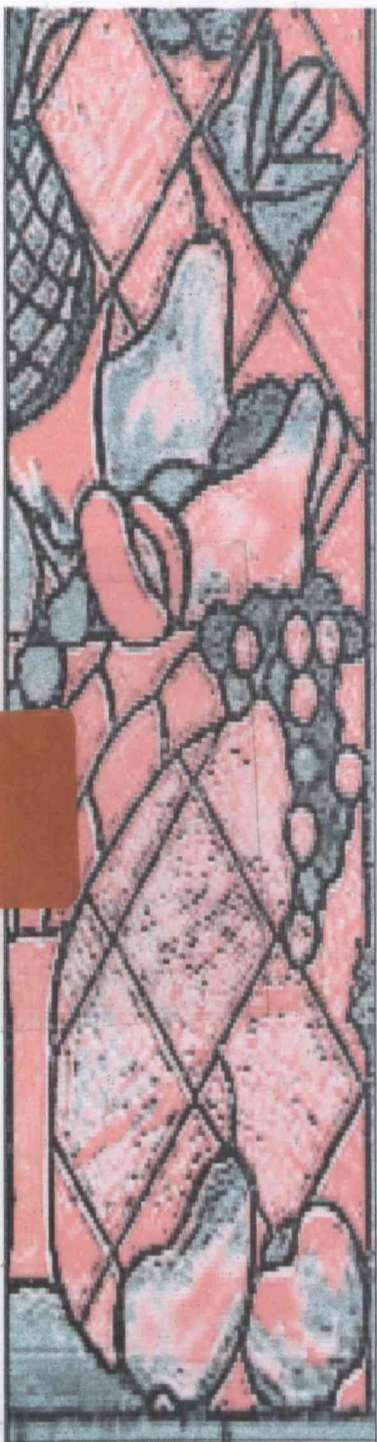


PAPERS IN ENGLISH & AMERICAN STUDIES XII.



Edited by
Erzsébet Barát

**SPACES
IN
TRANSITION**

*JATE*Press
Szeged 2005

SPACES IN TRANSITION

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ERZSEBET BARÁT

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Papers in English & American Studies XII.

SPACES IN TRANSITION

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ERZSÉBET BARÁT

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As for myself, the most precious concern I derive from Sida is the relevance of involvement and its impact on the life of disadvantaged people. Perhaps the most striking and convincing example of this knowledge is the constant struggle over the proper

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INTRODUCTION

ERZSÉBET BARÁT

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WHY THIS BOOK?

The members of the Gender Studies Stream at the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Szeged decided to celebrate Dr. Sarolta Marinovich-Resch, our senior colleague's 60th birthday in recognition of the excellence of her contribution to the field of feminist scholarship as well as her support and encouragement to all of us, in her diverse and generous ways. The celebration took place on November 21st, 2003 in the local headquarters of the Hungarian Academy of Science. The current volume is partly an outcome of that event, including the talks presented on the occasion by Éva Federmayer, Mária Joó, Mária Kurdi, and Nóra Séllei. Except for Éva Federmayer, the presenters are not Sári's local colleagues and friends but scholars from all major Departments in the Faculties of Humanities in the country, attesting to the significance of Sári's achievement in building a successful feminist network over the past fifteen years. We, the organisers thought it would be in accordance with the nature of feminist concerns not to have our local voice domineer the event. The current volume, however, may provide an appropriate site for extending our congratulations in this more academic manner as well. Therefore the conference presentations are accompanied by further works written by Irén Annus, Anna Kérchy and Andrea P. Balogh, representing the ongoing research of the members of the Stream.

VALIDITY AND INVOLVEMENT

As for myself, the most precious concern I have learnt from Sári is the relevance of involvement and its impact on the life of the researcher. Perhaps the most striking and convincing example of this knowledge is the current struggle over the proper

institutionalisation of feminist scholarship in the changing field of Hungarian Academy.

Arguing that doing research can seriously damage one's health and that feminist ways of knowing are far from being a rather harmless and comfortable activity has never been more valid than now, only a year after the actual event that led to this publication. However, I do not need to feel defenseless in the face of the hostile gate-keeping strategies of the predominantly male academy. The source of my encouragement comes from the other dimension of this knowledge regarding the impact of feminist research on the researcher. It is being a member of a research team, our Gender Stream. It is this solidarity that may have the potential to fight the vulnerable effects of masculinist notions of science and relevance. Although, we may not have as much power and influence on the hierarchical academic institution itself as it may appear to the respondents involved in our research projects or, ironically, as it may appear even to ourselves in comparison with the researched 'other' women, I have learnt from Sári's ways of negotiations to value the enabling power of belonging in a team when it comes to considering the possibility of breaking down hierarchical relations of power in order precisely to have the space for working collectively.

Another way of formulating the issue of impact could be in terms of experience. In the day-to-day practicalities of finding the space for conducting feminist research and inculcating students in critical awareness, what also seems to be at issue is the understanding of women's lived experience itself. Whilst the personal, autobiographical location of the researcher undoubtedly shapes her understanding of what she sees to be the particular forms of oppression, and therefore the matter to be put on the public agenda, it does not mean that her awareness is beyond the access of those who have not 'lived' such experiences. Nor does it mean that a reference to such experience should inevitably legitimize the knowledge ensuing from it. That is, experience is always already mediated by interpretation, to the experiencing self and the 'other' alike. However, this recognition should not necessarily lead us to giving up all claims to authenticity, to sharing a language or to negotiating an allegiance. What we should make explicit in the course of our analyses, instead, is the ways in which these ways of interpretation/mediation seem to be effects of differential access to cultural and political resources.

This latter point takes us to the consideration of the relationship between politics and academy. What seems to be at stake these days in Hungarian academy is a concern to re-examine the possible transformatory potential of feminist research, its potential of facilitating a change of the higher educational institution in a way that could at long last legitimate the curriculum of our Stream in the form of an MA degree. It is in this particular context where we should address the apparently abstract matter of validity in/of (feminist) research.



There is definitely one aspect of the current situation with regard to which we as feminists can make use of our 'abstract' scholarship: the social nature of interpretation. We may argue that we are experiencing a moment of feminist methodological logic that can explain the grounds on which certain selective interpretations have been made over others. That logic can expose the silences and absences in the emerging legitimizations of decision making.

To reach a (favourable) conclusion on matters of accreditation is a social process and the interpretation of the various Government documents is a political, highly contested and unstable activity. Therefore we cannot really believe that if all there is on offer for woman scholars to emerge as bearers of agency is some (preferably as little as possible) privileged status accorded to a non-reflexive, essentialist conception of 'women's ways of knowing', then teaching/researching that experience could radicalize their audience. And most certainly, it does not turn their audience of researchers into subversive voices. For that resistance we need to shift our position and expose the presence of other (textually mediated) experiences.

I think the problem is not that we 'come out' about our 'desire' to have an MA degree accredited but if we render ourselves blind to the dangers of doing "theory as life insurance" (in the sense of Meaghan Morris's¹ insightful concept). In my opinion, the problem is that the latter position can implicate our arguments all too easily into the commodifying logic of another form of culture, namely that of the advertising industry where there is always the promise of a way to 'redemption'. As a painful ironic twist, the appeal of the celebratory approach to (masculinist) prestige then consists in its promise of power to knowing the way to this mode of pleasure; in the promise of knowing how to shift back and forth between the textual worlds of the Government documents and feminist theories, without inflicting any (further) damage on us.

CODA

The contributions in this volume are attempts at exploring the unsettling potentials of feminist ways of seeing. What they have in common is the discourse of critical awareness of the various textually mediated ways of women's oppression and the potential power we may learn through their exposure. I hope it may resonate with the Readers while reading this book.

In fact the book as a site for this identification could not have come about without Sári's pioneering experiences involved when undertaking feminist literary

¹ Morris, Meaghan. "Banality in Cultural Studies", *Discourse*. 10/2, 1988, 19.

criticism in the past fifteen years or so. That is, the historic legacy of Sári's scholarship can teach us something very important at the moment: It is a focus on our history of scholarship in the Department that can alone bring back us as 'actual women' into the position of bearers of agency. In my view, without this turn to our local history we may not even stand a chance in the ongoing battle over accreditation.

SUBVERSION THROUGH THE QUILT? MORMON AUTO/BIO-HISTORIES FROM THE DOMESTIC

IRÉN ANNUS

Department of American Studies, SZTE

To Sári, with gratitude

FRAMING THE QUILT

In her article "Trifles and Everyday Use," Sarolta Marinovich Resch argues that the quilt, the product of a distinctly American female activity, has been used by American women authors as a symbol of "women's culture and writing a metaphor of domesticity and its everyday values in American culture."¹ She traces the process of the feminization of the art of quilting, which has positioned this art form as-at best-a craft and a form of folklore, produced in the home exclusively by women, thus presenting it as a typical female domestic activity. She suggests that the quilt has been a recurring motif in American women writing, a motif through which authors have been able to challenge their own marginalized position, both socially and culturally, and to subvert overall male dominance. Thus, in American literature the quilt has come to signify not only female creativity and cultural heritage, aesthetics and sisterhood, but also, in Elaine Showalter's term, "a politics of feminist survival celebrated as naturally from womanly impulses."²

Using a speech to illustrate how the quilt, a common domestic object in traditional Latter-day Saint households, may operate as a pertinent tool for the constitution of personal history and identity, this paper examines one of the many common Mormon practices related to history writing: keeping a diary. This is especially common among Mormon women, for whom journal writing serves mul-

¹ 1995, 108.

² Elaine Showalter, 1991, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in Women's Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 146. Quoted in Marinovich Resch 1995, 109.

multiple purposes and represents the primary written medium for self-expression and self-definition. Through an analysis of some entries from two diaries, this study examines the self-definition and self-positioning of the authors and, in the light of these, the extent to which this practice has provided Mormon women with a tool for recognizing and transforming their traditional roles, for their subversion in a world where their social positions and deeds are thoroughly defined by their highly conservative faith and male-dominated church.

MORMON WOMEN, QUILTS AND HISTORIES

The quilt and Mormonism may appear to signify two thoroughly different things: one is a traditional American household item, produced by women through their imagination and creativity as well as countless hours of labor; the other is a male-dominated world view and a modern belief system, the most dynamically growing faith in the world today. However, they also share a number of features: they are both uniquely American phenomena, related to the everyman, to craftsmanship and hard work, often evoking public respect and admiration. The Mormon Church is rather conservative in its attitude to gender roles and encourages the traditional patriarchal family model among its members, envisioning the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the homemaker, who is also intimately drawn to traditional female activities such as child-rearing, cooking, gardening, sewing, home decorating, and crafting-which includes quilt making.

A beautiful collection of Mormon quilts was exhibited during one of the History Weeks, an annual Latter-day Saint program sponsored by the Mormon Brigham Young University in Utah. One of the keynote speakers also addressed the significance of the quilt in Mormon culture in her speech. She suggested that, besides being a useful and beautiful object in the home, the quilt also proves to be a useful tool for the further enrichment of Mormon family history. Mark Leone³ offers an account of this talk, describing how the speaker characterized the quilt as an aid to "jog one's memory" about the past. She offered her recollection of a childhood event as an example to illustrate this process. She remembered lying in bed sick, covered up by the quilt her mother had made, and passing the time examining the individual patches on it. Slowly, she started to remember their origin: one piece was from her brother's shirt, another from her grandmother's apron, and so on. The quilt became the vehicle by which she traveled back in time, recalling the memory of her childhood, her family members and happy days long passed. She yet again was physically

³ 1979, 196-7.

wrapped in their all-embracing love, warmth, and care, all of which comforted her during her illness.

The quilt was an object, which assisted her in “constructing and reconstructing [her] personal view of the world.”⁴ Through narrating the quilt she was able to recall various people and events from the past and to re-create her personal and family history, to preserve the memories of her ancestors and loved ones, to evoke and re-establish strong emotional ties. The quilt also provided her with a sense of continuity, security, and self-affirmation for the present. This type of experience illustrates what Marinovich Resch defines as “the quilt as a process rather than a commodity;”⁵ indicating that the focus of interpretation in this case shifts from a sense of nostalgia to a sense of “continual renewal”, characterized by deep emotional attachments.⁶

This speech on the quilt as a collection of memorabilia, a product of past history evoking new history, was itself also a patch within the history-making efforts of the Latter-day Saint Church, a major undertaking that may also be interpreted as an act of quilting. The Mormon Church is well known for its deep devotion to history and research on the past. Their history-making efforts cover four major areas: (1) the biography of Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of the Latter-day Saint Church, along with the biography of other outstanding church leaders and figures; (2) the history of the church itself, including the recording and interpretation of various church-related events; (3) the ancestral history of the Saints, including extensive research of personal documents from the past; and (4) the personal family and life stories of the Saints.

The first two of these are histories, which are reserved primarily for professional church historians, almost exclusively men. Jan Shipp explains this exclusivity with the state of the Church hierarchy, also constituted by men only, which disallows Mormon women's histories for fear of their using history “to call into question the church's conservative stance on the role of women [on the basis of] the development of an LDS feminist theology centered on the Mormon concept of a Mother in Heaven,”⁷ whose existence was described only in a poem from 1845 by Eliza Snow, and in none of the sacred texts⁸ of the Mormon faith.

⁴ Leone 1979, 198.

⁵ 1995, 110.

⁶ 1995, 111.

⁷ 2000, 195. Laurel T. Ulrich, professor of history at Harvard University, for example, was disallowed from giving one of the opening presentations at the Saints' Annual Women's Conference in 1993.

⁸ These are the Bible, the Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants.

Contributing to ancestral history, however, which is based on genealogical research, is the duty of every Mormon believer. Tied to the Mormon theology on salvation, genealogical research enables the Saints to bring about redemption for their deceased non-Mormon ancestors and, granted that these ancestors embrace the Mormon faith, also makes it possible to seal families together for eternity through temple ceremonies. Genealogical research is an individual endeavor; however, it is carried out within an elaborate system established by the Church, through prescribed steps and under Church guidance, with the findings to be submitted to the Church Historian's Office for validation—all within a structure and discourse through which the Saints constitute themselves as well as their faith and Church.

Practices regarding personal and family histories, however, are the most loosely framed and least directly controlled by the Church. They tend to be quite personal, produced with the purpose of enriching histories of the Mormon community as well as of giving an account of one's own and family life to the next generations. These histories are primarily the outcome of women's efforts, may be of various kinds, and take various forms. They may perhaps best be signified as nuclear family histories, meaning essentially various documentary narratives of family events, both major and everyday ones. Relevant activities include keeping records, arranging family photographs, filing all pertinent family documents, documenting family excursions, gatherings, and reunions, keeping in touch with members of the extended family, and often even publishing family newsletters or developing websites. Of all these activities, keeping a diary and the Book of Remembrance are the most common.

The Book of Remembrance kept in every family contains the complete family tree, records of all the significant pieces of information on ancestors, as well as providing a collection of their deeds of righteousness, merits, and accomplishments, supplemented with documents, newspaper clippings, letters, pictures, etc. This is a rather formal album, which lends the rather factual genealogical data a more personal tone, revealing the people and their personalities behind the data. It provides a family history located in a specific place at a specific time, based on a compilation of facts and documents along with their individual understandings—resulting in an act of the “rhetorical construction of blood descent”, to use Shipps' definition.⁹

“There shall be a record kept among you,”¹⁰ said Joseph Smith, thus also initiating the widespread practice of diary writing—the most personal endeavor by definition. Diary writing has generally been associated with women authorship and the female domain, as is also the case in the Mormon Church. In general, the Church leaves it to the members to decide how much time they will spend on this activity as well as what the content and length of the entries will be. The only

⁹ 1994, 70.

