and energy, embarking on numerous adventures by using her religious faith as a cunning excuse. She is also less radical than Chaucer's heroine in her

marital tactics. While the Prologue reveals how Alison reduces her husbands to complete submission and obedience, all except the fifth, the former “clerk of Oxenford”, exposing her struggle to subdue her partners less in terms of a feminist struggle than as a farcical treatment of female supremacy, Cigman insists on rich emotional scope, ranging from lust to grief, from self-sacrifice to self-gratification. Still, her Alison invests her emotional and sexual energy even into loveless marriages, supporting her husbands in all their endeavours.

3. Past lives of Mirjana Đurđević

A very specific, even unique, case of appropriation is turning the author’s self into a fictitious character. Kathy Acker used to multiply her identity in her fiction, as does her Serbian follower and translator Nina Živančević, who freely shares her name and identity with the characters in her novels. But a very specific case of appropriation can be found in the latest novel by Serbian author Mirjana Đurđević, whose witty and comic projection of her own incarnation inhabits her fiction.

Mirjana Đurđević’s eleventh novel *Kaya, Belgrade and the Good American* is an appealing page-turner which can deceive its readers in many ways. Apart from being a family saga and a social docu-drama about Belgrade from the 1920s to the 1950s, the novel contains various motifs and themes, ranging from melodrama to mystery, that keep the reader deeply engrossed in the intricate but wildly hilarious plot. The author partially reconstructs the history of the Kalmyks, a western Mongol people whose temple in Belgrade was the only place of Buddhist worship in Europe between 1929 and 1944. More precisely, she is interested in the brief historical episode of the Kalmyks’ arrival in Yugoslavia after the Russian Revolution, which followed after the savage reprisals by Bolsheviks against the Kalmyk people and their Buddhist clergy. Settling in Belgrade, a small

Kalmyk community lives a secluded life and yet invests energy into strengthening ties with their new home. Kaya is a young Kalmyk girl who lives through turbulent episodes in her childhood and youth, including forbidden pleasures, flirtation and putting her child up for adoption, but also the robbery of church relics and participation in Nazi experiments. She bedazzles John Dyneley Prince, the US Ambassador to Yugoslavia and a renowned linguist, becomes his protégée and the next best substitute for his absent granddaughter.

The Kalmyk girl and the good American of the title are very close friends of Serbian writer Mica Đurđević, who is a sort of previous incarnation of the novel's author herself. Mirjana Đurđević gives a humorous sketch of her former self, inventing her namesake who lived in the first half of the twentieth century as a writer and fencing teacher who trained young girls. Ms Đurđević is also a former student of architecture who spends a great deal of her time fighting tooth and nail to provide proper urban planning for Belgrade. Most of her stratagems or ideas go awry, but she never gives up either on spying Kaya or on selflessly helping the Kalmyk community.

Susan Barton – the Female Castaway

Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), as a recasting of the castaway tale, has been predominantly approached and interpreted from the postcolonial stance which appraises the novel as an example of the appropriation of textual power and the reconstructive subversion of canonical texts of British literature. It is Edward Said who postulates texts as "events [which] are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course, the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said 1983: 4) and suggests that critics and theoreticians should "read and write with a sense of the greater

stake in historical and political effectiveness that literary as well as other texts have had” (Said 1983: 225). Consequently, he proposes the strategy of “contrapuntal reading” (Said 1994: 59) which places the text within cultural, political and institutional contexts of imperial production and colonial consumption with special emphasis on the important role of literary texts in facilitating British imperial hegemony over “willing” colonial subjects. Said’s contrapuntal reading of British literature explicates its (c)overt compliance with imperialistic ideology and colonial practices.

Read contrapuntally, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, with its motif of a castaway on a tropical island, yields the paradigm of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, relegating the tale of adventure to a secondary position to the paradigm of British colonial experience and mercantile expansion. The postcolonial inquiry into the British canonical text reveals it to be a parable of British enterprise in establishing absolute control over colonial domains as well as a metaphor of belief in the European civilising mission and the triumph of progress over wilderness. In the spirit of Protestant tradition and mercantile ethics, Crusoe becomes a self-appointed master of the island where he toils to create a replica of Western civilisation. In much the same manner, he asserts his superiority over the native whom he names Friday, makes him wear clothes, learn English and assume the role of his servant. Crusoe’s colonial adventure ends after thirty-five years and the novel closes on a triumphant note as Crusoe returns to England with his faithful servant, a willing colonial subject who gladly receives the gifts of British civilised society. As an autobiographical account of the protagonist, *Robinson Crusoe* is a reflection of self-image and self-representation created by the West. It also epitomizes the process which firmly established the relationship between

Europe and its Others and set the pattern and standards by which alterity was to be valued and interpreted.

In his intertextual dialogue with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee re-writes the events of Defoe's text, shifting the focus from Crusoe to Friday, from the master to the servant. Interestingly, Friday is once again deprived of the possibility to tell his story because he cannot speak; his tongue has been cut out. Coetzee introduces an additional character and another point of view – the female narrator Susan Barton, who has been marooned on an island with "Cruso." The implication of Coetzee's counter-discursive repetition is that Susan Barton's narrative has been appropriated by Defoe's patriarchal master text. She is telling Cruso's story to the second-rate writer and journalist Foe, hoping to cash in on it. However, Foe is only moderately interested in the despondent, morose and inefficient old man who lives a pointless life on an island with his disobedient and discontent slave. The reader, of course, is well aware of the fact that Defoe's text makes no mention of a woman on the island and depicts Crusoe and Friday as entirely different characters. Since Susan Barton's story is presented as the authentic version of Defoe's subsequent novel, the reader is led to conclude that the English author removed Susan from the story and remodelled Crusoe and Friday so as to suit the mercantile ethics and meet the ideological expectations of the era. That Defoe's official text is a depleted edition of Susan Barton's original narrative is in Coetzee's novel signalled by the fact that his "Cruso is by an absence orthographically marked as different from Defoe's Crusoe" (Macaskill and Colleran 1992: 439).