¹⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 21:1.

period, however, during which regular diary writing is particularly emphasized is mission time. Some of the entries from missionary journals-typically authored by elders, that is, men-have been published and analyzed, as well as journals written by prominent leaders of the Mormon Church, exclusively men.¹¹ Only a very small number of diaries written by women have been published, but they are primarily from the 19th century and are viewed as historical documents that provide first-hand accounts of the Mormons' cross-continental migration from New York State to Utah, while a very few are diaries written by wives of former church presidents which are viewed as biographical documents on their husband's lives, and thus also contributions to church history.

Keeping a journal with regular entries, however, remains an activity primarily performed by women, associated with the home and daily life, both for its content and as a creative act-just like quilting. It enables the creator to stitch a variety of events and people together, creating a unified patchwork-just like quilting. It results in an object, a materialized narrative based on which a story of one's life may unfold-just like quilting. This is a story which is a personal history: an autobiography of the author as well as the biography of the family members, also treated as documents of witnessing, faith and church life, constituting lay church history: in short, an auto/bio-history.

DISCURSIVE PRESENTATIONS OF LIFE STORIES

The distinction between journals and autobiographies in terms of the intention of the author is pointed out by Anthony Giddens. He proposes that journals are written exclusively for the author and, as such, are personal and intimately honest narratives, while autobiographies allow for a "corrective intervention into the past."¹² This understanding of autobiographies as self-fashioned, retrospective narratives allows room for evaluative intervention by the author, which in the case of Mormon journals is a significant constitutive element of the writings. Self-reflection in the course of which the 'I' is also investigated by the author through the eyes of significant Others, blends into the narrative, tailoring the representation of personal lives. In the process, the 'I' transforms into 'me', the recollecting self into the re-collected self, offering a "dialectical synthesis of internal and external definitions"¹³ of the self, as understood by the author.

¹¹ They were arranged in a catalogue for the first time in 1977 by the Church historian Davis Bitton.

¹² 1991, 72.

¹³ Jenkins 1996, 21.

Similarly, Erzsébet Barát also argues for the intersubjectivity of representation in auto/biographical writing, inasmuch as “auto/biography is a form of discursive practice that reconstructs the past as the major means of self/other understanding.”¹⁴ Drawing on Norman Fairclough's concept of discourse¹⁵, she also contends that this genre is a discursive practice which assists the author in constructing a “continuous, unified personal identity” emerging at the intersection of the multiple positionings available to the self. Also, the mode of auto/biographical writing, in her view, is able to bind various narrative events into a “temporarily fixed coherence,” through emplotment, as introduced by Paul Ricoeur.¹⁶

Emplotment is understood by Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson as the framework within which both minor occurrences and major events take on significance and meaning. They call the narratives which are used to make sense of social positionings and actions ontological narratives, as they enhance the emergence of identity and construct a cohesive self-image out of the fragmented, often even contradictory positions. They propose that ontological narratives also frame action as identities are constituted through these narratives, and it is identity which informs decisions regarding actions. “People act, or do not act, in part according to how they understand their place in any number of given narratives”.¹⁷ In the act of narration, however, authors tend to tailor their stories to their identities as well as to the so-called realities around them.

Michel Foucault also finds that the author's identity is established through the act of writing in early Christian autobiographical writing. However, he also points out that in this narrative process of identity construction, the author is always described as similar to other Christians. That is, Christian autobiographical writing makes use of emplotment as the method of creating a self-narrative which is always tailored to the public narrative of the given faith or church. Foucault's finding also implies that in these writings, identity is established not through difference as much as through similarity/identity as the primary dynamism for fitting in. Therefore, Christian autobiographical writing is also often a forum for myth-making, a type of narrative which offers accounts of wonders and supernatural events which have transformed the author's personality and spirituality, turning him into a true Christian. In this sense, these types of writings are also containers of significant power which may contribute to what Mae Henderson calls “the autobiographical assertion of cultural authority.”¹⁸

¹⁴ 2000, 165.

¹⁵ 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman).

¹⁶ She refers to Paul Ricoeur's 1992 book *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

¹⁷ Somers and Gibson 1998, 61.

¹⁸ 1995, 14.

This cultural authority in the case of Christianity tends to reflect a traditional, heterosexual patriarchal order. In her analysis of the position of women in Judaism, Judith Plaskow proposes that the Jewish patriarchal order is based on the articulation of difference between men and women, centering men and treating women as the Other. Difference, she continues, is always understood in hierarchical terms—which are materialized in institutionalized roles and practices, according to Marie Cornwall. In this hierarchy and the attendant roles and practices, women are assigned particular spheres—as in various Jewish texts, which Plaskow characterizes as male texts that treat women as “objects of male purposes, designs, and desires. [In these texts] Women do not name reality, but rather are named as part of a reality that is male-constructed.”¹⁹

Plaskow argues that patriarchal religions, thus, do not render women absent—they only silence them. She finds that Jewish women “do not look for [themselves] in the narratives, but assume presence, peopling the gaps in the text with women's shadowy forms.”²⁰ Somers and Gibson also discuss the narrative representational silences of women. Drawing on Patrizia Violi's theory, they locate them in the “archetypal, 'universal' narrative of men”²¹ which allows men to objectify themselves and their experiences—but not those of women. Women's experiences appear only in their relation to men, as understood or imagined by men.

All these authors argue that in order to subvert male master narratives and to give voices to women, this textual female subjectivity must be made visible. Somers and Gibson suggest that this may be achieved by reading narratives as texts expressing the multiplicity of subjectivities and in this way doing away with the perceived “neutrality and objectivity” of these narratives. Plaskow proposes that male texts and male dominance may be subverted by challenging established hierarchies—as these are the embodiments and guarantors of perceived gender differences, capturing these in terms of superordination and subordination. She suggests that within Jewish culture, subversion may be achieved through the transformation of the community into one “in which difference is neither hierarchicalized nor tolerated, but truly honored.”²²

¹⁹ Plaskow 1991, 2.

²⁰ 1991, 2.

²¹ 1998, 74.

²² 1992, 97.

VOICES OF MORMON WOMEN

Cornwall examines the voices of Latter-day Saint women and maps the social factors that shape them. She suggests that “[H]ierarchy is a fundamental characteristic of Mormonism, and gender is one of the primary characteristics by which difference, and therefore hierarchy, is created.”²³ This hierarchy assigns specific spheres, roles, and practices to the two genders, which are carefully designed and located. She proposes that the division of gender roles is embedded in social practices related to the two essential structural units within the Church: family and church organization.

Within the family, women and men are entrusted with motherhood and priesthood, respectively, which appear as parallel familial roles. Motherhood is a status based on the natural order between mother and child, while priesthood is a status by law, a later addition to the traditional dyad of the mother-child relation through theology. This results in a triad in which both mother and father seem to have equal voices and authority. However, Cornwall disregards the fact that the natural authority of the mother over her children decreases gradually over time, while the authority granted to the patriarch—through a number of exclusive powers and practices, such as administering blessings invested with special power—is likely to increase, resulting in a more powerful voice than that of the woman's. Moreover, in terms of semantics, motherhood and priesthood are not parallel words: mother is a natural/biological category, which should be paired with father, while priest is a religious/authoritative category. Mormon women who are not wives and mothers do not possess the source needed to have voices by definition, while men are endowed with the authority of priesthood regardless of their marital status and number of children. Therefore, Cornwall's argumentation that the Mormon Church grants equal familial voices to members of both genders and that these voices are expressed accordingly does not seem to hold water. If anything, it reveals the ideal model of a heterosexual patriarchal social order as conceptualized by the Church.

With regard to voices within Church organization, Cornwall suggests that Mormon women enjoy a strong presence and voice on the ward level, which is the local congregational level of the church. Although priesthood is reserved exclusively for men, women are involved in a number of activities: they attend to anyone's needs in the community, “they pray and preach, they direct and teach the religious education programs, (Sunday School, Young Women, Primary, and Relief Society), and they organize church functions and gatherings.”²⁴ Home and familial responsibilities along with regular local church duties “leave the typical Latter-day Saint

²³ 1998, 240.

²⁴ 1998, 241.

woman with little time to think about access to organizational power and decision making ... [and] they rarely notice that women's voices are absent at the highest levels of institutional bureaucracy."²⁵ Moreover, even on the local level, women are involved in activities related to the implementation of their faith and local policies, but not in shaping them or making decisions on them, these still being reserved for the leaders, all members of the priesthood.

Those few women who attempt to subvert the patriarchal hierarchy often depart from the Mormon belief in the literal parenthood of God, the Heavenly Father, which, in their interpretation, logically presupposes the existence of a Heavenly Mother as well. Moreover, the Mormon plan of salvation also conceptualizes the afterlife in terms of man and wife being sealed together with their families and potentially ruling over a planet granted to them as a heavenly couple, the man becoming a god, his wife his goddess. However, the canonized texts never refer to the existence of the Heavenly Mother; her existence is mentioned only once in official church literature, in a piece written on the origin and destiny of men by the First Presidency, which contends that man is "the offspring of celestial parentage", born to "heavenly parents".²⁶ The words 'Heavenly Mother' are not spelt out, her figure is to be found in the logical gap, remains implicit and invisible-and, in silence.

Many claim that the tendency to silence women is all too common in academia. In 1996, a committee was set up at Brigham Young University to address some serious concerns among women professors at the university. The work of the committee led to a report entitled "Limitations on the Academic Freedom of Women at Brigham Young University" which lists a number of cases in the four-year period between 1992–96 in which women were restricted in their academic performance and freedom by the university leadership. These cases included engaging in inconsistent hiring and firing practices, forbidding certain publications, and limiting research projects. One example is the case of Marian Bishop Mumford, who was selected by the English Department for a position, with the full approval of the department chair and the dean. She had completed her Ph.D. on women's journals, such as Anne Frank's, and investigated these as the site of authentic identity construction for women. The university leadership told her to discontinue her research as a condition for being hired, so she declined the position. One may regard these as isolated cases, however, they tend to appear too frequently to be isolated, and the fact that through its first seventy-five years of history, the university has never invited a woman faculty member to speak at its Distinguished Faculty lecture series is a further indication that women in academia are regarded unequal to men, and either work on issues approved by the Mormon leadership or remain invisible and – in silence.

²⁵ 1998, 241.

²⁶ Quoted in McConkie 1997, 516.

It cannot be argued that women enjoy no voice at all within the realm of the family and local organizations. One possible way to map their voices is through a close reading of diaries which are authored by women and regard their daily, primarily familial, but also congregational and spiritual sets of experiences from their personal perspective. The following part focuses on entries from two women's diaries with regard to one, even more specific area: their accounts of their relationship to Mormon men within the realm of the familial, especially their husbands. The purpose of the analysis is to reveal the nature of these relationships as captured by these women, as if models expressing women's relation to men in Mormon circles in general, as well as to expose women's emerging self-positioning and self-definition in relation to men, and to map where the voice of power and authority is located in Mormon families.

DAYS IN THE LIVES OF TWO MORMON WOMEN

This section introduces a selection of diary entries written by two Mormon women. The first one, a woman in her 30s from Georgia, identifies herself as “a wife, mom and nursing student”; however, the topics in her diary express the order of significance in the reverse order: she writes the most about her experience with her studies and often makes mention of her son but less so of her husband. Her direct references to her faith are in regard to her morality: “since being a Mormon, I have some pretty definite moral opinions”²⁷ or keeping to the faith: “those of us non-champagne drinking [people]”²⁸ and relation to church-related events and charity: “Our local town is having a First Night celebration tonight and the Young Women from church sold tickets. Well, how could we not go now? The young women got half of each ticket for camp money, so it's for a good cause.”²⁹

She mentions three men in her family, also members of three generations. One is her son, aged 9, towards whom she expresses genuine love and care. She attends to his needs, “coddles” him and offers him “sympathy” in distress. He is also her aide: “At least my son is going to help me”³⁰ she notes when discussing her Christmas preparations, stating that she will make homemade éclairs, her husband's favorite, from scratch—something most American women would hardly contemplate doing at home.

²⁷ Entry on 03/11/2003.

²⁸ Entry on 31/12/2003.

²⁹ Entry on 31/12/2003.

³⁰ Entry on 18/12/2003.

The second man is her husband, who, based on her text, is also in his 30s. He appears on the pages as a neutral person, but is characterized as one who possesses knowledge and authority. She mentions, for example, that she spent hours over a school assignment without success and finally asked for help from her husband, who “was able to step back and come up with clear cut”³¹ answers from which she was able to work her way to completing the assignment. She also tries to please him, usually in traditional female ways: “I abandoned most of the homemade Christmas gifts. (Well, except for the *éclairs* which were such a hit that my husband went out and bought the ingredients so that I can make a second batch!)”³² Baking his favorite dessert ended up being the most important activity she completed on time for Christmas, and accepted that her husband's high praise for and satisfaction with the *éclairs* were expressed by his actually going to the store and buying the ingredients for a new batch—an occurrence which is read as exceptional, but it would typically not be the case in a non-patriarchal family.

The third man is her father. He is discussed only once and seems to fit the character of a true patriarch: difficult to please. She describes him as a critic who can never be pleased, even making remarks about every single Christmas dinner she has prepared. She mentions that she has decided that if he makes another comment during Christmas dinner this year, she will “sweetly” say, “Do you know what I want for Christmas next year? For you to sit here and eat just one meal that I have prepared and tell me it's good and nothing else.”³³ He, of course, made his comments, but she found an excuse to let them “roll off” her back, and never told him, “sweetly” or otherwise, about her wish.

She also writes a longer entry on domesticity vis-a-vis Christmas preparation. She mentions that she always has great plans to prepare a handmade present for everyone. She tries to find out the others' likes and needs, make the gifts herself, as well as bake, cook, and also perform well in all her other roles. That is, she puts “a lot of pressure” on herself, just as Mormon women generally do, but she cannot cope with it and ends up finishing some of the presents late and never starting others. But, at the end of the day, she blames Martha Stewart—the media star who made her name by re-introducing the wonders of cooking, baking, and crafting which American women traditionally used to do in their homes—for turning her Christmas into “a show-off effort of my lame attempts at domestication.”³⁴

The second diary was written by a former member of the Church. The diary entries were reworked into a continuous narrative, and, although this narrative contains added comments and explanations, it is also faithful to the original diary,

³¹ Entry on 07/11/2003.

³² Entry on 30/12/2003.

³³ Entry on 30/12/2003.

³⁴ Entry on 30/12/2003.

rich in quotations from conversations and letters. The sections discussed below are from a two-year period, when she was 19–21, living in the primarily Mormon town of Provo, Utah.

Her basic understanding of her identity and role in life reflected the patriarchal family model the Church advocates. “The traditions of my religion had mainly taught me to be concerned with my suitability for wifehood”³⁵ she says, implying that it is not so much motherhood as wifehood that had been emphasized. This is expressed further by another comment she makes:

I also, at the age of eighteen, already desperately wanted to marry one [returned missionary], since I knew that my success in this life and the next was dependent upon it. The importance of such a marriage was the primary lesson of my Mormon girlhood, when it had been repeatedly impressed upon me that if I failed to marry a faithful Mormon man in a ceremony performed in a Mormon temple, I would be denied access to the highest level of Mormon heaven. ... And I have never intended to miss it.³⁶

This quotation refers to an essential feature of Mormon theology, especially concerning gender differences: salvation theory. It maintains that one basic condition for a Mormon woman to be able to be saved and to reach the highest level of heaven is not simply to be a mother but to be married in a temple to a worthy Mormon man, already at a high level of priesthood, which usually is received by returned missionaries. The full salvation of a woman depends on the man she marries—and not on motherhood, not on devotion to faith, not on righteousness and hard work. She may excel at all of these, but without being married to a proper Mormon man, strong in faith, she will never reach the highest level of heaven. Therefore, it is no surprise that her primary interest was marriage and that she often made comments such as the following ones: “It was easy for me to confuse the Lord’s voice with Robert’s [her returned missionary boyfriend]. That is how much I admired an outstanding man.”³⁷ Or “I admired him [her husband] with the senseless sense of inferiority that characterized all my dealings with men.”³⁸

For her, power, knowledge, ability, and authority were all invested in holders of the priesthood, whose superiority was never to be questioned. She says that it was only these “men whom I recognized as the voices of authority”³⁹ – voices which were heard and followed. These men enjoyed her unconditional trust, which was based not on her personal experience and relationships with them, but on a category

³⁵ Laake 1993, 13.