The central mystery in Coetzee's novel is what happened to Friday before the beginning of the novel, or who cut out his tongue and why. The violent act left Friday without the power of speech and the ability of self-articulation, which symbolically designates Cruso and the civilization he

represents as those who reduce to silence anyone who does not share their own discourse. Eager to learn Friday's history, on Foe's suggestion Susan tries to teach the slave Friday to master the English alphabet, but all he manages to produce is the letter "o" and he fills an entire page with it. The letter "o" emphasizes emptiness and silence as interpretative problems which erode any potential narrative Susan Barton attempts to (re)construct. Ultimately, it is a confirmation of Spivak's contention that the subaltern cannot speak. The subaltern voice cannot be recovered, but the attention can be brought to the existing void and silence within dominant narratives (Spivak 1994).

Susan Barton is, on the other hand, literate and able to speak, so she relates her story in *Foe*. This makes the reader realize how literary history, and history in general, has completely written her out of the story so that she has fared even worse than Friday, who in the story sanctioned by history, in Defoe's story, features at least as a minor character. The introduction of the female narrative perspective in Coetzee's novel can therefore, be interpreted as a deconstruction of gender roles, as a recharting of *Robinson Crusoe* from a feminist perspective which probes sexual alongside racial antagonism and tackles gender alongside racial issues. Crusoe disappears fairly early in the novel, dying on the ship bound for England, while Susan Barton, now Friday's owner, starts searching for an author who will be willing to write down her story.

It is quite clear to the reader, although not to Susan Barton herself, that the author she finds, Foe, is the enemy who has cut out Friday's tongue, captured him in *Robinson Crusoe* and repeatedly fixed him in discursive strategies of colonial texts and practices as a childish, primitive and ignorant creature who needs someone else to look after him, educate and civilise him.

In his novel, Coetzee shows that the author of any text and particularly those dealing with racial and cultural alterity is invariably the “foe.” In addition, the author of the novel which is to be based on Susan’s story, or the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, is not solely Friday’s foe, a member of the society which appreciates non-European peoples only as slaves, but her own foe as well, a member of the society which values women less than men. Consequently, the official history of that society has ears neither for the voices of women nor for the voices of slaves. Susan and Friday share a common foe – white male European authority - and the novel is ultimately informed by both postcolonial and feminist discourses. Coetzee stages a battle between Susan Barton and Foe, who fight for control over the “truth” which will be written and preserved for posterity. Susan Barton insists on a faithful representation of events whereas Foe wants to construct a narrative and fashion a discourse which will meet the horizon of literary, political, social and cultural expectations of the targeted readership. In other words, in the process of textualising, the truth of the event is necessarily relativised, turned into an arbitrary construction in the service of the dominant ideology, authority or prevailing world view.

3. Conclusion

Variously fuelled by postmodernist, postcolonial and feminist discourses, *A Wife There Was* by the British author Gloria Cigman, *Kaya*, *Belgrade and the Good American* by the Serbian author Mirjana Đurđević and *Foe* by the South African author J. M. Coetzee all deploy the same strategy of appropriation of the existing literary and historical plots with the same purpose of recasting the familiar story in such a way as to reveal the undercurrents of either misogyny, racism or political depravity. Reinvented

from a female point of view, Chaucer's fourteenth century English society surfaces in its grimmest detail as one of his most gripping characters; it is placed centre stage and provided with a life story built upon the clash of her passionate temperament and the restrictive society of her days. Recreation of early twentieth century Belgrade brings a marginal community of Kalmyks under the spotlight and imaginatively explores female prospects in post-First World War Balkan society. Rewriting of the eighteenth century castaway story from a female perspective summons for scrutiny its implicit imperialist and patriarchal ideologies and investigates the power of textual representation and the possibilities of self-articulation.

References

- Acker, K. 1994. *Literary Madness: Three Novels (Kathy Goes to Haiti; My Death My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini; Florida)*. New York: Grove Press.
- Cigman, G. 2007. *A Wife There Was*. Bloomington: Trafford Publishing.
- Coetzee, J. M. 1986. *Foe*. New York: Viking.
- Defoe, D. 1948 (1719). *Robinson Crusoe and A Journal of the Plague Year*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Đurđević, M. 2009. *Kaja, Beograd i dobri Amerikanac*. Beograd: Laguna.
- Jeter Naslund, S. 1999. *Ahab's Wife: or, The Star-Gazer*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Macaskill, B. and Colleran, J. 1992. 'Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*' in *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 33, No 3 PP. 432-457 [Online]. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208477> [2010, May 10]
- Said, E. 1983. *The World, the Text, the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Said, E. 1994 (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage Books.

- Showalter, E. 2009. *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx*. London: Virago Press.
- Sontag, S. 1993. *Alice in Bed: A Play in Eight Scenes*. New York: Noonday Press.
- Spivak, G. C. 1994 (1988). 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.). New York: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, pp. 66-111.
- Woolf, V. 2002. *A Room of One's Own*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.

**WOMAN MUST WRITE WOMAN.
JEANETTE WINTERSON AND ECHOES OF FRENCH
FEMINISM***

ANDREEA MINGIUC

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iași

Abstract: The essay attempts at discovering aspects that mirror elements of French feminism in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*. Following Winterson's puns and puzzling perspective as well as her subtle and at the same time strong manner of expressing personal truth, one goes beyond oppositions reaching an intense, even if short, moment of ontological harmony.

Key words: body, écriture feminine, gender, language

Introduction

Jeanette Winterson and her writing are a puzzling discovery to make; nonetheless, necessary because it helps readers open their inner eyes, question the world, its old and/or new ways, define themselves as autonomous identities within it. The ones who “hear” her voice will most probably decide to leave the comfortable “armchair of clichés”, as she calls it, and try living fully, beyond binary oppositions, sexual taboos or/and imprisoning moral imperatives. The new “way” to follow is presented in a new language, which plays with the old meanings, transforming them and imparting a sense of rebirth.

Born in 1959, Jeanette Winterson belongs to the second generation of women writers influenced by feminism, especially by its French variant. That is why an analysis from this point of view seems to be legitimate. Whether or not she has wholly accepted this influence, whether or not she has transformed it or to what extent she has gone beyond it are questions that can be answered only by a thorough perusal of her books. Still, at the end, the reader realizes that she cannot be so easily categorized or labeled as belonging to one tradition/school or another and this makes the challenge even more interesting. In this essay I will approach one of Jeanette Winterson’s novels, *Written on the Body*, in order to trace elements that account for the author’s view on feminine identity and their relation to the defining principles of *l’écriture féminine* as they feature in the writings of Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.

1. “Written on the body is a secret code”

Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body* gives, from the very beginning - even from the title - the feeling that we are going to deal with a feminine text. The phrase “Written on the body” suggests something very

intimate, the inscription of one's being onto the lover's body, thus establishing an unbreakable link:

You have scored your name *into* my shoulders, referenced me with your mark.
The pads of your fingers have become printing blocks, you tap a message *onto*
my skin, tap meaning *into* my body (Winterson 2007: 89).

As we can see, it is not only writing on the body, but also writing *in* the body. There are no more boundaries. The author seems to respond to Helene Cixous's vision according to which women's writing must be related to their bodies in order to escape the trap of patriarchal discourse. As Winterson says, "It's the clichés that cause the trouble" (2007: 10). It is essential for her, as a woman writer, to break this web of pre-established sentences/*sententia* about love, gender, specific male or female behaviour. Clichés place everything in certain general, fixed categories, whereas the narrator is looking for an appropriate way of expressing individual emotion which is, as well as the human being, unique. In this process, the body, as a bearer of signs and meanings, is pushed to the centre and that is a positive aspect because it presents or represents a woman's body and its specific features and needs but it can be, at the same time, problematic as it emphasises physicality, biology. On the other hand, this aspect was at the core of *l'écriture féminine* – a woman must write her body because it has been neglected and because this means a new way of writing that only a woman, with her specific sensibility and special sexual morphology, can approach. Thus, Winterson makes the narrator speak about and experience the lover's body as if it were a river flowing over and conquering the senses, invading the reader's mind, too:

The smells of my lover's body are still strong in my nostrils. They yeast smell of her sex. The rich fermenting undertow of rising bread [...]. Three days without washing and she is well - hung and high. Her skirts reel back from her body, her scent is a hoop about her thighs. (Winterson 2007: 136).

And:

Your skin tastes salty and slightly citrus. When I run my tongue in a long wet line across your breasts I can feel the tiny hairs, the puckering of the aureole, the cone of your nipple. Your breasts are beehives pouring honey. (Winterson 2007: 123).

However, in the novel there is still the issue of the fragmented body as it is presented in pieces and in a state of decay, which brings up the question: how can one put the body in the centre when

There is no connection between your shoulder and your arm. You will break up bone by bone, fractured from who you are, you are drifting away now, *the centre cannot hold* (Winterson 2007: 142).

For Helene Cixous, the body is also made of parts: if woman is a whole, she is a whole that consists of parts which are each and every one "wholes, not simple partial objects, but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros" (Cixous 1980: 259). The difference is that in Winterson's novel, the body is invaded by cancer, which, as opposed to Eros, is destructive, and offers no place for hope. This invasion can be related to the way in which the feminist theory sees woman's body as a colonized territory – robbed of its powers, its desires repressed. Therefore, we are tempted to ask whether the body can really be

a source of self-knowledge. Could it really be placed in the centre? This seems to be what Winterson also tries to find out by her exploration, which sometimes resembles sexual intercourse presented from a masculine perspective:

Let me *penetrate* you [...] I would devote my life to marking your passage ways, the entrances, the exits... (Winterson 2007: 119).

The narrator is looking for answers while trying to heal by “marking” or even “colonizing” the body with new meanings, a new structure. Cixous’ Eros and Louise’s cancer have the same transformative power. Love breaks down boundaries and so does disease. Both force a new self on the human being. The question is whether we are willing to accept it or not.

Returning to the centre which “cannot hold” we may say that this defines Winterson’s aesthetic program: a writer can use the language on an artificial level only to tell a story, but at the same time s/he could use it in order to reflect on the reliability of the linguistic truth. This reminds us of Ferdinand de Saussure’s arbitrariness of the linguistic sign; there is no such thing as a unique truth. Words are only instruments for us to create (new) meanings. In “writing the body”, the author tries to find words to express intimacy, proximity, desire by entering the realm of the body and without using male discourse. The question “Will you let me crawl inside you?” (Winterson 2007: 115) mirrors the desire for ultimate intimacy. The narrator looks for real contact through something deeper than sexual intercourse; not just touching but knowing the whole body from the inside while searching for authentic union.