³⁶ Laake 1993, 5–6.

³⁷ Laake 1993, 5.

³⁸ Laake 1993, 158.

³⁹ Laake 1993, 155.

and definition introduced by the Church. Statements such as "I had respected Robert's standing as a priesthood holder too much to challenge his beliefs, even to myself"⁴⁰ indicate that her submission was thoroughgoing and unconditional. Even on their wedding night, she trusted her husband to take the lead: "It was only ten o'clock when we climbed into bed I was tired and terrified, and relieved when Monty [her husband] suggested that we wait until later. It wouldn't have occurred to me to suggest it, since I thought that the moment of consummation was his decision."⁴¹ The mere fact that she uses the word "consummation" and that she leaves that to the husband, and it does not even occur to her that she actually may have a say in it, signifies her own positioning of herself as inferior, blindly accepting that she is treated like an object, an item possessed by the husband, available for his personal use as determined by him only.

An acceptance of this position is also expressed in her description of the expectations a Mormon young man, her future husband, has of her as soon as they start seeing each other.

He immediately asked me to change my life for him, to quit my job at the student paper so that we'd have more time together. (As soon as we were engaged, I did quit, too.) He pressured me from the time we began dating to prepare his dinner every evening. (I never agreed, but the battles were fierce.) Although he made it clear that I was the woman for him, he was nonetheless quick to criticize my kisses, my clothes, my family. And he discussed the long line of his former girlfriends while his forehead puckered with displeasure at their failures, which he hoped I wouldn't repeat.⁴²

No wonder she felt that "[P]erhaps my Heavenly Father was satisfied with me, but I don't think Monty ever was."⁴³

Her narrative is an account of a woman who firmly believed in her faith, the superiority and absolute authority of the holders of the priesthood, and the possibility of a happy life leading to full salvation, as outlined by her faith. She did not question these firm convictions nor did she challenge the position assigned to Mormon men. If anything, she doubted herself in light of their ongoing criticism, questioning her own behavior, righteousness, and worthiness, constantly attempting to find ways to improve herself in order to meet the expectations of these men. And they were numerous: her boyfriend, husband, leaders of her congregations called bishops, higher church authorities, all of whom tended to be more critical than not, more frightening than kind, more threatening than inclusive. Her diary is a narrative

⁴⁰ Laake 1993, 25.

⁴¹ Laake 1993, 128.

⁴² Laake 1993, 55.

⁴³ Laake 1993, 136.

of her own thoughts and deeds, of a woman whose natural drive was to see herself as secondary to men and find reasons which would support further that it was indeed the case. Her narrative is the story of a woman who explains and justifies male dominance in the Church, without even the slightest attempt to present this as questionable or problematic.

MORMON WOMEN AND THEIR AUTO/BIO-HISTORIES

Claudia Bushman, a widely noted Mormon historian, contends that keeping notes equals living. She says that the significance of keeping a diary dawned on her while preparing for a presentation on the life of Mary Chesnut—a famous American woman from the Civil War era—which she based on Chesnut's diary: "She lives because she kept notes. I would disappear because I did not." Although she could easily claim that her writings as a historian would provide her with a legacy, she disregards that and locates her voice in her diary.

What can be concluded about Mormon women's voices in these diaries? These entries express the authors' continuous, cohesive self-identity, framed by their Mormon faith. Their religion provides the coherence, the meta-narrative into which these identities are emplotted and made meaningful. Terms or abbreviations common within the Mormon subculture are often used, with no explanation attached, indicating that the diaries are primarily written for a Mormon audience. They reveal lives embedded in the highly structured, patriarchal Church and a world view which embraces the teachings of the Church. "Most of what I wrote was self-consciously Mormon," says one commenter on Bushman's article, expressing how Mormon diaries also tend to be self-tailored, representing self-images, which are in line with the faith and Church expectations. Similarly to early Christian autobiographical writings, these are constructed to prove and confirm identification with the Mormon community, are about being accepting and accepted. The authors do not regard the diary as a site for possible subversion as they do not position themselves as women who need to subvert. These diaries serve rather as accounts and testimonies that contribute to the maintenance of the Mormon faith and Church, along with the patriarchal family structure and social order they envision.

These diaries do not question church hierarchy and male leadership, authority and power, nor do they indicate the need to equalize institutionalized difference in gender. These are definitely not texts of criticism or rebellion, but of proof of the righteousness of women's worth and roles as assessed and determined by the Church. The sense of obedience is often coupled with an implied desire for reward: the hard labor invested in living up to church expectations and fully observing the faith foreshadows the possibility of glorious salvation, which is difficult to forsake.

The church provides overall security and offers a salvation theory which is very difficult to discard, especially if one is born into the faith. It also comes as no surprise, then, that "sentimentalizing or being didactic" is a feature of LDS journals" as worded by another of the Saints also commenting on Bushman's article.

The entries introduced were written by women who were active members of the Church and wanted to remain that. It is this self-positioning of the internal and external that determines the content, tone, and mode of narration in these diaries. The authors do not attack the male church hierarchy on any grounds, for any reason, nor do they want to change the existing mentalities and attitudes toward gender difference: their diaries represent an act of affirmation of their assigned positions. As a result, they do not want to reposition themselves, or tend not to use the diary as a site of mental processes in which they may challenge the patriarchal narratives and women's subjectification. The diary entries are written by women whose position as the speaking subject has created male texts, to the effect that they subjectify their own selves just as patriarchy would. They do not want "to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it,"⁴⁴ eventually leading to subversion, primarily because they see that there is neither the need nor the space for it. They either firmly believe in their inferiority or, if they do not, they refuse to challenge the all too powerful faith and Church for fear of losing their chance for salvation-which no true believer would risk. Theirs are tailored lives, represented in tailored writing: patches designed to match the colorful quilt, which signifies the cohesion and uniformity of the Mormon community, tying them all together, so that no loose ends may remain.

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⁴⁴ Irigaray 1998, 570.

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THE REPRESENTATION OF RACE AND GENDER IN *IMITATION OF LIFE*

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I want to present this talk to my friend and colleague, Dr. Sarolta Marinovich, in celebration of her 60th birthday. I would like to offer this presentation to Sári as a token of friendship, a precious sisterhood, that I have held in high esteem ever since I came to know her in her many capacities as a pioneering Hungarian feminist scholar, a most successful conference organizer and academic, a proud mother and grandmother, and last but not least, a most effective feminist “networker.”

* * *

Imitation of Life (Dir. Douglas Sirk, 1959) is one of the most successful narratives plotting the intertwined lives of a black and a white mother. Since Fanny Hurst published her book of the same title in 1933, it has incited passionate, even tearful audience responses, including my students,¹ who are normally quick to raise brows over the slightest streak of movie sentimentalism.¹ Not only popular but also financially and politically successful, its first film adaptation by John Stahl in 1934 earned a tremendous profit for Universal Pictures. Even in the post-civil-rights-movement era, *Imitation of Life* was hailed by black film scholar Donald Bogle as a landmark film, claiming that in it “The humanization of the Negro servant was carried to new and highly publicized heights” (57). The 1959 remake of the original narrative by Douglas Sirk superseded the popularity of both the original book and

¹ I must point out, however, that it was my Hungarian students at ELTE and SZTE who found *Imitation of Life* a powerful tearjerker. When discussing the same movie with my Finnish students on an Erasmus course at the University of Turku, the responses were highly critical, even dismissive of its racial and gender stereotypes. The different Hungarian and Finnish reactions, I venture to suggest, signal profound problems with educational ideals and social goals in our country that we urgently need to address. Given the deep-seated traditions and resurging waves of various kinds of exclusionarism in Hungary, the feminist educator needs to measure up to enormous responsibilities now made more visible by international academic programs such as Erasmus.

its first film adaptation, netting Universal's biggest financial success until *Jaws* was released in 1975.

Before exploring the intricacies of gender and race as represented in Douglas Sirk's film, let me give you a sketch of the storyline. The film begins in 1947 with Lora Meredith, a beautiful blond woman frantically looking for her daughter, Susie, on Coney Island. Lora is alone and helpless among a huge mass of people on the beach, all faceless and indifferent to her trouble. She bumps into a young photographer, Steve Archer, who directs her to a policeman and, owing to male intervention, she eventually succeeds in locating her child with a black woman and a white-looking little girl. In a few minutes, the two mothers, white and black, take to each other as well as realize that they need each other: both are widows and have a hard time making ends meet as working mothers. Lora, the white woman, offers one of her small rooms for Annie and her daughter, Sara Jane, in return for babysitting for her while she is off, job-hunting in the city.

Lora is an aspiring actress with talent, ambition and perseverance to succeed in the face of inimical circumstances, completely alone in a strange metropolis, without male protection and financial means. Immediately infatuated with her "fine bones," Steve, the young photographer from the beach, offers her love, and moreover, marriage and security, but Lora persists in pursuing her goal to be a successful actress. Assisted by Annie, who proves to be a most efficient housekeeper and a substitute mother for Susie, Lora manages to devote herself fully to the stage, and in seven years she becomes a national celebrity with lugubrious fees. However, against the backdrop of financial security and professional success, Lora is feeling increasingly unhappy in her private life. Though providing profusely for her daughter, and enjoying the company of a rich comedy writer, she admits to herself that she only imitates life instead of living it: she has neglected her daughter and missed a meaningful heterosexual relationship.

In the meantime, the black mother-daughter relationship is strained to the point of a fatal break-up, white looking Sara Jane rejecting her mother and running away to pass for white. In addition, Sara Jane also aspires for the stage, but her opportunities are more limited than Lora's so she becomes only a chorus girl. No matter how hard Annie tries to rescue her daughter from "the ditch," Sara Jane is not glamorized by her mother's alternative of religious piety and social confinement. Due to some mysterious disease and the trauma of losing her child, Annie dies prematurely. The film concludes with a long scene depicting her richly orchestrated funeral complete with Mahalia Jackson singing a passionate spiritual. In the last minute a screaming Sara Jane appears, hysterically reclaiming her mother from the coffin. White Lora, Susie and Steve, invariably mournful but in control, offer relief to Sara Jane by taking her inside a cab, symbolically providing her with the safety and comfort of a cab and the promise of a "modern," integrated family.

Jerky and reductive as this sketchy outline may be, it evokes the emotional intensity of the film. But Douglass Sirk had a larger design than just a family melodrama in mind when making this movie. As he claimed:

"I tried to make it into a picture of social consciousness-not only of a white social consciousness, but of a Negro one, too. Both white and black are leading imitated lives.... There is a wonderful expression: seeing through a glass darkly. Everything, even life, is inevitably removed from you. You can't reach or touch the real. You just see reflections. If you try to grasp happiness itself, your fingers only meet glass. It's hopeless." (quoted at http://yorty.sonoma.edu/filmfrog/archive/Imitation_of_Life.htm)

Indeed, *Imitation of Life* strikes one as a seemingly more sophisticated film than a tearjerker, setting in motion binaries, such as imitation-truth, natural-artificial, white-black, feminine-masculine, moral-immoral, and innocent-corrupt. Sirk's narrative has a praiseworthy tendency to problematize these stabilities; indeed it even goes as far as to intimate a larger landscape of groundlessness, insecurity and flux, encompassing both the white and the black world. In consequence of this strategy that does not shrink back from applying "floating signifiers" in the film narrative, it is difficult for the viewer to decide a great many narrative functions crucial for interpreting the movie's gender and racial inflections.

Let me give a few examples of these narrative instabilities. It is hard to decide, for instance, whether it is white Lora or black Annie who represents good mothering in the plot; whether it is the mother, Annie, who is the perpetrator of a series of crimes against the daughter or, on the contrary, the daughter, Sara Jane, is the perpetrator, indeed, a killer, murdering her own mother. (Put it another way: Is Annie the cause of her daughter's downfall or is she the victim of her daughter's cruelty?)

To a certain degree, it is also difficult to decide whether Lora is a "natural" woman guided by love for her child, seeking true heterosexual romance by the side of a "real man" or, on the contrary, she is driven by legitimate desires to succeed alone out in the world, attaining distinction, power and fame on the stage, even as a serious dramatic actress. Similarly, it is hard to decide whether Sara Jane (black Annie's beautiful daughter) is white or black; whether it is white Lora or "mulatta" Sara Jane who is a cheap woman; whether Steve Archer (Lora's loyal beau) is a passionate lover or an arrogant brute. Along the same line, it is not at all clear whether Lora is rendered as a decent woman or, on the contrary, a cheap woman who prostitutes not only her talent but also sells her body to a popular comedy writer; whether Lora is selfishly individualistic and career minded or she is a self-sacrificial mother, her child and home always on her mind, even at work, in the theater. It seems that – *horribile dictu* – even womanhood is not "inevitably" tied to a distinct gender or racial identity in the film, since Steve is the one who is pre-

occupied with “feminine ambitions” and not Lora. While Lora and Annie, the women with children, can get along without men pretty well, Steve keeps returning to the “fragmented” family to “save it” and make it complete at Lora's side as husband/protector. In sum, Steve and not the adult women is the only character who hankers after marriage, home and family, willing to stake his whole life-in a womanly fashion-on LOVE. Indeed, as an artist he fails to rise as high as Lora, since his photographs, though bringing him wealth and prestige in the business world, never make it to the Museum of Modern Art. While giving up his ambition as an artist, he remains adamant about his other youthful dream to gain Lora as a wife.

The unanchored tendencies of the film are further enhanced by two distinct plots, both revolving around quests: the white main plot and the black subplot configure women who restlessly seek to write their life “beyond the ending.”² In the white main plot Lora is *searching* (for her lost daughter, her identity as an actress, mother, lover, friend) as well as she is *being searched for*, indeed, pursued by Steve to reclaim her as a wife defined on his own terms. In the black subplot, Sara Jane is *searching* (for self-realization, physical safety, wider options to choose from as a white woman) as well as being *sought for*, indeed, pursued by her black mother to reclaim her as a decent black daughter defined on her own terms. Both Lora and Sara Jane are represented as rebelling against traditional roles confining them to gendered and raced scenarios that they feel paralyzing. Lora is described as transgressing white, middle class gender boundaries to be an independent woman of great acting talent in the male dominated American theatrical world. Sara Jane is likewise rendered as a woman ambitious to transgress barriers in order to empower herself. Yet in her case crossing over racial and social boundaries necessitates a more risky “double passing” to become “white” and glamorous.

For all the instabilities, self-referential gestures, and female rebellions, Sirk's narrative is far from being either a postmodern pastiche or a feminist critique of white patriarchal dominance. On the contrary, the film accommodates difference (racial and gender transgression) only to control it right away by several devices of which I will briefly discuss only one, the framing device of *voices and gazes*.

Sirk's film begins with Earl Grant singing a bitter sweet melody while behind the opening credits glass beads are cascading in slow motion. The first stanza of the lyrics repeats the title of the film as well as prefigures the main issues to be developed in the plot:

What is love without giving
Without love you are only living an imitation of life.

² For a detailed analysis of the white main plot and the black subplot that explores the hierarchy of values embraced by *Imitation of Life*, see Valery Smith 1998.

The film ends with a long and deeply emotional scene with Mahalia Jackson singing the spiritual, Trouble of the World:

Soon it'll be dawn/ Trouble of the world/ Trouble of the world/
Trouble of the world,
Soon it'll be dawn/ Trouble of the world/ Going home to hear you've gone/
No more weeping on Whaley/ No more weeping on Whaley/ No more
weeping on Whaley/ Going home to live with my love, etc.