The very first line of the book - "Why is the measure of love loss?" (Winterson 2007: 1) - suggests that the narrator cannot find a satisfactory expression of love. S/he is in pursuit of a new language but what she finds is loss. "What the body really wants is to be naked" (Winterson 2007: 3) meaning to be presented openly, directly, not to be hidden, to be accepted and endowed with a language of itself. Because of this new language we must listen to the unnamed narrator differently in order to hear and understand another meaning "which is constantly in the process of weaving itself" (Irigaray 1991: 105). Why is meaning a process? Because being written by a woman it reflects her quality of escaping any fixed, final definition. One example of this continuous construction of meaning can be found in the first pages of *Written on the Body* where Winterson plays with the word "game" when referring to love:

It is a big game hunter and you are the game. A curse on this game. How can you stick at a game when the rules keep changing? (Winterson 2007: 10).

Later she uses another pun by opposing "engage" and "distract":

[...] send myself a greeting card saying 'Congratulations on your Engagement'. But I am not engaged, I am deeply distracted. (Winterson 2007: 10).

Another example is the double meaning of "old". When asked what s/he is dreaming about the narrator answers: "An old love" and Gail continues: "You like'em old, don't you? That's good." (Winterson 2007: 143). There is then the meaning of the body, a woman's body, on/into which the lover writes and this meaning is not complete and it is not

exhausted in one sentence or in one page. It takes almost two hundred pages for it to develop and then to unveil itself to the reader, an alert reader with the mind's eyes wide open.

All the references to the lover's body as containing and offering honey and milk, or the comparison: "My lover is an olive tree whose roots grow by the sea." (Winterson 2007: 137) are reminiscent of the tone and language of the *Song of Songs* suggesting that the lover's body is sacred and that the words used for expressing it are also holy. Love is sacred and demands expression; second-rate words would not satisfy its requirements.

The relationship between the lovers in *Written on the Body* is so strong that they seem to almost fuse. "She is neither one nor two" states Irigaray (2001: 106) trying to explain the fact that woman cannot be so easily defined because of her complexity which stems from her sexual morphology. In *Written on the Body* the narrator experiences fusion with her lover, Louise, after which she/he is neither one because she/he feels the loved one as being part of her/his being – "You are still the colour of my blood. You are my blood. When I look in the mirror it's not my own face I see. Your body is twice." (Winterson 2007: 99) nor two, because there is nevertheless a distinction between them: "Once you, once me".

2. Narrative Voice – From Beyond Gender Differences

Gender has been defined as a social construct, a set of behavioural practices that society recognizes as "feminine" or "masculine". This perspective implies a certain limitation. What is there, for instance, between these binary oppositions? How could one approach the "inbetween-ness"? Winterson's solution is that of going beyond gender distinctions. Still, the reader looks for hints that would assign the narrator

to the feminine or the masculine and that accounts for her daring attempt: offering a third “realm” to minds still captive in a “right or wrong”, “white or black”, “feminine or masculine” etc view of the world. Maybe this sounds as utopian as Cixous’s *écriture féminine* but it proposes an important change of perspective. The narrator’s indirect refusal of being classified according to gender is challenging while reminiscent of Julia Kristeva’s refusal of defining the woman in terms of what she is. The woman remains, in her view, what is not said (Kristeva 1981: 137). The text offers clues regarding the narrator’s gender but these are ambiguous and misleading. One night, in the bar, Gail Right says: “Can’t depend on Prince charming at my age [...] or *with my tastes*.” (Winterson 2007: 142). These tastes could refer to the fact that she is a lesbian but then how could she be waiting for a man to come as she has previously confessed? Later on, she has a relationship with the narrator, which leads to the conclusion that she is a woman. The “I” also compares her/himself to Alice in Wonderland, Lauren Bacall (why not Humphrey Bogart?), or a convent virgin (why not a monk?). When talking about feigning virginity and finding substitutes for the hymen the narrator avers “In Europe we have always preferred a half lemon” (my emphasis) (Winterson 2007: 143). The inclusive personal pronoun “we” directly alludes to the “I” as being a woman. However, no sooner do we collect these elements than we realize that there are also hints at the narrator being a man – “unhappy Socrates”, “Lothario”, a heartless libertine (which generally applies to male figures). There is also a scene in which the narrator chooses just to pour himself another glass and shrug instead of expressing feelings about Jacqueline, which is traditionally viewed as a typically male attitude. Furthermore, the dream of a paper snake and the rat– trap could have a Freudian interpretation: the narrator’s fear of castration which leads to the

conclusion that the “I” is a man. It is important to note that only the instances of male identification function as masks and that would mean that they are employed to conceal a feminine identity. Interestingly, the narrator’s male lovers are not very realistically depicted: one carries his dwarfish parents on his shoulders and another who asked her/him to shave all her/his body hair and then left for another lover – “They exchanged razorblades and cut me out.” (Winterson 2007: 143). The tone is ironical and the narrator is not reliable in this respect.

The sexual stereotypes are constantly contradicted, satirized and questioned with the aim of underlining the fact that love is not restricted by gender and not exclusively reserved for heterosexual relationships. The main objective is no longer to discover a specific female identity, and the emphasis is not on a predominantly female perspective; it is not an attempt at self-discovery through reviving androgyny – sexual ambiguity is something different (Kauer 1998: 42). Winterson’s view on gender and sexuality transcends normative constructions of homo- and heterosexuality. She does not leap directly to a notion of androgyny, but advances a different notion of femininity, since to move directly towards a notion of thinking gender as androgynous, would bypass an assertion of the feminine as such (this is where Derrida’s *différance* is contradicted – the concept has made it impossible to consider any difference as foundational, including the sexual one; the idea of a specifically feminine language or desire is thus unattainable according to Derrida’s philosophy.). Jeanette Winterson leads her narrator and implicitly the reader to new territories of discourse by questioning gender roles and by using the mask of ambiguity. We may say that the un-gendered narrator functions as a device to challenge patriarchal and implicitly dominant constructions of gender and sexuality and in doing that s/he uses a “secret code only visible in certain lights” (Winterson 2007: 89). If we were to

combine the two main points regarding the narrator and the style we, as readers, feel yet again intrigued. The narrative voice belongs to a sexually ambiguous being, but still, in the way the story is told we can easily trace aspects of feminine speaking/writing. The conclusion could be that Winterson wants to escape any attempt at categorizing or proving something in the field of gender identity.

Many critics have read the novel as being a lesbian one because it is known that the author is lesbian or, on the contrary, have praised the British female author for such a realistic depiction of the male mentality. Cath Stowers, for example, believes that the reason for using an ungendered narrator is similar to that of the less discussed French feminist Monique Wittig as presented in *The Straight Mind* because for her “lesbian” meant neither masculinity nor femininity (Stowers 1998: 91). This way of approaching the novel seems to be “touched” by cliché-governed views. At the same time, in the tradition of the reader’s response theory and Roland Barthes’ “death of the author”, the book may have a multitude of meanings according to the subjectivity of each reader. We could also say that Louise and the narrator are one and the same person; two entities searching for and finding each other in a “territory from beyond”. The best alternative concerning Jeanette Winterson’s writing is that, maybe, we should just take what is offered to us - this new, fresh, even if puzzling, perspective and open “nrw” eyes upon the world.

Conclusion

The concept of gender as performance suggests a level of free play with gender categories that the human being enters socially. The result is that individuals have the potential to create what Judith Butler called *gender trouble* and challenge the way discourse establishes and reinforces

certain meanings or institutions such as compulsory heterosexuality. Jeanette Winterson's attitude represents such a challenge. She refuses a pre-established role and puts her self in writing (one of the "requests" of *l'écriture féminine*) in order to show that gender is a matter of choice and that the best solution for overcoming or avoiding the oppositions that gender establishes is that of going beyond those differences

In the 19th century, the masculine style was seen as strong, massive, direct, whereas the feminine one was supposed to be delicate and graceful. In the 21st century, the reader can find a harmonious combination between the two in Jeanette Winterson's work. She has strength and directness as well as delicacy and grace and, above all else, she develops a style that goes beyond traditional oppositions and dualism.

*This work was supported by the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007–2013 [grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/47646].

References

- Cixous, H. 1980 (1975). 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in *New French Feminism. An Anthology*. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (eds.). Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, pp. 245-259.
- Irigaray, L. 2001 (1997). *To Be Two*. New York: Routledge.
- Kauer, U. 1998. 'Narration and Gender. The Role of the First Person Narration in Jeanette Wintersons' *Written on the Body*' in "*I'm telling you stories*": *Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading*. H. Grice and T. Woods (eds.).

- Amsterdam, Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi, pp. 41-50.
- Kristeva, J. 1981 (1974). 'Women Can Never Be Defined' in *New French Feminisms*. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron (eds). New York: Schocken Books, pp. 135-142.
- Stowers, C. 1998. 'The Erupting Lesbian Body: Reading *Written on the Body* as a Lesbian Text' in "*I'm telling you stories*": *Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading*. H. Grice and T. Woods (eds.). Amsterdam, Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi, pp 90-98.
- Whitford, M. 1991. *The Irigaray Reader*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Winterson, J. 2007 (1992). *Written on the Body*. London: Vintage Books.

**FEMALE CHARACTERS
AMIDST POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CLASHES
IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS***

ANA SENTOV

Faculty of Law and Business Studies, Novi Sad

Abstract: Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* spans two decades of Afghan history, from the Soviet rule in the 1970s to the Taliban's rise to power in the 1990s, seen through the eyes of two women. The paper deals with the female characters' struggle to escape subordination imposed upon them by the politics and culture of Afghanistan.

Key words: female characters, politics, culture, political and cultural clashes, identity

1. Introduction

1.1 About the author

Khaled Hosseini (1965) is a novelist and physician who was born in Kabul, Afghanistan where his father worked for the Afghan Foreign Ministry. In 1970, Hosseini and his family moved to Iran, where his father was employed at the Embassy of Afghanistan. Three years later, Hosseini's family returned to Kabul. In 1976 when his father obtained a job in Paris the whole family moved there. They decided not to return to Afghanistan because PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) had seized power through a bloody coup in April 1978. Subsequently they sought political asylum in the United States and settled down in California in 1980. Hosseini graduated from the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, where he earned his M.D. in 1993. He practiced medicine until a year and a half after

the release of his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which went on to become an international bestseller. Hosseini is currently a Goodwill Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, was published in 2007. This book tells the dramatic story of an unlikely friendship between two women, Mariam and Laila, who are married to the same man. The story takes us through each of their lives before the Russians enter Afghanistan, into the horrible years of Taliban rule, and beyond. Watching these women grow in their relationship, we are given a picture of what it meant to be a woman in Afghanistan during the last four decades.

2. A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

2.1. Overview and Context

The novel can be read on two levels: as a poignant tale of two women and their enduring friendship and an account of Afghan recent history and politics which shape the lives of the protagonists. As was the case with many postcolonial states, Afghanistan's move from colonial status to independence turned out to be a relatively minor move from direct to indirect rule. As Young (2003: 3) puts it, the major world powers did not change substantially during the course of the 20th century, despite decolonization. For the most part, the same (ex-)imperial countries still dominate the countries that they had formerly ruled as colonies, while the cases of Afghanistan, Cuba, Iran, and Iraq, make it clear that any country that has the nerve to resist its former imperial masters does so at its peril.