The key terms of Earl Grant's song, as is also evident from the plot, are LOVE, GIVING, LIVING, and IMITATION, of which LOVE is the pivotal term. Yet this LOVE is referenced as indeterminate (besides its main aspect, which is GIVING), unspecified, unrelated, in short, boundless and oceanic in its extensity and intensity. What is to be taken for sure is that LOVE AS GIVING or GIVING LOVE equals TRUE LIFE (as opposed to an imitation of life); hence LOVE is assumed as *transcending* race, gender, class, religion, sexuality or other earthly limitations.

Mahalia Jackson's spiritual is about mourning for the loved one and longing for a reunion with mother who is already with God. According to the lyrics, going to the mother is to go home, which also implies meeting God in heaven. In the context of the film, this particular "Trouble of the world" is the very trouble of blackness as well as of motherhood, both constructed as *ahistorical*, transcending class, race, time, and culture-in short, magnified but at the same time explained away as metaphysical essence.

After the framing device of *voices*, let me take up the other framing device of the film crucially constructed as a series of *gazes*. As we recall, the film begins with a long scene introducing a young mother desperately looking for her daughter on the beach. But this opening section of the filmic narrative simultaneously comprises a scene in which a young man takes a photo of this young mother. That is, we have a woman trying hard to see (but she fails nevertheless), whereas we also have a man who not only succeeds in seeing but also takes possession of what he sees with the help of his camera. This photograph of Lora Meredith, whom he barely knows, will later be called by the young man, Steve Archer, as "Mother in Distress," which he finds so successful that he decides to submit it to a magazine. Thanks to "Mother in Distress," the jobless young man is already at the top in a few years, heading a powerful advertising agency.

What is, then, the significance of the gendered representation of looks at the beginning of *Imitation of Life*?³ For all the apparent floating signifiers and instab

³ I am aware of the important differences recent feminist scholarship (E. Ann Kaplan, bell hooks, Ella Shohat, Mary Louise Pratt) has made between "gaze" and "look," problematizing Laura Mulvey's pioneering essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" 1975. However crucial

ilities of gender and racial identity, Sirk makes *visible* his gendered landscape that was temporarily made invisible by the turbulent times, World War II and its aftermath, when men were missing, women were present (even as providers) and the idea of racial integration was looming large. Whereas Lora is desperately trying to see and eventually assisted to see through male guidance (helped by Steve and the policeman, she locates her daughter), Steve immediately sees what he is looking for. At the very beginning of the film, he is represented as a character of weight entitled with the right to look as well as to name. He is not only endowed with the authoritative look of a professional photographer, but also rewarded for it with a lucrative business, and, as we shall see, with a woman who eventually turns out to be a “mother in despair” or a mother to be assisted-as he earlier identified her.

Indeed, this gendered framing-and-naming of the woman that launches the film narrative comes full circle at the end of the movie when Lora is shot as a tender mother, sheltering Sara Jane with her arm in the safety of a taxi cab she shares with her daughter, Susie, and her loyal husband-to-be, Steve. With the sumptuous funeral over, Sara Jane belatedly arrived and hysterically threw herself on her mother's coffin, but Lora as substitute mother tenderly disarmed her and took the still sobbing daughter into the cab with her. Instrumental in finding straying female children without fathers (Susie at the beginning of the film, and Sara Jane at the end), Steve is now looking benignly, taking stock of his women, two daughters and a wife. His gaze gives final approval of a family eventually reunited and racially integrated.

With the gender and racial anxieties over, life gets back to “normal.” Earl Grant's male voice at the beginning and Mahalia Jackson's female voice at the end of the film ally to legitimate Steve's benevolent final looking that accommodates racial and gender transgressions as long as they comply with *his terms* of happiness and truth within the white patriarchal family, complete with a black daughter. His gaze is, then, the one that controls the final scene and brings home the truth to all of us (who may not have got the picture) as to how life is to be lived “without imitation.”

it would be to expand the scope of my discussion and explore the dynamics of looking relations, (white and black) women's active/resistant looking, white man's imperial gaze or Sirk's witty devices of self-reflexivity (film/play/fiction looking at itself) in *Imitation of Life*, this occasion does not seem to be appropriate for such meticulous elaborations. For an important source of recent theorizing about looking and the gaze, see E. Ann Kaplan 1997.

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SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR IN THE POST-SOCIALIST CONDITION

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CHOOSING A TRADITION

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* has proved to be a living classic. My paper concentrates on its concept of ambiguity in ethics and identity, problems that I consider once again highly relevant in our post-socialist situation. I appreciate *The Second Sex* in my position as a professor of philosophy as a comprehensive introduction into feminist theory and gender studies that is more viable for readers in our region than, say, Judith Butler, an author often recommended by feminist visitors from the US. Only a philosophical work of such encompassing kind and groundbreaking power can provide us a chance to cope with our theoretical handicap in joining the international community of feminist scholars.¹ In the last decades I have also noticed a growing interest in Beauvoir in Western feminist theory. Maybe, she has indeed become, as Karen Vintges argues, the feminist thinker for our times,² now including Eastern European feminists as well. I suggest that Beauvoir could be a meeting point between Western and Eastern European feminists insofar as her work, *The Second Sex* provides us a chance to face our Marxist or socialist past.³

¹ See Joó 2003. A new version of the present paper in Hungarian is forthcoming in Palasik és Sipos (szerk.) *Házastárs, munkatárs, vetélytárs?* Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó.

² This is a categorization implied by the title of Vintges 1999.

³ I am now addressing a frequent topic: Where do we, East-Central European women belong in the waves of Western feminism? I guess between the first and the second wave. I like to see myself as a humanist or equality feminist looking for difference on the horizon of equality. It is in fact the third wave's goal, isn't it?

THE SECOND SEX IN SOCIALIST HUNGARY:
THIRTY YEARS AGO

I have to outline the political situation in Hungary at the time when Beauvoir's book first arrived there because it helps us to understand the present, post-socialist situation. *The Second Sex* was translated into Hungarian in 1969 and it was an immediate success, followed by a second edition in 1971.⁴ Around these years in Hungary, the theoretical chance appeared for some critical philosophers to revise Marxist philosophy and integrate some elements of existentialist philosophy into it. These philosophers, though, were called 'revisionists' in a pejorative sense in the language of official party ideology. A sign of this changing climate was the publication and discussion of Sartre's works that also opened up the way for the Beauvoir text. One of these critical Marxist philosophers was the controlling editor of *The Second Sex*. His name is Zádor Tordai. Earlier on, George Lukács, the period's leading Marxist philosopher wrote an essay against the combination of Marxism and existentialism⁵.

As for women's issues⁶, two years after the second edition of *The Second Sex*, in 1973, some intellectual women launched a petition campaign to promote legal abortion.⁷ This campaign was one of the first political actions of the Hungarian opposition in state socialism, still in the making. It had the form of a petition to subscribe and I am quite proud of having signed it myself. This action was quite private: the organizers took the petition personally to each of the potential subscribers they had known about. The initiative was illegal; the organizers had to suffer retaliations; some of them were even made to emigrate.

The year 1973, in general, was a milestone in Hungarian politics in terms of the relation of the Communist Party to the critical philosophers. A group of them, the so-called Budapest-School, mostly former students of George Lukács, were thrown out of their positions and this way compelled to emigrate. Among them were two

⁴ It was an abridged edition authorized by Beauvoir herself, containing about two-thirds of the original, with most footnotes left out. It takes another paper to analyze what and why was left out of the Hungarian translation. The controlling editor was a philosopher specialized in existentialist philosophy. He provided a philosophical glossary to *The Second Sex*.

⁵ Waldenfels 1983 also mentions Lukács. He published four volumes on the connections between phenomenology and Marxism.

⁶ For a detailed review see Goven's 1993 PhD dissertation.

⁷ For a discussion of abortion see Júlia Szalai "Abortion in Hungary" in *Feminist Review* No. 29, 1988. On the petition itself see Körösi, one of the organizers' work "The Non-existence of Emancipation" in Morgan ed. *Sisterhood is Global. The International Women's Movements Anthology*, New York: Feminist Press, 1984.

women: Mária Márkus and Ágnes Heller. Márkus, a social scientist became a feminist scholar. After her emigration she could publish her research done on Hungarian women's situation in the sixties. The philosopher Heller's relationship to feminism is less straightforward. After sympathizing with feminism for a while she turned rather hostile.⁸

There is a striking coincidence between the French pro-abortion movement in which Beauvoir herself took part and the Hungarian proclamation⁹. The French action took place in the public space while our so-called 'second public sphere' just started to take shape as a result of similar political actions. I guess there is a connection between publishing *The Second Sex* and organizing the petition campaign for abortion. In any case, the organizers were women. So much about politics in Hungary in the seventies. Later, in my analysis of identity, I will explore further how women in the Eastern Block could have read Beauvoir's book.

POST/SOCIALIST IDENTITY:

A MORAL RATHER THAN POLITICAL STORY OF BECOMING

Now I'll turn to the central thesis of my paper. I'll argue that our post-socialist identity formed under socialism has more of a moral than a political character. It could be called an anti-political identity. Its formation can also be traced back as far as the seventies in Hungary. At the time, apart from small groups of oppositional intellectuals, there was not any political movement; neither of men nor of women. While looking for our predecessors in fighting for women's issues after the transition we had to realize that a women's movement was even completely unthinkable.¹⁰

In our present lies our past embedded. So let me first try to take that past into account. The first question to answer is: What was our old, so-called 'socialist' identity like? The negative definition is now well-known: it was gender-blind, to put it briefly. Sex/gender was an inessential part of identity for women, just like for

⁸ Although she contributed to a volume on feminist philosophy edited by Nagl-Docekal 1990, some years later she started to publish sharply critical papers against American feminism and made theoretical objections to the whole issue of feminism, mostly in Hungarian periodicals. After 1973 she emigrated with her husband, the philosopher Ferenc Fehér and taught in different American universities till she took over Hannah Arendt's chair at the New School of Social Research.

⁹ Schwarzer's 1999 work contains three forewords and five interviews with Beauvoir. The author was in contact with Beauvoir for years.

¹⁰ A question often raised, is concerned with the reasons for the lack of any women's movement in Hungary. See in this regard especially Mária Neményi's works.

men. However, the picture is more complex. I will explore two positive characteristics of socialist women's identity: (1) it was based on equality and (2) on caring for the family.

AWARENESS OF EQUALITY

We lived in a socially constructed reality of equality with men. The Marxist task was realized by state socialism in that women were liberated from their oppressed situation. So from the fifties on in socialist countries in our self-consciousness we lived as equal to, and as free as, men. Therefore we were just 'artists', 'philosophers' etc; we did not want to be called a 'woman-writer' or 'woman-philosopher'. The attitude has remained unchanged up to this day with the exception of some feminists like me. Here I refer the reader to interviews made with famous woman-writers and woman-philosophers who refused the label 'woman' in addition to their job title. However, our strong consciousness of equality turned into an obstacle in the way of accepting feminist tasks in socialism and at the beginning of the transition period as well. We could not see any use for feminist theory or a feminist movement: we believed to have already reached their goals. (The idea of post-feminism was and still is quite popular.) I shared this opinion myself and presented it in 1990 at a meeting in Vienna¹¹. My present situation more than ten years later opens up a new perspective: that of a process from the initial denial to the acceptance – of what? To say it briefly: the identity of the second sex. The existence of a hierarchical difference between men and women was denied by the socialist self-consciousness of equality. After 1990, the following ten-twelve years offered plenty of opportunities to raise consciousness of the still existing negative differences and discrimination against women. The story of my rising consciousness is typical in Eastern Europe nowadays as it used to be in the West as well.¹² The pro-

¹¹ Similar opinions were published in a couple of books published by Eastern and Western scholars on the topic of transition by Funk and Mueller eds. 1993, Gal and Kligman 2000, Corrin 1997, Einhorn 1993, Jahnert, Nickel, and Gohrisch eds. 2001, Feischmidt, Magyari-Vincze, and Zentai eds. 1997.

¹² In 1990 the Vienna Circle of Woman-philosophers, the Department of Philosophy at the Vienna University organized the first meeting between Austrian women and women of the neighboring countries. I presented the opinion mentioned above and did not see it as an issue for philosophy. Nevertheless, the question struck me: it gave me something to think over again in the following years. What I am presenting now is its outcome: my narrative identity of becoming a feminist.

cess constructed my feminist identity as a narrative identity: its becoming makes up its essential feature.

Formerly we had envisaged an identity of the kind 'just like men': the one of equality, sameness. Then this identity became transformed as a result of historical changes. We can point out a similarity in Beauvoir's case as well. She saw herself as a writer, an intellectual equal with her friends and colleagues, and never felt personal discrimination, or disadvantages based on her sex.¹³ We know the continuation of her story: being asked by Sartre to examine her life and education to see what difference it made to be born a woman, she started her research on the situation of women. The outcome is *The Second Sex*. According to her narrative, we have to thank Sartre for the publication. At the same time, ironically, she admitted that in these years she felt like writing about herself.

In addition to her alleged equality, the identity of a woman grown up in state socialism entailed an essential (and traditional) part as well, namely the care and responsibility for the family as her natural role, founded on her biological difference. In the public opinion to be a married working mother represented an emblematic homogeneous identity. The tension between equality and unshared family responsibility was not publicly problematized; it was rather denied (along with the resulting double burden that is well analyzed by feminist social scientists).

AMBIGUOUS IDENTITY IN READING

However, the everyday life of women showed a less charming and less unambiguous picture. Reading Beauvoir's analyses under socialism, on marriage and motherhood, about the boring repetition of household chores, and about the burdens of motherhood, must have been a revelation of liberating force. It partly explains her extraordinary success. Some of women's lived experiences, hardly spoken of before, were revealed. The power and validity of her descriptions have remained unchanged, just like women's situation in the family. But the Beauvoirian housemaid did not have another vocation. One reason for socialist women to differentiate themselves from the Beauvoirian housewife was that, unlike her, they

¹³ In her memoirs, often cited. Her self-assured statement could have perhaps challenged Le Docuff 1991 and Moi 1994 to investigate her personal life and career. The problem is of course one of theoretical importance: How far can individual freedom reach in a period when most women do not have it? Beauvoir herself provided a theoretical answer. Freedom can not individually be attained only socially. That is, her individual statement of freedom was refuted by her own theory. That refutation was presented in both works on Beauvoir written by Docuff and Moi, her spiritual daughters.

had a position and were financially and legally equal to men. I think most socialist women identified themselves more readily with the picture of the independent woman in the last short chapter of the book. This picture gave them re-assurance and self-confidence. Yet, at the same time, they must have become partially aware of the old burdens of their private lives as housewives described in the largest part of Beauvoir's book.

Although socialist women were not confined to the household, nor bored at home as the Beauvoirian housemaid was, the work done at home remained as hard and unpaid and without recognition as in the capitalist, bourgeois society in the past and present. Neither capitalist nor socialist society acknowledged traditional female work and tasks. It was the case because Marxist theory, the ideological resource for the socialist institutions, makes a distinction in value between productive and reproductive work, between material production and reproduction of life and its vital conditions. In traditional Marxism, reproduction, including women's work at home, is not considered to be productive of new material values. That is, women's social evaluation as equal members of society depended on having a productive position in the workplace. Taking identification and differentiation together, the socialist woman-reader of Beauvoir could feel ambivalent about the text: being free and equal on the one hand and being confined to the home and unequal on the other. In the course of her reading, she could re-live her own ambiguous, moral identity.