Afghanistan underwent military interventions by the western states twice: by the Soviet Union in 1978 and by the NATO states in 2002. Both times the invading forces claimed that their purpose was to protect the

civilians and their rights. Interestingly, this was the argument that imperial countries had often used when trying to justify the imposition of colonial rule. In many cases, the colonial state attempted to ban social practices that allegedly oppressed women, such as veiling. In fact, the colonial authorities regarded these interventions as a way of transforming the values of societies whose traditions resisted their rule. (Young 2003: 97). In the novel, this is illustrated by the regulations imposed under the Soviet rule regarding women. However, such legislative acts often spark off fierce nationalist resistance: the communist rule over Afghanistan triggers off the Mujahedeen uprising.

The fates of the protagonists demonstrate the ambivalent position of women in Islamic countries: as Young (2003: 97) states, they are positioned in relation to their own cultures, their own histories, their own relations to the west and to western colonial power, their own struggles over the interpretation of Islam and of Islamic law, and their views on the role of women in contemporary society.

2.2. Mariam

Mariam is defined as an outcast, she being a *harami*, an illegitimate child. As such, she is a source of disappointment and shame to her mother, who blames Mariam for her own mistakes and failures. Mariam is an outcast in a spatial sense as well, because she and Nana live in a lonely cottage outside the town. Mariam is confined to the cottage and to Nana's company, and is exposed to minimal social interaction. She is also denied the opportunity to get an education as Nana claims that "there is only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school [...]. And it's this: *tahamul*. Endure." (17). When a family friend, Mullah

Failzullah, tries to argue with her, Nana insists: “There is nothing out there for her. Nothing but rejection and heartache.” (18). Mariam’s only joy in life is a weekly visit from her father. She focuses her affections on Jalil, only to be disillusioned when she discovers that he lacks courage to fully recognize her as his daughter. After her mother’s suicide, disappointed and bitter, Mariam leaves Herat to be married, without so much as a wave of goodbye to her father. In Kabul, Mariam encounters a different life, both socially and culturally. She speaks a different dialect of the Farsi language so at first she finds it difficult to understand her husband and other people. Kabul is also much bigger than Herat, and less traditional. These are still the days of the Afghan republic, and people in Kabul live a relatively peaceful life. Women can work and teach, hold office in the government. However, Rasheed, Mariam’s troubled and bitter husband, demands she wear a burqa, claiming that “where I come from, a woman’s face is her husband’s business only.” (63). Mariam ends up being even less free in her new life than in her old one. She fails to bear a child, and is gradually reduced to the status of a servant in Rasheed’s household, a source of disappointment to him and to herself: an outcast yet again.

2.3.Laila

Laila comes from a very different background. Her family is relatively liberal: her father, Hakim, is a university teacher, and although her mother Fariba is a housewife, her overall conduct is far from traditional: she is not submissive towards her husband; she wears only a hijab, a headscarf, instead of a burqa. From an early age, Laila is encouraged by her father to go to school and become an educated woman.

I know you're still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now, he said. Marriage can wait, education cannot. [...] Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila. No chance. (103)

The relationship between Laila and her father grows more affectionate when Laila's brothers join the Mujahedeen in a guerilla war against the Russian forces and the communist regime. Laila's mother loses her zest for life and languishes in bed with curtains drawn. She also seems to lose any interest in her daughter and so Laila turns to her father for help and support. He provides help and encouragement in matters of schooling, while Tariq and his family provide family love and warmth. However, although Laila sometimes resents her mother, she does not come to hate her; she can remember the time when Fariba was different, and she knows her mother loved her and still does. Laila also enjoys hearing stories about her parents' courtship and marriage; her father openly admits that they married for love, which was rarely the case in their society.

The loving relationship both with her own and with Tariq's family provide Laila with an emotional buttress against all the hardships awaiting her. Raised in an atmosphere of equality between the sexes, she soon starts to find Rasheed's traditional views and his abusive behavior repulsive, while her warm and outgoing nature will not only melt Mariam's reserve but will grow into female solidarity and close friendship. Despite all the atrocities she either experienced or witnessed Laila's faith in goodness remains uncorrupted and she chooses to return to Afghanistan, so that she could contribute in the rebuilding of Afghan society and culture. She remembers her father's words:

You can be anything you want, Laila, he says. I know this about you. And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you. (345).

Laila decides to go back because of the sacrifice Mariam and her parents have made.

2.4. Political and Cultural Clashes

The novel shows how female characters are caught in the net of different political factions and cultural standards, and how the clashes between them have devastating effects on their lives.

Mariam, as an illegitimate child, renders her mother a social outcast. The woman is always the guilty party, so Mariam's mother will be excluded from society and spatially marginalized. This makes the relationship between Mariam and her mother embittered and tense. When her mother commits suicide, Mariam feels stigmatized once again: she cannot aspire either to being accepted by her father's family, or to being given a place in their society. Her only choice is to be hastily married off as far as possible, and forgotten about. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Jalil, Mariam's father had deeply regretted the loss of his daughter and had been trying to make amends. However, he was not brave enough to withstand domestic and social pressures which condemned Mariam for being a *harami*.

Women's position in a traditional Islamic society is constantly questioned throughout the novel. The communist regime in Afghanistan starts with a coup against the government in 1978, and is followed by the Soviet occupation of the country. The fierce clash between the traditionalist Islamic culture and the communist ideology will produce terrible consequences. The communists uphold egalitarianism along class, nationality and gender lines. In cities, such as Kabul, this is more or less accepted. Teachers and intellectuals, such as Laila's father, are being dismissed from

their posts in order to work in factories, in an attempt to demonstrate the principle of equality. However, as Laila's father says, the one good thing about the regime is the opportunity for women's education.

In fact, Babi thought that the one thing the communists had done right – or at least intended to – ironically, was in the field of education, the vocation from which they had fired him. More specifically, the education of women. The government had sponsored literacy classes for all women. Almost two thirds of the students at Kabul University were women now, Babi said, women who were studying law, medicine, engineering. *Women have always had it hard in this country, Laila, but they're probably more free now, under the communists, and have more rights than they've ever had before*, Babi said [...]. *Of course, women's freedom – here, he shook his head ruefully – is also one of the reasons people out there took up arms in the first place.* (121)

Here, Laila's father refers to the rebellion against the communist regime, or *jihad*, the holy war, which most Afghan men joined, Laila's brothers among them. The break with religion and tradition enforced by the communist regime sparked off the rebellion, and later the civil war, which would have devastating consequences for the Afghan people.

By 'out there' he didn't mean Kabul, which had always been relatively liberal and progressive. Here in Kabul, women taught at the university, ran schools, held office in the government. No, Babi meant the tribal areas, especially the Pashtun regions in the south or in the east near the Pakistani border, where women were rarely seen on the streets and only then in burqa and accompanied by men. He meant those regions where men who lived by ancient tribal laws had rebelled against the communists and their decrees to liberate women, to abolish forced marriage, to raise the minimum marriage age to sixteen for girls. There, men saw it as an insult to their centuries-old tradition, Babi said, to be told by the

government – and a godless one at that – that their daughters had to leave home, attend school, and work alongside men.” (121)

The *jihad* hit Laila’s family very hard: both her brothers are killed. Laila and her father try to persuade her mother to leave Afghanistan, but she is even more firm in her decision to endure,

to see the day the Soviets go home disgraced, the day the Mujahideen come to Kabul in victory. I want to be there when it happens, when Afghanistan is free, so the boys see it too. They’ll see it through my eyes. (130)

In 1989, the Russians leave Afghanistan and in 1992, the communist regime is overthrown altogether and the Mujahideen extend their rule over Kabul. However, since they come from different tribes and support different political factions, they quickly turn on each other and the civil war breaks out, putting an abrupt end to Laila’s peaceful and mostly happy childhood: she has to quit school. In 1996 when the Taliban take over the whole of Afghanistan the situation deteriorates further on. They enforce the strictest Islamic laws: women are forbidden to work, go to school, leave the house without a male companion, even put on makeup. Petty crimes are severely punished; cinemas, theatres, restaurants are closed down; music and television are forbidden, even games such as cards and chess. Women’s position is worse than ever and Rasheed’s brutality receives official support. When Rasheed’s shop is destroyed in a fire, they face extreme destitution and starvation and Aziza has to be sent to an orphanage because Laila can no longer provide for her. Laila tries to visit Aziza every day, despite the severe punishment administered by the Taliban to women who walk outside their homes unaccompanied. Laila shares this predicament with many other

women forced to give up their children because the Taliban banned them from working. Seeing her old school teacher, who had previously prevented her female students from covering, wear a burqa, seems to Laila like the final humiliation of all Afghan women.

Then one day, Tariq appears outside the house. He and Laila are reunited, and their passion flares anew. When Rasheed returns home from work, Zalmai tells his father about the visitor. Rasheed visits all his rage upon Laila and Mariam kills Rasheed with a shovel. Laila, Tariq and the children flee to Pakistan. In an attempt to save Laila and her children, Mariam confesses to killing her husband and is executed. Laila and Tariq live peacefully in Afghanistan for some time, but when the NATO forces drive the Taliban out of Kabul and most of the other towns in the country, Laila decides to return, unable to forget the words of her father or Mariam's sacrifice. They stop in the village where Mariam was raised, and discover a package that Mariam's father left behind for her: a videotape of *Pinocchio*, a small pile of money and a letter. Laila reads the letter and discovers that Jalil regretted sending Mariam away. Laila and Tariq return to Kabul, fix up the orphanage, where Laila works as a teacher and when Laila becomes pregnant again it is suggested that should the baby be a daughter they will name her Mariam.

3. Conclusion

Set against the backdrop of constant war, the novel shows how the everyday lives of the protagonists and people in general, are affected by political conflicts and various cultural clashes: young men leaving their homes to fight the communists and getting killed, like Laila's brothers;

people forced to resign their jobs, like Laila's father; children being forced to leave school because of the fighting in the streets; innocent citizens getting killed; women deprived of their rights and abused with the regime's support. In the end, it can be said that any attempt to enforce a new regime or a new ideology only breeds more violence, which has dramatic repercussions for common people – in this case, mostly women. The novel is dedicated to the women of Afghanistan and until we have a novel written by an Afghan woman, Hosseini's story of love and endurance is an unforgettable picture of the position of women in Afghanistan during the last four decades.

References

- 'A Thousand Splendid Suns'. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Thousand_Splendid_Suns
[accessed June 13, 11:35]
- Amrohvi, I.A. (August 20, 2008). "A Thousand Splendid Suns". *Book Review*. [Online].
Available: <http://indianmuslims.in/a-thousand-splendid-suns/> [2009, June 15,
18:40]
- Ciabattari, J. 'Kite Runner's' Author also Shines with 'Suns'. *Los Angeles Times*. [Online]. Available:
<http://articles.latimes.com/2007/may/21/entertainment/et-book21> [2009, June
15, 18:35]
- Hosseini, K. 2007. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. London: Bloomsbury.
- 'Khaled Hosseini'. [Online]. Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khaled_Hosseini
[2009, June 13, 11:23].
- Young, R. J.C. 2003. *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford

University Press Inc.