HOMOGENEOUS IDENTITY IN POLITICS

The socialist woman was given the opportunity for self-reflection mostly in reading Beauvoir since there wasn't any public, political discussion of women's situation where she could have mobilized her reading. The public or political identity of women, that is the position of married working mothers, was unambiguously positive, homogeneous and powerful, furnished by the assumed historical privilege of socialism due to their liberation from oppression. Socialism gave the evidence for the truth of Beauvoir's basic principle: it is neither woman's nature nor her fate to be the second sex. Beauvoir subscribed to the Marxist philosophy of history on the historical evolution of humankind. Women's liberation counts as a milestone of this evolution as she concludes with a quote from Marx on the last page of *The Second Sex*.

A further important comparison remains to be drawn: the theoretical justification of motherhood in *The Second Sex* and in socialism. Woman's specific difference is her ability to give birth. Beauvoir attributes crucial relevance to this biological fact. According to her, this is what makes woman the slave of the species. Woman's individual interest and pleasure on one hand and those of the species in

reproduction on the other oppose each other, while in the case of man they coincide. Woman and man therefore are not equally free to follow their goals and engage in their respective projects. Thus Beauvoir reinforces motherhood as a natural identity that inherently makes women disadvantaged in comparison with men.

Beauvoir's theoretical stance on motherhood seems to be a form of biological determinism in some scholars' view. Does she really subscribe to a biological determinism of motherhood? A deeper analysis of Beauvoir's chapter on biology, however, makes it clear that according to her central claim biological facts (including the female ability to give birth) acquire their significance, their meaning (their weight) according to particular socio-historical circumstances¹⁴. Back in the middle of the twentieth century, childbearing in fact made women a kind of slave to the reproduction of the human species, since there were no safe and reliable methods of contraception or any legal possibility of abortion available. By now changing circumstances have liberated women from the slavery of childbearing, but not from the moral duty to become (sooner or later) a mother. Social and individual recognition still depend on being a mother in addition to career and marriage.

A socialist mother's identity was theoretically reassured by reading Beauvoir: on one hand it was woman's inescapable destiny to have children; on the other hand she became free to choose her destiny. The Marxist hierarchical distinction between production and reproduction taken over by Beauvoir as value-producing activity versus biological process (pregnancy) reinforced the primary element of women's identity as worker, just like in the case of men. Therefore motherhood should have been considered as socially secondary identity – with pregnancy as a merely biological, primary process. Yet this was not the case: motherhood and family were important values in socialism, women as individuals nearly disappeared behind these roles. The importance of the family was beyond question: family was considered to be the basis of any kind of society. Consequently, Beauvoir's skeptical views on marriage were refused on the cover of the Hungarian edition of *The Second Sex*: "She comes to conclusions the Hungarian audience does not, cannot agree with. She provokes discussion; for example her position on marriage. However, this does not diminish [her work's] significance."¹⁵ In my opinion the excellence of her work for the official party ideology could have been her revealing women's oppression in capitalist society and her pleading for their liberation as Marxist ideology had it as well.

The similarity of Hungarian women's situation to woman's traditional patriarchal role as cultivated in capitalist society was declared to be superficial because there

¹⁴ Vintges 1995, among others, shares my view.

¹⁵ On the cover sheet of the Hungarian translation it goes like this: „Vannak olyan következtetési is, amelyekkel a magyar közönség nem ért, nem is érthet egyet: vitára ingerelnek.”

women's family responsibility was constrained by their economic dependency. A socialist family was different and better than a capitalist (called bourgeois in French) family. One of Beauvoir's important legacies in post-socialism could be the vindication of individual freedom for women, whether or not living in family. Women as individuals should be recognized in their individuality as persons without a family, without partnership, as individual men are recognized in similar situations.

ETHICS OF AMBIGUITY, AMBIGUOUS IDENTITY, IDENTITY POLITICS

Perhaps the most important and liberating legacy of Beauvoir after socialism is the imperative to consciously live an ambiguous identity. This is a lesson both for men and women, although not in equal measure. With that observation now I turn to my final point, to the ethics of ambiguity¹⁶ as it appears in *The Second Sex*.

So far I have argued that the socialist woman's identity incorporated both being a new, independent woman, equal to men, and having a family as her natural destiny. In this regard Beauvoir draws our attention to the ambivalences, the contradictions of this woman. Instead of denying them, she encourages us to see and live them. Beauvoir describes women's ambivalent behavior in many situations. She claims that their experiences and sentiments are ambiguous as well. Their ambivalence manifests itself in relation to men, in relation to themselves, and to the world, as we find summarized in the tenth chapter on woman's situation and character.

Her concept of ambiguity is in fact similar to Merleau-Ponty's, whose name is often mentioned in the parts of *The Second Sex* on the body. The concept was intended by Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* to get rid of the Cartesian dichotomy of body and soul and make it the central characteristics of human existence, to make it one that reveals itself in sexuality, because "sexuality and existence are coextensive" (quoted in Beauvoir 1971, 61). Beauvoir explains the citation in the chapter on psychoanalysis, referring to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty as well.

We find an even more telling exposition on the ambiguity of the human condition revealed in sexuality when she is discussing female sexuality and erotica. Here Beauvoir goes so far as to declare that the female sexual experience is more authentic than the male one, lacking his self-deception that is due to his aggressive role in

¹⁶ Beauvoir, in the 'Foreword', declared her ethical standpoint to be existentialist ethics. I would rather define it a phenomenological ethics based on women's lived experiences.

sexuality¹⁷. That is why man is less able to live the fundamental ambiguity of human existence revealed in sexual experience. (Here I have to refrain from commenting on this important passage and draw all the consequences another time.)

As for the concept of ambiguity in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir makes it clear that it relates to the main dyads of opposites in existentialism such as transcendence and immanence, activity and passivity, freedom or choice and the reluctance to take it up, the Self (Same) and the Other (Different). Ambiguity concerns other binary oppositions of the philosophical tradition as well, such as nature versus society, or life versus spirit.¹⁸ In conjunction with the conceptual pairs the dualism of the human sexes has existed and always will. The human couple incorporates the authentic significance of humankind.¹⁹ In the relationship of the human couple there should be a reciprocity and mutual acknowledgement, which could be realized after the demolition of the slavery of one half of humankind. That was Beauvoir's hope as well as that of Marxist theory. Beauvoir admitted later that socialist societies in her opinion did not realize this hope, but the socialist regimes declared equality of women to be realized. Socialist women's self-conscious identity was unambiguous in this respect.

I have arrived at my *closing statement*: In my opinion Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity receives its full significance for women once again in the post-socialist condition. After socialism we have witnessed a return of the ideal of the traditional woman – among other conservative and some liberal values as well as non-values (antisemitism, antifeminism, etc.). What kind of identity and existence have we got returned? Ironically, the one in *The Second Sex*: The opportunity to stay at home and have children as the only real vocation. Where could the 'second sex' have been hiding herself during socialism? She was undercover, staying with us all the time oppressed within our family.

The facts revealing the existence of the 'second sex' became public knowledge in the last decade: these are similar facts all over the world.²⁰ Yet in our socialist reality we lived our lives with the consciousness of equality. Was that a false consciousness? That is not my point. What I want to argue is that the situation itself was ambiguous and ambivalent, but was not adequately perceived as such. I quote an emb-

¹⁷ Beauvoir 1976 vol. 2, 190–91.

¹⁸ She traces them back to the Pythagoreans and mentions them in her motto to the 'Foreword'.

¹⁹ Beauvoir 1976.vol. 2, 662 (in fact on the last page of the book).

²⁰ They include less payment, hardly any leading positions, lower representation in politics, in the media, often victimized in various cases of violence, etc. There were some surveys conducted in socialism resulting in the same observations but they partly remained unpublished or were tailored in accordance with our socially constructed reality of equality.

lematic title: "How can Hungarian women lose what they never had"?²¹ It is the identity of equality that has been lost, isn't it? It is logically presupposed in the former statement. Only something that used to be there could have been lost. But is it really lost? I do not think so. It is only the assertive homogeneity of the old socialist identity with its two components analyzed above that has been lost and the proud consciousness of some evolutionary supremacy that made sense only within a Marxist evolutionary philosophy of history. The recently re-discovered old identity of the 'second sex', that of being equal with the first sex, did not replace the other one acquired under socialism. Both are and have been living identities, belong together as two sides of the traditional opposites: they constitute an ambiguous identity: being One and the Other, transcendence and immanence, free and confined at the same time. We find it best explained by Beauvoir's work.

Moreover, she put an emphasis on the tragic tension of ambiguity women have to suffer more than men. This is one of the lessons Beauvoir has taught us. Nowadays perhaps we do not see the ambiguity inherent in women's situation to be as tragic as Beauvoir did²², but it is still there. Post-socialist women were reluctant to accept the negative side of ambivalence still inherent in their existence. After all, they were meant to overcome it. The strange phenomenon of hostility against feminism among women so often registered by Western feminists visiting Eastern Europe gives evidence of the weight of this ambiguity. The process of raising our consciousness to discover disadvantages and still suffering from existing discrimination against women turned out to be a hard lesson to learn. The earlier blindness towards these problems was more agreeable to live with or less difficult to bear than the choice to consciously suffer from them. The difficulties of living consciously the ambiguous female existence explain some of the hostility of Eastern European women toward feminism that made them aware of discrimination. But the very same ambiguous experience promotes the rising of feminism as well! I agree with Peggy Watson,²³ who claims that the rise of feminism goes together with antifeminism; both are part of democratization in Eastern Europe. In my view this recently regained ambiguous identity evokes more of a passion for freedom than the socialist consciousness of equality and freedom which let the passion for freedom lie dormant. That was the historical truth of Beauvoir's analysis in the middle of the century before the rise of the feminist movement in its second wave.

Finally, let me draw an actual political conclusion from my analysis. In our post-socialist situation perhaps we are facing a period of identity politics, one that involves reflecting on and expressing our ambiguous moral identity. I do not separate moral and political identities as private and public forms of identity, nor do

²¹ Adamik 1997. This work was also published in German in *Feministische Studien* 2/ 1996.

²² See her observations to this effect at the end of the 'Foreword'.

²³ Watson 1993, 1997.

I see the actual political forms of action in the traditional sense of politics. Perhaps we will come to a feminist political movement, and perhaps it will take the form of an identity politics that we have recently had some experience with two forms of identity politics emerging. One is the ways Jewish identity has been publicly discussed while the other is the Roma identity coming into the focus of such politics. I hope women's identity will emerge next as the focus of public discussions.

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WINGS AND MASKS.
GROTESQUE BODY, LAUGHING LANGUAGE
AND CARNIVALESQUE TEXTURE IN
ANGELA CARTER'S *NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS*

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*To Professor Marinovich-Resch, Sári,
to whom I owe the fantastic world of Angela Carter*

CARTERIAN BODY-TEXTS

The paper focuses on an original piece of contemporary woman's writing Angela Carter's 1984 novel, *Nights at the Circus* with the aim to provide a complex analysis of the *semioticization* of the body narrated in the text and of the subversive *somatization* of the text on the body (see Brooks 1993). I wish to reveal how the uncontrollable ambivalence of the mockingly burlesque, jovially vulgar, celebratory sublime, uncannily abject grotesque body infiltrates, vibrates the language of the novel, producing an excessive, overflowing style, a self-deconstructive, playfully carnivalesque text, a laughing language. Via a feminist re-reading of Bakhtin's theory on the grotesque, inspired by Mary Russo's *The Female Grotesque* (1995), I wish to reveal how the double world-view, the ambiguous nature of the grotesque intertwines dichotomies, transcends hierarchical binary logic and-by fusing capriciously into one multifaceted mask Bakhtinian carnivalesque with Kayserian grotesque, Kristevaian abject, Freudian uncanny, Bergsonian hilarious, Chaplinian burlesque and Kantian sublime-thus becomes an able model to describe women's heterogeneous experience of their polysemic bodies. Unlike Mary Russo who calls attention to the misogynist aspects of grotesque representation I wish to underline uniquely its empowering potentials for revisionary feminist readings of body-texts. The final aim is to unveil how the body becoming grotesque and the text becoming

carnavalesque rewrites feminine subjectivity, demythologizes *écriture féminine* and phallogocentric language, and problematizes masculinized authorship, along with patriarchally canonized literary, critical, readerly assumptions and conventions, so as to create in the long run a self-deconstructive women's writing able to depict the paradoxical female subject in process.

As Sarah Gamble highlights, Angela Carter's novels take place in liminal settings and focus on borderline conditions (Gamble 1997, 6). Carter's scenes, the toyshop, the fairground, the circus, the masquerade or the theatre, can be regarded as spectacular, open spaces of a grotesque, carnivalesque topography, while her favourite themes, adolescence, blurred gender boundaries, journeys and the suspension of space and time, can be associated with the constant metamorphosis of the heterogeneous, ambiguous grotesque body—especially since Carter's stories seem to host to an almost maniac extent fantastic characters with grotesque bodies, ranging from the wolfish Red Riding Hood, the tender wolf, the distorted faced Beauty, and the pregnant man, to the murderous clown, the aerial giantess, and the set of licentious old women twins.

GROTESQUE BODIES

In *Nights at the Circus* it is Fevvers, the winged giantess aerialist who embodies the carnivalesque grotesque defined by Mikhail Bakhtin as open, changing, unfinished, irregular, heterogeneous, protruding, corporeal, excessive and ambiguous as opposed to the classical body that is transcendental, monumental, disciplined, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and homogeneous (Bakhtin 1968, 303–368).

Fevvers' stage names, mocking the *Nomen est Omen* tradition and resisting the compulsory Name of the Father, reflect the paradoxical and playful, unnatural nature of an ambivalent carnivalesque grotesque being. Fevvers, a foundling, is initially christened Sophia by her stepmother, Lizzie, and sincere to this name meaning "wisdom" she renames herself cleverly, choosing ambivalent stage names masking and unveiling her throughout her performance, an ironic "confidence trick" staging her deconstructed selves. "Fevvers" embraces the word "fever," a physical symptom as well as "feather," a symbol of sublime spirituality, "Cockney Venus," "Helen of the High Wire" (Carter 7)¹, "Madonna of the Arena" (126) merge high and low, sacred and profane, divine and vulgar, fusing binary oppositions, disturbing hierarchies, degrading conventional high principles, lofty values.

¹ All parenthesised references if not stated otherwise are to this edition: Carter, Angela. 1994. *Nights at the Circus*. London: Vintage.



Fevvers is the “Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states” (81), her slogan “Is she fact or is she fiction?” underlines the polysemic nature of her performative, spectacular identity. She acts out the “feathered frump” “cripple” (19), the “marvellous monster”, the estranged “alien creature” (161), a giantess bound to Earth, with useless wings, her mutant bodily protuberances recalling the deformations of a hunchback, while simultaneously she also performs the role of the sublime aerialiste, the angelic winged wonder, an “fabulous bird-woman” (15) defying the laws of the gravity in her graceful and erotic art on the trapeze. Fevvers mocks the spectators’ (the readers’) epistemophilia, fetishistic gaze, she never provides a final answer to her being a fact or a fiction, Walser can merely wander upon the paradox: “an authentic miracle must purport to be a hoax, in order to gain credit in the world (?)” (17), while Fevvers laughs at him (at us), adding ironically “Oh, Lizzie, the gentleman must know the truth!” (35). Fantastic and freak, Fevvers embodies the Kristevaian subject in process/ on trial (Kristeva 1985, 37) balancing on a borderline in a grotesque body always becoming an other, performing a carnivalesque subversion of the hierarchical social order, of the homogeneous subject, of transparent language and of conventional representation of femininity.

Fevvers’ spectacular performances in Ma Nelson’s brothel and Madame Schreck’s Museum of Woman Monsters, her posing in *tableau vivant* as Cupid, “the sign of love,” as Winged Victory, “a perfect, active beauty, [...] mutilated by history” (37), and as the castrating femme fatale Angel of Death, also carry ambivalent meanings: she repeats patriarchal stereotypical representations of women with a wink, via a “perverse dynamics of transgressive reinscription” (see Dollimore 1991, 33) she reveals à la Judith Butler the performative and repetitive nature of gender and provides an ironic critique of the ideology of representation limiting female identification (Butler 1990). Fevvers’ wings recall the Victorian Angel in the House, defined uniquely in relation to man as subordinated wife and mother, the Muse exploited to inspire male creativity and muted herself, Fairies objected to the rape of the male gaze, as well as the winged statue of the Nike of Samothrace that simply lacks a head. However she subverts these *clichés* of femininity from within: her sexual activity mocks the Victorian angel, yet she also challenges the stereotype of the whore, the supernatural succubus as her confidence trick is based on her claimed virginity. She continuously uses her heterogeneous body as a space for the narrative deconstruction of her identity, by technologies of the self working against technologies of power (see Foucault 1980); she erases and rewrites traditional stories of femininity, weaving her own texts, becoming an author of her own. Fevvers is a self-made woman (de)constructing her patchwork wings by recycling the divine Leda and the Swan just as much as a lowly London pigeon. She flies by reweaving myths and gossip, art and craft, by relying subversively on the established knowledge of library books just as much as on Lizzie’s innovative calculations, and on Baudelaire’s albatross-artist. She is never what she seems to be, she performs *simu-*

lacra, her repetition is a revision of icons of femininity and an embodiment of her multiple selves, constituting a part of her confidence trick, a subversive feminist tactic, revealing a liberating play of carnivalesque identities and narratives inspired by a heterogeneous body.

Fevvers defies the male gaze by taking advantage of her feminine "being-looked-at-ness" (see Mulvey 1991, Doane 1997, Van Zoonen 1994), to her slogan "LOOK AT ME!" she adds "Look! (but) Hands off!" (15) and she finds pleasure in her female gaze as well.

She turned her immense eyes upon him, those eyes made for the stage [...] Walser felt the strangest sensation as if these eyes of the aerialiste were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds, and these unguessable depths exercised the strongest possible attraction, so that he felt himself trembling as if he, too, stood on an unknown threshold (29, see 40, 48, 78, 87).

As Mary Russo claims, the grotesque body of the trapeze artist destabilizes gender by an ambiguous relation to the gaze: on the one hand her being objected to the scopophilia of the male spectator reinforces masculine power position, but on the other hand the voyeur is obliged to look upward, and is hence diminished, becoming "dwarfed, clownish or infantilized" (Russo 1995, 171) exactly due to the gaze destined to master the woman as spectacle. Fevvers subverts her spectacularity to her own ends, ambiguous, ever-changing she can never be pinned down as a trophy of the male Collector, she resists the final meanings desired by journalist Walser aiming to decode her as a great humbug of the world. She is simultaneously "Cockney sparrow" (41) and "tropical bird", cripple and celestial, vulgar and sublime, bird and woman, virgin and whore, giantess and aerialiste, a feminine "symbolic Woman", an "anomaly" (161) and "a-woman" (see De Lauretis 1987, 124)² in her subjective corporeal reality, thus-playing on the subversive grotesque pregnant body-she can give birth to herself again and again anew.

Fevvers' body becoming the source, the engine of her revision, besides being ambiguous, bears the grotesque feature of excess enhancing the transgressive violations of her bodily limits. She has both wings and arms, thus she is "the impossible made doubly unlikely-the impossible squared" (15). Her height of six feet two, her enormous breasts, her two yards of golden hair, her six inches long false eyelashes and the superfluous, grotesque protuberances of her wing-supplements embody her feverish excess, her "grand, vulgar, careless generosity" (12) coupled with an "enormous appetite", "gigantic coquetry" (21) and a "gargantuan enthusiasm" (22). The

² In Teresa de Lauretis' s view the female subject is simultaneously "a-woman" embodying a singular identity in its plural, heterogeneous and uncontrollable bodily reality and "Woman" symbolizing the essential myth of homogeneous subjection and of ideologically constituted universal femininity.

robustly Rubenesque Fevvers, a material girl, performs a habit of non-productive expenditure never thinking of calculation. She is "big girl" (7) a "marvellous giantess" (42) whose monstrous attractivity is just as threatening in the eyes of Walser as it is seducing. When she yawns "with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of a basking shark, taking in enough air to lift a Montgolfier," and stretches hugely as if "she intended to fill up all the mirror, all the room with her bulk," Walser is convulsed with nausea, panic and a "seismic erotic disturbance" (53). The mouth of the trapeze artist, the bodily opening of this sweating working girl, is like the *grotto* of a mythic monster, the cave of a carnivore beast, evoking mockingly Hell's Mouth, the grotesque patriarchal topos of the *vagina dentata*, fatally attractive, engulfing, and embracing-yet a few hours later-or in the very same moment, as time stops on the Grandfather Clock of Fevvers' dressing room-the yawn of the ever-changing Fevvers is not (only) like that of a sublime whale or a devouring lioness, but (also) just "a girl who has stayed up too long" (87). Fevvers' first spreading of her wings, ripping her chemise is extremely erotic, yet her rebirth as a winged woman is combined in a grotesque way with death, since it is also the annunciation of Lizzie's menopause (24), the closure of her procreativity, that signals in a patriarchal logic the end of her femininity.

Fevvers' grotesque body, identified with excessive sexuality, unlimited desires and bodily decay, is associated with corporeal functions, vulgar materiality, embodying the destabilizing abjectification of the subject: she sweats, farts, gorges, gulps, belches, yawns, irrespectable of limiting social conventions of politeness. The "essence of Fevvers", the "highly personal aroma" of her dressing room contains a "powerful note of stale feet" (9), "sharp gusts of cheap scent" of Parma violets (25), mingled with the smell of sweaty underwear, of eel pie with mash and gallons of champagne. She is an earthly giantess, a female Gargantua: with a Rabelaisian appetite she stuffs herself, spilling gravy, sucking up peas from the knife "with table manners of the Elizabethan variety" (22), she pours the sugar into her mug in a stream, directly from the bag (43), pops the cork of "a chilled magnum of champagne between her teeth" (8). Crying she blows her nose "rather disgustingly between her fingers" (142), while her loud laughter is a "spiralling tornado" twisting and shuddering across the entire globe (295). An angel with smut on her nose (75), sublime mistress of heterology she repulses and enchants Walser, when she talks openly about lowly physicality, her woman's bleeding, the marvellous blossoming of her flesh (23), mocking the Foucauldian society of confession by her unwillingness to discipline her body and provoking Walser who aims to frame her in the phallogocentric narrative of his pragmatic report. Walser is more than impressed, touched by Fevvers' body; the tone of his language undergoes a metamorphosis, becoming more and more feverish as nights at the circus pass by.

The ambiguous Fevvers' "asymmetric splendour" (8) embraces the grotesque, carnivalesque degradation of sublime beauty. She is "divinely tall" yet looks "more

like a dray mare than an angel," her wonderful face seems "broad and oval as a meat dish," (12), "beefsteak red and gleaming" (13), and wholesome like an "Iowa corn-field" (18), while her voice of the spheres sounds "raucous and metallic [...] clanging of contralto or even baritone dustbins" (13). The fantastic aerial wonder recalls an "over-literal winged barmaid" (16), whose flight is that of a Trafalgar square pigeon flapping and plummeting "lazily enough to show off the crack in her bum" (17), whereas her star's dressing-room is "mean as a kitchen maid's attic" (14).

Fevvers's grotesque ambiguity is enhanced by the fact that her uncanny double also appears in the text in the form of Buffo, the mad circus clown. Just like Fevvers – as Tamás Bényei also highlights – Buffo bears all the characteristics of a grotesque being. Ambiguous, he is the Great Clown of Clowns, a quintessence of all that clowns personify, his laughter embodies the deepest sorrow, despair and the filth of life. He is lonely, lovesick Pierrot, cunning, clumsy Harlequin, deformed Triboulet, vulgar Buffon³, and a sacred madman, "a mad priest," the very image of Christ suffering for the sins of mankind. Excessive, he drinks prodigiously as if he could "bottle the whole world, tip it down his throat, then piss it against the wall" (118), and partakes in the orgiastic, wasted, anal, death-miming violent bergomask, the savage jig of the clowns. He embodies corporeality and degradation, as he wears, in a grotesque reverse logic, his most intimate and obscene insides on his outside in the form of a wig simulating a bladder, and thus suggests that "he stores his brain in the organ, which, conventionally stores piss" (116). During his dreadfully fascinating constant metamorphosis, an unchanging change, the mask becomes the face that eclipses me to reveal the other (--while he claims ironically that the "beauty of clowning is that nothing ever changes"). On the stage, amidst the most hideous grimaces he transgresses his physical boundaries, when he "shakes(s) out his teeth, shake(s) off his nose, shake(s) away his eyeballs, let all go flying off in a convulsive self-dismemberment" (117): a deconstructed subject he is the object of hysterical laughter.

Fevvers' and Buffo's numerous similarities turn them into a schizophrenic pair, two sides of the same grotesque coin. They are of lowly Cockney origin, Fevvers' enormous appetite matches Buffo's insatiable thirst, both are simultaneously saint and freak, the trapeze artist defies gravity as the clown defies reason, Fevvers demythologizes femininity as Buffo does Christianity. They both grimace at their warped reflections in the "inverted world of the mirror," cracking the glass of the socializing-normalizing Lacanian mirror stage (see 51, 88, 173, 177) by performing multiple, ever-changing, illusory identities in spectacles provoking enchanted or frightened laughter: during their double confidence trick Buffo's madness appears on stage as an "illusion of intentional Bedlam" (177) while Fevvers performs the

³ For a differentiation between various types of clowns see Szabolcsi, Miklós. *A clown, mint a művész önarcképe*. Budapest: Corvina, 1974.

authentic miracle pretending to be a hoax. Already before her circus career Fevvers' adolescent body foreshadows her spectacular future: in her first revisionary performance she poses in Ma Nelson's *tableau vivant* as Victory with wings equipped with a phallic sword, while her naked body is "spread with the wet white that clowns use in the circus" (37) (*emphasis mine*). The promise of her spreading wings is linked to the clowns' act. Her body becomes a telling melting-pot combining two modes of grotesque subversion, the sublime flight and the dance macabre to come. Fevvers and Buffo are intimately linked, since "under these impenetrable disguises of wet white [of the clowns], you might find, were you to look, the features of those who were once proud to be visible. You find there, per example, the *aerialiste* whose nerve has failed" (119). The winged trapeze artist inherently carries within herself the potential to become a fallen angel, a sad circus clown bound to the earth of the arena miming a happiness he does not own. The clowns, like Fevvers, are "whores of mirth perpetually at play" (119), yet they embody a different mode of the grotesque and provoke a different laughter.

Perhaps Fevvers and Buffo never appear together, never meet face to face throughout the novel because they embody two opposing sides of a single identical Janus face, two different aspects of the very same ambiguous, troubling phenomenon called grotesque. On the one hand Fevvers embodies the Bakhtinian Medieval grotesque, a burlesque comedy inciting a joyous laughter by the promise of unlimited wish-fulfillment, a celebratory liberation by the carnivalesque playful destabilization of the micro- and macrocosmic order. This feverish laughter celebrates ambivalence getting rid of fear and limitations, and provides a Dionysian delirium of subversive possibilities, revelry in excess, and a festive debauchery of desiring bodies without end. (In the meanwhile, the sublime nature of Fevvers calls for an enchanted laughter, a Kantian awe-struck admiration of the mighty, incomparable, unknowable, all-embracing, infinite totality.) On the other hand, Buffo incorporates the Romantic grotesque, a darker, uncanny, abject side that threatens with the return of the repressed (see Freud 1953, Kristeva 1982), and provokes a hysteric, painfully disillusioning and corrective laughter by revealing human being as a puppet in a hostile *theatrum mundi*, aware of his existential uncertainty. The clown's disillusioning laughter, the laughter on the clown--the embarrassed grimace-smile of alienated being (see Kayser 1963, 154) or the ironic, knowing laughter of the post-modern split subject (see Bényei 1997, 308)-is confused by the ambivalence of chaos and unnamable fears, troubled by primary loss, uncompensatable lack, desiring mourning forever in vain. Fevvers and Buffo, the two modes of the grotesque fuse in *Nights at the Circus* to vibrate the novel with their differing laughters in a polyphony, producing a carnivalesque grotesque, feverish, laughing text.

Fevvers' voice fusing corporeal and textual metamorphosis is a vocal mise-en-scene of the dynamic interrelation between grotesque body and carnivalesque language.

[...] her cavernous, sombre voice, a voice made for shouting about the tempest, her voice of a celestial fishwife. Musical as it strangely was, yet not a voice for singing with, it comprised discords, her scale contained twelve tones. Her voice, with its warped, homely, Cockney vowels and random aspirates. Her dark, rusty, dipping, swooping voice, imperious as a siren's (43)

The description of Fevvers' ambivalent voice is a metatextual comment on Carter's playfully subversive text, a spectacular, seducing, enchanting, excessive and ecstatic narrative that is a confidence trick, as the voice of the winged aerialist is the very voice of the laughing woman writer.

LAUGHING LANGUAGES

The characteristic differences of the grotesque body are textualized in Carter's subversive narrative that elaborates on Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque language, a familiar speech of the fairs fuelled by a folk laughter associated with polyphonic ambivalence, jovial vulgarity and transgressive excess. *Nights at the Circus* exploits the potential of carnivalesque language to undermine official discourse and conventional representation, with the specific feminist aim of destabilizing phallogocentric discourse, patriarchal representation and masculinized author position.

The paradoxical double world view of the grotesque is echoed in the ambiguous voice of the Fevvers, the winged freak personifying the woman writer writing from within yet subversively against the phallogocentric language of patriarchal literary institution and canon. Fevvers' speech combines the highbrow, sometimes affected utterances of a cultivated perfect lady and the coarse, vulgar slang of a street girl or a rag and bone merchant (88), she mockingly mixes different registers with sentences like "This is some kind of heretical possibly Manichean version of Neo-Platonic Rosicrucianism, thinks I to myself, tread carefully, girlie! I exhort myself." (77). Fevvers' narrative of the self as Carter's autobiografiction melts the obscene, uproarious, sneering laughter of common folk, the Cockney heehaw with the winking intertextual allusions and subtle irony of the intellectual elite and a metatextual humour of her own kind. The knowing yet familiar tone of the recurring allusions to the canonized master, Shakespeare signifies an *hommage* to the vulgar yet poetic

language of the dearly loved Bard, as well as a revelation of the grotesque relativity of high and low. ("we were just a hop and a skip and a jump away from the good Old Vic at Waterloo where, at very reasonable prices, we perched up in the gods and wept at Romeo and Juliet, booed and hissed at Crookback Dick, laughed ourselves silly at Malvolio's yellow stocking" (53)) The text, as Fevvers' voice balances on the thin dividing line between sublime and ridiculous, revealing poetic clichés, archaic diction, lofty tone, sentimental topos and sublime narrative as mere mannerisms, incongruous with the brute materiality of corporeal reality, and thus performing an ironic miming (see Marinovich-Resch 2002)⁴ of conventional, patriarchally canonized features of the so-called "feminine literature."

Pathos and bathos fuse in Fevvers' polyphonic life narrative (constituting the first part of the novel) told to Walser, the young reported to be seduced by the winged giantess and her midget stepmother, intruding in each other's voice, commenting on, complementing each other like "two Scheherazades, both impacting a thousand stories into the single night" (40). ("She paused for precisely three heartbeats. 'I fell...and give my poor nose such a whack on the brass fire-guard-'"(30)) The reliability of the narrative voice, the credibility of the story are mockingly questioned, the reader's expectations and the transparency of representation are playfully destabilized as Walser, the *reader* of Fevvers' indecipherable body, is invited to dance, to waltz with the grotesque set of twin Scheherazades weaving the text, thus embodying the polyphonic, subversive woman *writer*. The ambiguity of the grotesque body is textualized in the various poetic figures and tropes of *mésalliance*-metaphors condensating, metonyms displacing different concepts, litotes expressing meaning with opposite meanings, and oxymorons uniting antagonistic terms-overabound in the story of the "robustly rosy cheeked," "less colossal than human" "Cockney Venus," an oxymoron itself.