About the Authors

Anemona Alb is a graduate of Bucharest University (a major in English). She is currently Lecturer at Oradea University, Department of English, where she teaches British Cultural Studies and Contemporary British Literature. Her academic interests include Gender Studies, Discourse Analysis (mainly straddling Media Discourse and Political Discourse) and British Literature. She has published articles in national and international gender studies journals; among books she has co-authored are *Contemporary British Writers* (1997), *Aspects of Contemporary British Literature: Conflating Texts from the Post-war to the Globalization Age* (2010).

Ramona Bran has a B.A. in English and French Philology, and an M.A. in British and American Studies. She has been teaching English and French at the West University of Timisoara, Romania, for 6 years and is currently a PhD student in Dortmund, Germany. Her thesis is entitled *Women's Identities in Contemporary Cities*. Her interests range from postcolonial literature to urban and cultural studies.

Roxana D. Cruceanu holds a BA in English and French and an MA in British and American Studies from the University of the West, Timișoara. She earned a PhD with a thesis entitled *Byron's "Don Juan" on the Margins of two Concepts: Dandyism and Don Juanism*. She has published several articles – in the country and abroad – on British and American literature, British studies, foreign language teaching methods and approaches.

Reghina 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 five 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*.

Tatjana Đurović currently works as an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade. She earned her PhD in linguistics in 2006 with a thesis dealing with a comparative analysis of metaphors in English and Serbian economic discourse. Her main research interests include ESP, particularly conceptual metaphors in economic discourse. She has

published a number of papers in Serbian and international journals and participated in various international conferences. She is the co-author of a monograph on Serbian public discourse and of three textbooks on English for Economics.

Vladislava Gordić Petković is Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. In her eight books published so far she has written about the English and American contemporary fiction, women's writing, Shakespearean tragedy and the issues of media and technology. Her publications include *The Syntax of Silence* (1995), *Hemingway* (2000) and *On the Female Continent* (2007).

Nataša Karanfilović teaches literary and cultural courses at the English Department, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. Her interests include postcolonial and women's writing, postcolonial and gender studies. She is the author of the monograph *Tri lica australijske proze (Three Faces of Australian Fiction, 2004)* and is currently working on a study about Peter Carey.

Vesela Katsarova is Professor of English Literature in the Department of British and American Studies, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, Bulgaria. Her field is contemporary British fiction and the female tradition. She is also a translator and has translated *Dombey and Son*, *The Golden Notebook*, etc.

Hildegard Klein is Senior Lecturer of English Literature in the English, German and French Department, Malaga University. She holds a PhD that she earned with a thesis on the theatre of Edward Bond, an author on whose work she has published widely. She has further focused on British contemporary and Feminist Theatre, co-editing two books: *Teorías Feministas y sus Aplicaciones al Teatro Feminista Británico*

Contemporáneo (Granada: Comares, 2000), and *Estrategias Feministas en el Teatro Británico del Siglo XX* (Malaga: ATENEA, 2003). Her research included the drama of an unknown German author, Frieda H. Kraze, from World War I. She is co-editor of *British Theatre of the 1990s: Interviews with Director, Playwrights, Critics and Academics* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Milan Miljković is an MA in Serbian Literature and is currently employed as a researcher at the Institute for Literature and Arts in Belgrade within the Literary Periodicals Research Department. His main fields of study are women's literature, gender and cultural studies, Yugoslav post-WWII literature and 1990s literary periodicals.

Andreea Mingiuc holds an MA in American Studies and is a 1st year PhD student working on Puritan cultural identity under Professor Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru's guidance. Her research interests are Puritan texts, women's writing, film studies.

Andreea Pele is a graduate of the Faculty of Letters and has worked as a teacher of English within the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology for almost four years. Her interests are gender issues, but also increasingly popular culture and popular fiction.

Izabella Penier holds a PhD in American literature. Currently her research is focused on breaking down theoretical and disciplinary barriers between African American and postcolonial scholarship. It examines the commonalities and differences among major discourses of the Black Diaspora: African-American studies and British cultural studies (particularly Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*). Her work is based on the literary output of Afro-American, Afro-Caribbean and Black British writers. She has published textbooks (on British and American history, literary theory), a monograph

(Ideological and Discursive Aspects of Magical Realism in Literary Quest for Afro-American Identity), articles and book reviews.

Biljana Radić-Bojanić currently works as a Senior Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. She got her MA degree in linguistics in 2005 with a thesis dealing with the analysis of Internet language in English and Serbian. Her fields of interest include discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics and ELT. She has published a number of papers in Serbian and international journals and participated in various international conferences. She is the author of a monograph on Internet language and a co-author of a monograph on Serbian public discourse.

Colomba La Ragione is Professor of Anglophone literatures and cultures at the University of Naples, "Parthenope". Her research areas are both linguistics and literary studies. She has written extensively on Renaissance culture and Shakespearian theatre, and on the social and intellectual connections between economics and literary culture at the end of the 18th century. Her research interests focus on Shakespearian contemporary theatre and cinema, the issues of migration, identity and multicultural diversity in Europe and Asia, Gender studies. Her recent publications include *L'economia politica e la società inglese agli esordi della Rivoluzione industriale* (2006), *The Classical Economists and Industrial Britain* (2009).

Nadežda Silaški works as an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade. She got her PhD degree in linguistics in 2005 with a thesis dealing with genre analysis of advertisements in Serbian and British women's magazines. Her fields of interest include discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics and ESP. She has published a number of papers in Serbian and international journals and participated in various international

conferences. She is the co-author of a monograph on Serbian public discourse and three ESP economics textbooks.

Remina Sima graduated from the Faculty of Letters, University of the West. She holds an MA degree in Gender Studies and teaches English at the Millennium High School, Timisoara. Her main scientific interests lie in the area of Gender and Cultural Studies. She has published several articles in academic journals.