The unlimited excess, the transgressive overflowings and the unusual protuberances of the grotesque body infiltrate the text by the constantly recurring hyperbole, as well as by infinite enumerations, the avalanche of adjectives, the overabundance of synonyms, the nearly maniac accumulation of metaphors, and a joyous luxuriation in every possible textual, stylistic, rhetorical exaggeration characterizing the loquacious Carterian narrative. Fevvers' grotesque body, her identity

⁴ Carter's subversive repetition of the feminine literary tradition is in a sense very much like the parody of the female gothic described by Sarolta Marinovich Resch 2002 as not necessarily a disgracing, trivializing, ridiculizing caricature but rather recalling an ironic inversion, a parodic imitation, implying a dialogic, intertextual homage to the parodied woman's writing. Marinovich-Resch associates the crude caricature with Bakhtin and connects the liberatory parody to Hutcheon, however, as I argued in my paper, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque ridicule also has its subversive potentials, while Hutcheon's concept of the parody seems in some sense limiting, and much more uninvolved, impersonal and cruel as opposed to the tenderly ironic rewriting employed by Carter.

performance is repeatedly illuminated in the light of an excessive and antagonistic language⁵: “Her breast fluttered as if her heart wanted to fly out. Her heavy head hung down like a bell that has ceased tolling. She even seemed to have diminished in size, to have shrunk to proportions only a little more colossal than human. She closed her eyes and let out a long exhilaration of breath.” (87) These poetic highlights fuse various subversive tropes playing with sounds (“flutter”-“fly,” “bell”-“toll”), paradoxical similes (“as if flying”, “hung down like a bell”) mix with alliterations (“her heavy head hung”), onomatopoeia (“fluttered,” “tolling”) and the embodied voice (“exhilaration of breath”).

The mockingly harsh material reality of the grotesque body invades the text as the semioticization of the body results in the somatization of the narrative, producing a text vibrated by corporeal presence. Obscene licentiousness, direct vulgarity (“me old cock” (89)), cursing, swearing (“rot her soul” (73)) and the degrading travesty of carnivalesque language melt with winking self-correction (“pardon my French” (70)) and sublime erotic allusions (“the drawing room was snug as a groin,” “soft, feathery growths...pulling my shoulders backwards with the weight and urgency of an invisible lover” (27)). Ironically, even the lowliest bodily functions are described in a disillusioning realistic yet poetic manner (“she let a *ripping fart ring round the room*” (11)) that acquires an intensive effect celebrating the totality of life by addressing all the senses, making the reader feel, smell, hear, taste, touch Carter's very text.

The embodied voice can be deciphered in the oral exclamations, in the lively vocalicity of the text-- the “Splat!” (13), the “whoosh!” (19), the “crack” (106), the “squeak, squeak” (110), the “Yes, sir!” “Ooops!” (47), the “ahem” (25) the “rat-a-tat-tat [...] and lo and behold” (46) the “H'm, [...] and, h'm, again” (79)-as well as in the onomatopoeic verbs, the roars, neighs, grunts, cries, sighs, giggle and applause echoed in the circus, and in the pre-linguistic noises of Fevvers' unlimited body, her whisper, laughter, fart, belch, the bang of her empty glass, the rattle of her jars of fards, the thump of her giant feet, the swash of her wings. Fevvers' grotesque body resonates the text by the trans-discursive, primary rhythm, repetition and musicality of its materiality, by its unspeakable excess, as if the narrative was embraced by her “simmering wake of [...] hair [...], a sufficiently startling head of hair, yellow and inexhaustible as sand, thick as cream, sizzling and whispering under the brush [while] Fevvers sighed with pleasure” (19).

The excessive body-text abounds with onomatopoeic verbs of action inviting corporeal reality and its fleeting presence into the text, destabilizing narrative temporality and moving discourse to the rhythmic tune of the body changing with passing time.

⁵ See also quotations on Fevvers' eyes, voice, wings, hair.

Then she spread out her superb, heavy arms in a backward gesture of benediction and, as she did so, her wings spread, too, a polychromatic unfolding fully six feet across, spread of an eagle, a condor, an albatross fed to excess on the same diet that makes flamingos pink. OOOOOOOh! The gasps of the beholders sent a wind of wonder rippling through the theatre. (15)

The moving, musical materiality, the embodied voice, preverbal noise, and delirious overflow of Carter's subversive language recalls Julia Kristeva's revolutionary poetic language able to recuperate the lost pre-symbolic Semiotic bodily bliss by semiotized corporeal energies, rhythmic, repetitive, playful linguistic subversions and other text(ure)s pointing beyond conventional meaning and established language use. Accordingly, the novel's poeticity joyously exceeds representational norms and mockingly troubles horizons of expectations by fusing denotative and figural meanings, mixing realistic and metaphoric levels. In Carter's literalised metaphors, self-confidence lends real (?) wings to Fevvers who actually stumbles down off the trapeze when she falls head over heels in love with Walser. The mock aerial being puts on airs and graces, when her affected manners give the impression of great elegance but in reality have the opposite effect. Finally, after changes in fortune, at the successful end of the trial, the *picaro* birdwoman can literally have the last laugh.

Carter's complex, compound sentences provides the pleasure of rhythmic sound, augmented tension, paradoxical symmetries of free associations, excessive stylistic play of unlimited overflow and artistic verbal mastery of minute details and nuances. Carter reveals the grotesque sublime of the grain in the avalanche, of the breath in the thunder. Reading *Nights at the Circus* out loud guarantees not only the full enjoyment of the oral, vocal, tonal quality of the text, but also turns the reader into a laughing grotesque being herself. As the reader goes on with the extremely lengthy sentences of Carter's baroque periodic style, the reader's breaths taken between the too long clauses within one single sentence, echo Fevvers' harsh, maniac, frenetic laughter just as much as the embodied inner voice of silent, meditative breathing. In the logic of Eastern philosophy, laughter may become a mode of spiritual healing and the source of wisdom. The reader ready to breathe to the rhythm of the text may take part in the woman-writer's revolutionary revision, as the breathing coded in Carter's subversive, excessive, carnivalesque text models the physical pneumonic contractions, the intensive respiration of laughter.

Thus, in the long run, Carter's unlimited, overflowing writing is apt to model the uncontrolled corporeality, the abject excretion, the delirious ecstasy, the sexual incitement, the sublime flight and the uncanny macabre clown-dance of the grotesque body. As the "spiralling tornado" of Fevvers' final, delirious laughter suggests, on the whole, the engine of the excessive subversive carnivalesque narrative is a polyphonic, enchanted and uncanny, vulgar and ironic, liberatory and corrective,

frenetic, frivolous and frightened, burlesque laughter that nevertheless becomes a joyous, unlimited frenzy, a child-like laughing fit working on the level of Carter's excessive language, vibrating body and text alike.⁶ *Nights at the Circus* remain(s) open-ended, as "[t]he spiralling tornado of Fevvers' laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a *spontaneous response* to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and *breathed*, everywhere was laughing" (295) (*emphasis mine*). At the end (or beginning) of her spectacular, seducing and smiling performance, that is at the end (or beginning) of the carnivalesque narrative, the winged Fevvers, like the womanwriter, Carter herself, laughing, "kisses her free hand to all. [and] folds up her quivering *wings* with a number of shivers, moues and grimaces as if she were putting away a naughty *book*" (18) (*emphasis mine*), rewriting femininity from a laughing grotesque body, that is "the abode of a limitless freedom" (41).

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⁶ Unlike Tamás Bényei, who argues for the clown's disillusioned, metaphysical, “adult” laughter to be the blindspot and engine of the text, or unlike female critics (Paulina Palmer, Mary Russo, Magali Cornier Michael, Marina Warner among others) who highlight the text-organizing feminist power of Fevvers' laughter, I think that this frenetic, joyous, childish laughing fit of/in Carter's excessive language resonates *Nights at the Circus* even louder than Fevvers' carnivalesque or Buffo's uncanny laughter.

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SPATIALIZATIONS OF THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH DRAMA BY WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION/INSPIRATION

About a decade and a half ago, before writing my candidate degree dissertation on contemporary Irish drama, I drew up a detailed plan and sent it to Christopher Murray, a distinguished scholar and internationally known expert of theatre studies in Dublin, asking him for his opinion. Replying in a friendly letter he said that he approved of its details on the whole, but pointed out the complete absence of women writers and inquired why I had not included any works by Anne Devlin and Christina Reid, for instance, in the list of plays to be analyzed. In hindsight, I wish I had heeded the male colleague's discretely implied suggestion. By that time I had read some of the said dramatists' works, but found them so different from those of the male writers in terms of both subject and technique, that they simply did not fit in with the structure and paradigm emerging for me from the male authored material. Thus I completed the dissertation barely mentioning the work of female playwrights, and the book I transformed it into a few years later under the title *Nemzeti önszemlélet a mai ír drámában (1960–1990)* (National Self-Portrait in Contemporary Irish Drama [1960–1990]) also lacks any substantial analysis of women's drama.

What caused me only a bit of unease at that time grew into a sense of having missed something important by the mid-1990s. I know now that this notable change was due to my listening to or reading the papers of some fellow women scholars in Hungary, Sarolta Marinovich among them in the first place, which led me to realize how wrong I was to write my book without trying to understand and interpret the “otherness” of strategy and style in Irish women's drama. My only excuse was that only around and after 1990, where the chronology of my above

mentioned book stops, did drama by women in Ireland make a considerable and more widely acknowledged breakthrough. An interesting parallel offers itself in the development of Irish Studies which started to deploy the discourse of post-colonialism around the late 1980s and assimilated it as an indispensable paradigm of analysis by our time, but has been definitely slower to apply feminist criticism in spite of the historically shaped, powerful links between nation and gender. Or rather, I should say, because of them, given the ever so delicate borders of their interface? Challenged by the fact that there seems to be so much to reconsider and scrutinize concerning the ways theatre by women explores the female experience in the Irish context, I have decided to broaden the scope of my research in this direction. Gratefully thanking the inspiration I received from Sári and other members of our little community of Hungarian women scholars involved in English Studies as it intersects with Gender Studies, my paper intends to share some insights into the many-sided achievement of Irish women playwrights with them.

DRAMA BY WOMEN IN IRELAND

The beginning of writing drama by women in Ireland dates back to the 18th century when theatres, like other institutions of the country, represented mainly colonial interests. Under the divisive socio-political conditions of colonialism the genre itself had a discontinuous history until the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1897, but kept on following a gendered trajectory beyond that, into recent times. Thus it took considerable time for female authors to find their place in the canon of modern Irish drama. A couple of examples can well illustrate this point. Richard Brinsley Sheridan's mother, Frances Sheridan was a playwright on her own, the author of works which can boast of great comic creations. She was, however, unjustly overshadowed by the fame of her son and the other male playwrights of the period. Doing her work due credit, in 1999 *A Journey to Bath* (1766) written but left unfinished by her was completed by young half-Hungarian playwright Elizabeth Kuti under the title *The Whisperers* for Rough Magic, an innovative theatre company in Dublin at the suggestion of their woman director, Lynne Parker. Early in the 20th century, Lady Augusta Gregory, one of the initiators of the dramatic renaissance and a highly active director of the Abbey Theatre for long years, started to write her own pieces for the national stage. Yet Gregory's oeuvre, which included one-act comedies, full length historical plays, as well as translations was viewed as secondary to the drama of W. B. Yeats or J. M. Synge. A crucial example of this neglect is that though *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (1902) was co-authored by Gregory and Yeats, the audience came to know it as the poet's play, despite the fact that, given her knowledge about the mind and speech of the

peasants, Gregory had actually had a fair share of writing the play.¹ In our time, one of the signs of the increasing appreciation for her work is manifested by the “Lady Gregory Autumn Gatherings” at Coole, a series of events consisting of lectures and productions organized annually since 1995.

Following Gregory by a few years, Teresa Deevy became the next important representative of women playwrights in Ireland. Her first works were presented by the Abbey in the 1930s and earned success, but then the conservative and biased leadership of the theatre, which reflected the increasingly isolationist politics of the postcolonial nation state, closed the doors against her from 1942.² The fate of her literary ambitions can be seen as emblematic under the circumstances. During the 1940s and 50s the writing and production of drama by women was not favored or encouraged in a country whose new constitution defined the role of women in terms of the demands of the domestic sphere. Deevy's exclusion from the allegedly public domain of the theatre was also part and parcel of the larger picture: Irish-born male playwrights Sean O'Casey and Samuel Beckett spent many years of their life in self-chosen exile from Ireland, mostly because they did not approve of the home conditions and their restrictive effects of those on culture and art. After several years of absence from the theatre, Deevy's *Katie Roche* (1936) enjoyed a revival on the national stage in 1994, and in 1995 the scholarly periodical *Irish University Review* devoted a special issue to her work in the context of some other female playwrights.

Against the backdrop of a fast changing Ireland, and catching up with the relevant developments of contemporary drama in other Western countries, female voices in the Irish theatre began to make themselves heard more intensely since the 1980s than it was the case before. This highly welcome process, however, has had its ambiguities: while “[t]he cultural climate is becoming more receptive to female-authored drama, and recent plays by Marina Carr and Marie Jones, for example, have stimulated critical debate and drawn large audiences [...] many women have had to produce and publish their own work, as they have not had institutional support.”³ Female playwrights in our days engage with and respond to a social milieu whose customs and discourses are not free from some long persisting negative elements of the patriarchal system in both North and South. Considering women's position and the precarious case and checkered fate of feminism in Northern Ireland set against the context of the whole of Ireland, Imelda Foley writes:

¹ Pethica 1988, 12.

² O'Doherty 1995, 26.

³ McMullan and Williams 2002, 1236.

The cultural constructs that have impeded a development of feminist perspectives in Northern Ireland are those relating to both the Irish Republic's constitution for nationalists and fundamentalist Christianity for the unionist community. The former's dictate of the place of women in the home is replicated by the espousal of loyalty to the men of Ulster.⁴

Testified by recent sociological investigations, male domination is still stronger in Ireland than in most European countries. Ample evidence can be found for the presence of the inherited patterns and practices of the "confinement of women to the sphere of motherhood and the family, and obsessive concerns with controlling sexuality [...] [so that] women continue to bear psychological burdens associated with oppression."⁵ Contemporary drama by Irish female authors tends to challenge the restricting convictions and stereotypes underpinning the discourses about gender, and exposes also the comparative rigidities of the social structure in which these are rooted and continue to be influential. Regarded in terms of form and dramaturgy, their work resists conventional ways of constructing images of women, while making attempts to negotiate and reshape those images through experimentation largely in the threefold locus that theatre critic Lynda Hart identifies as "[l]anguage, space, and the body."⁶ The rest of the present paper focuses on the alternative deployment of space as well as spatial metaphors in some contemporary Irish plays by women, which I consider to be representative.

IRISH DRAMA AND SPACE

In his article about the Irish sense of place Patrick Sheeran argues that "[h]istory [...], has deprived us of our significant spaces. In response to this deprivation the names of places and their associated tribes and families – the most portable of possessions – have been exhibited as a way of memorializing a lost world and of maintaining some sort of identity." A profound concern with place, he adds, has become a salient aspect of the native tradition.⁷ Throughout the colonial period, under the conditions of imposed foreign rule and order Irish literature, oral and written, became characterized by a rich occurrence and exceptional variety of space and related tropes. Against the socio-political dispossession and geographical displacement of a large part of the native population there emerged a culture which

⁴ Foley 2003, 24.

⁵ Moane 1996, 109.

⁶ Hart 1989, 13.

⁷ Sheeran 1988, 191–192.

attempted to restore the links between places and people imaginatively. In her ground-breaking book on place in modern drama Una Chaudhuri contends that

[B]elonging and related concepts, such as privacy, inclusion, participation, occupy the ideological heart of modern drama, which is above all else a drama about place, and, more specifically, about place as understood through, around, and beyond the figure of home.⁸

The history of the modern Irish theatre has been hallmarked by works which reconfigure the above issues in the national context, and demonstrate how they are related to, even entangled with a range of particular subjects during the process of decolonization. In postcolonial drama the traditional role of topography, geographical and architectural forms, has appropriated renewed significance through the evocation of the complex, at times troubled interconnections of location, national, cultural and individual identity, for instance in John B. Keane's *The Field* (1965), Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980), Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987), or the fairly recent play by Tom Murphy, *The House* (2000).

Place as subject and dramaturgical principle appears with special emphasis in the works of female playwrights. The place and position of women in various domains of Irish life still constituting contentious issues, the strategic use of theatre space, where internal and external worlds intersect, carries the potential of becoming a site of the multivalent exploration of the female consciousness. Women authors' plays tend to spatialize experiences which extend from a sense of incarceration to a determined search for freedom elsewhere, be it a physically existing or an interior, imaginary realm. Most of the plays "construct domestic space as problematic" to quote Chaudhuri again, who emphasizes that in the modern theatre "[t]he dramatic discourse of home is articulated through two main principles, which structure the plot as well as the play's accounts of subjectivity and identity: a *victimhood of location* and a *heroism of departure*⁹." Feeling dislocated and marginalized in their closer and larger environment, several Irish female protagonists are shown crossing boundaries and moving away from a home, or the idea of a home others created for them through received language, inculcated beliefs and diverse practices of control.

THE IRISH PROTESTANT WOMAN'S SPACE IN CHRISTINA REID

⁸ Chaudhuri 1997, 27.

⁹ Op. cit. 8, xii.

Tea in a China Cup (1983) by the Northern Irish playwright Christina Reid is set in Belfast, its action spanning from 1939 to 1972, from world war to sectarian warfare. The young female protagonist, Beth's evolving personal dilemmas are portrayed against the context of generations of her Ulster Protestant family, in which the place of women had long been defined and determined by the community's demand for their loyalty to their men and taking part in the perpetuation of prejudices and hostilities. Reid deploys the domestic space of the house where traditions are cultivated, but private interests remain grossly overshadowed by the concerns and fixities of the ideology and culture of loyalism. The home where Beth's mother, Sarah and herself have grown up is decorated by the photos of male family members of three generations in army uniform, making a proud demonstration of their self-sacrificing service of King/Queen and Country. Episodes of domestic life are framed by the public event often heard from outside, the sound of the Orange band playing at the 12th July parade, the grand occasion of celebrating Protestant supremacy and historical victory over the Catholics. Women's job is to pay attention to the little things, which, though seemingly private, are also regarded as part of the heritage distinguishing them from "the other" side, the Catholics: "Grandmother. No matter how poor we are, child, we work hard and keep ourselves and our homes clean and respectable, and we always have a bit of fine bone china and good table linen by us."¹⁰ Discussed by a scholar, the custom of making and serving tea in the home functions as *gestus* in the drama, enacting the "social coerciveness and constructedness of gender," while its feminized discourse contributes to "the stability of the public sphere." Complicating this, however, "the women's solidarity and strength,"¹¹ signifies their liminal position with the inherent possibility that they may choose an independent course.

Representing the ways of how individual life in politically and culturally divided Northern Ireland is both regulated and delimited by communal issues and ambitions which work all the more effectively as they are internalized, Reid's drama critiques the system from within. It stages extreme situations that push the female protagonists to recognize and also find a voice to articulate the distorting pressure of the public narrative on their individuality. When called upon by British soldiers to leave the family house because it is threatened by an IRA attack, Sarah insists on not moving out: the home with its "bits and pieces" (57) means her whole being, not just the moments of feeling sectarian pride but also the private experience of loss and grief. Her daughter, Beth makes a step further by realizing that her marriage into a very traditional, Protestant Big House family, whose enviable attraction for others lies in their possession of a Belleek tea set of the finest china, is anything but

¹⁰ Reid 1997, 25. All further references are to the same edition, giving the relevant page numbers in parenthesis.

¹¹ Luft 1999, 221, 215.

a personal decision: "I just sat down for a while, and got to thinking ... I'm getting married tomorrow, I'm moving from my mother's house to Stephen's house ... I've been my mother's daughter, and now I'm going to be Stephen's wife ... I've never been just me." (50) The image of the houses that belong to parent and spouse respectively suggests continuity and custom which protect Beth in both her old and new homes, whereas underscores the isolating secondary role she has been playing in her own life up to this point. Having become awakened to social, cultural and gendered confinement in her birthplace, Beth goes away from Belfast after her mother's death. This she does, however, not by rejecting the past altogether: she takes a fine china cup with her as a reminder of coming from a fragile culture that she might cherish but had better put in its place and not allow to dominate her life in the future.

CONFLICTUAL SPACES IN MARINA CARR

Dublin-based Marina Carr, who comes from the Midlands region of the Republic of Ireland, is celebrated most for three of her plays which can be read as a kind of trilogy. *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) explore the female protagonists' varied relation to self and community by showing them living in a family house, or highlighting that they are expected or demanded to live in one as their home. A symbol of domesticity, the house has been considered to be a female space for centuries, where women function as providers of care, wives and mothers, especially in a strongly patriarchal society like Ireland. Set in the rural part of the country, which had been known for preserving traditions in both outlook and lifestyle, Carr's plays seriously question and undermine the view of the house as a source of empowerment or satisfaction for her respective female protagonists. The discourse of home in them carries a complex sense of entrapment and restriction, which becomes contrasted by another kind of space, characteristically related to water and fluidity. According to Rosalind Clark, in Irish myth and folklore rivers, lakes, wells and the sea itself evoke the feminine, since women have been regarded as the source of bodily fluids "associated with sexual power, life-giving power, and destructive power,"¹² a belief continuing to inspire literary expression well into the 20th century. In the works of Carr the opposition between spaces representing civilization and nature invested with myths and stories underlines the female protagonists' need for and choice of an alternative to the atmosphere of the house, which they find unhomey and stifling.

¹² Clark 1991, 136.

The Mai rewrites the memory play using a narrator called Millie, the protagonist, The Mai's daughter, who is haunted by "that childhood landscape," the "dead silent world that tore our hearts out for a song,"¹³ and begins to inquire into her matrilineal heritage. The drama opens and closes with The Mai looking out of the window, the threshold of two contrasting worlds, the house and Owl Lake beside it. Planned by The Mai herself in the hope of attracting her husband back and re-stabilizing their relationship, the house is close to the beauties of nature symbolized by the swans that in Irish folklore are described as being loyal to their mates till death and references to them in the play serve as background to the overwhelming desire of the protagonist to restore mutual love in marriage. Yet her efforts remain unrewarded: after a brief reunion her husband resumes his extramarital affairs and, disappointed in love, she commits suicide in the lake. The Mai's unfulfilled dreams have their root in the emotional deprivation and hunger experienced by generations of Irish women, and the conflicting nature of this heritage is represented by the stories and memories of the one hundred year-old grandmother, a figure associated with folklore. Remembering her own unmarried mother, who named herself "The Duchess" and kept on waiting for the Sultan of Spain, the father of her daughter to come and save them, Grandma voices the power of dreams against the limitations of reality. This, however, involves the danger of cherishing too high expectations in life and love, as The Mai realizes: "... her stories made us long for something extraordinary to happen in our lives" (55).

It is really an extraordinary turn of fate, the renewal of perfect harmony in married life that The Mai longs for, and to achieve it she casts herself as a kind of angel in the house whose sole ambition is to wait for her husband to return to her. Necessarily, she is defeated by her illusory version of the mores grounded in the patriarchal system of values, which validates the woman through her role as loyal, self-effacing partner for the male. The origin of Owl Lake becomes known from an old legend, figuring a mysterious parallel between the cycles of nature and human fate: the beautiful maiden, Coillte was pushed into the lake her own tears made by the dark witch of the bog for whom her lover left her. Millie's telling the prophetic story evokes the image of The Mai's dead body held by her husband in a ghostly light at the window, a memento of the precarious moving of humans "like sleepwalkers along a precipice" (42) between life and death. In her story, The Mai is drawn to the lake of sorrow, which "seems increasingly to invade the interior space,"¹⁴ offering her escape from victimization by illusions. The family house she built and furnished cost her too much, her freedom of mind, and the way to regain

¹³ Carr 1995, 71. All further references are to the same edition, giving the relevant page numbers in parenthesis.

¹⁴ McMullan 2001, 82.

that is through re-alignment with nature in the form of physical death, following the choice of many split-minded heroines in an international literary matrilineage.

In *Portia Coughlan* the eponymous woman protagonist is trapped between two completely different spaces. The house where she lives is the centre of her married life with Raphael, an ambitious factory owner who demands that Portia serve her family as a housewife, keeping their possessions tidy and taking proper care of their children while also support his public image and business interests. Pressed to conform to these conventional expectations Portia feels that their house resembles a "choffin" where "sometimes ah chan't brathe anamore."¹⁵ The nearby Belmont River is also associated with death, it was there that Portia's twin brother, Gabriel drowned himself by wading into the water fifteen years ago. However, aware of Gabriel's haunting and his songs on the bank of the river, the liminal space between the public world and the water but tempts Portia to brood over her former, symbiotic life with him. The mysterious attraction of the singing ghost suggests what she misses among the four walls of her family's middle-class house: the poetry of the unknown and the boundless flight of the imagination. She suffers from a keen sense of lacking what might complete her life and give meaning to it: "He woulda bin thirty today as well ... sometimes ah thinche on'y half a'me is left, the worst half ..." (258). Portia and Gabriel had tried, when children, to sail out on the sea in a boat "'jus anawheers thah's noh here' ,, (275), finding water the element beside or surrounded by which and away from society they felt happy, at home and free.

The tension between the forces of home and the river is signified by the confrontation of two objects right at the beginning of the play. Raphael brings a birthday present, a vulgar-looking though apparently expensive diamond bracelet, bought to demonstrate prosperity rather than love for his wife. Markedly, Portia attaches more value to a box recently fished out of the river, which used to belong to herself and her twin brother. Applying Gaston Bachelard's concept about a "homology between the geometry of the small box and the psychology of secrecy,"¹⁶ in contrast with the edginess and rigidity of the precious stones of the jewellery the worthless-looking yet emotionally treasured object evokes a space of intimacy and mystery associated with the Belmont River, the grave of the dead boy. Based on folklore and myth the river has its own story like the lake in *The Mai*, about a woman whose suffering was caused by the cruelty of people. Ostracized and condemned as a witch, yet she was healed by the powers of nature which eventually overbalanced the manifold biases of the human world:

¹⁵ Carr et al. eds. 1996, 25. All further references are to the same edition, giving the relevant page numbers in parenthesis.

¹⁶ Gaston Bachelard: *The Poetics of Space* (1958). Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1994. 82.

[...] wan nigh' tha impaled her an stache wheer tha river now is, mayhap righ' here, an' tha left her ta die. [...] Bel, tha valla god heerd her, an' her cries near druv him mad. He could noh unnerstan' how her people could treah her so for she war wan a'thim, on'y a little different. He chem down tha valla in a flood a' rage, coverin' houses an' livestoche an' churches over, an' tooche tha ghirl in hees arms, down, down, all the way down ta tha mouh a' th'Atlantich. (267)

The legend offers a parallel to Portia's increasingly outcast fate among her own people and subsequent death in the river as a form of escape, which unites her with Gabriel, her long missing other half and helps her become whole again. Spatialized by the opposition of the family home and the river, one imprisoning while the other mysteriously drawing the woman to itself, Gabriel's newly felt absence "reveals the gap/space which desire cannot fill, that between Self/Other," and water symbolizes "the flux of desire – a Lethe-like borderline, which Portia eventually crosses when she fulfils the suicide pact first made fifteen years ago."¹⁷

Action in act two and three is chronologically reversed in the play. Portia's dead body, just raised out of the water like the little box earlier, and clutched to himself by her husband as his property in a riverside tableau with members of family and community around, is shown on stage in the middle of the play. Set indoors, the concluding scene of act three focuses on the living Portia's confession of her deepest secrets to the abhorred Raphael, and his concomitant rejection of the woman in her troubled, transgressive reality. Read with H el ene Cixous, who speaks about the woman being loved only when "absent or abused, a phantom or a fascinating abyss,"¹⁸ the scene with the dripping body enacts that the protagonist is accepted and revered once she has become an object of ritual and mourning. In this light, the structural arrangement of the acts disrupts the conventional logic of causal relations with multiple effects. On the one hand it suggests that Portia is as much as dead for the indifferent world before she has actually left it. On the other hand, she appears as a haunting, disturbing presence even after her death, a ghost reminding the living of the fragility of boundaries.

The last piece of Carr's trilogy, *By the Bog of Cats* is recognizably though loosely modeled on Euripides's *Medea*, the treatment of its combined issues of gender, identity and space grounded in the archetypal. According to Melissa Sihra, while The Mai is portrayed indoors, at times looking out, and Portia flirting with the threshold between land and water, the new protagonist, Hester "crosses spatial boundaries more radically."¹⁹ In opposition to the house, symbolizing settlement,

¹⁷ Llewellyn-Jones 2002, 79.

¹⁸ H el ene Cixous: "Aller   la mer." In Drain ed. 1995, 133.

¹⁹ Sihra 2000, 261.

it is the characteristic Irish landscape, the vast, steeping bogland where she feels at home. Before Carr, the bog had become engendered in literature, suffice it to refer to Seamus Heaney's poem *Bogland*, where its "wet centre bottomless"²⁰ evokes Ireland's traditional allegorization as feminine. The link between nature and humans is reinforced by Carr through stories mostly told by a folktale-based figure, the Catwoman who, having a foot in both domains as her name shows, mediates between the two. She narrates how the newborn Hester was taken by her mother "over to the black swan's lair"²¹ on the bog to lie there as her natural home. Carr, however, subverts the original trope of woman representing the land and its people by depicting the society around her heroine as split along the lines of economic interest, gender and race. Having her mother's tinker blood in herself, Hester as a woman is a born outsider and remains one in contrast with the established people, whose world fails to accommodate her. Settled life in a house with her lover, Carthage Kilbride worked only temporarily for Hester. Abandoned by him for the sake of his marriage with a prosperous farmer's daughter, she refuses to obey the man's demand that she should move from the bog to another house in town and bring their daughter up there. Enrica Cerquoni writes that Hester's "association mainly with open or unfixed spaces such as the swan's lair, the caravan, the yard and the bog seems to suggest a whole reconceptualization of the notion of home/homeland for female characters."²² The liminal and permeable space of the bog attracts her as the domain she can link with her mother whom she saw there last, and a life of freedom. Longing for renewal through the maternal she lost, Hester rejects the limitations that the patriarchal order is all too ready to impose on her, its power represented by a Creon-like authority figure:

XAVIER: Look, Swane, I don't care about your family or where ya came from. I care only about me own and all I've left is Caroline and if I have to plough through you to have the best for her, then that's what I'll do. I don't want to unless I have to. So do it aisy for all of us. Lave this place today. (40–41)

The misogynistic, commercially driven rule of Xavier is, however, thoroughly destabilized in a carnival scene unfolding at the wedding dinner of his daughter and Carthage. His own house, where the dinner is set, turns into a site of the rebellion of the powerless: together with the bride, four women appear wearing white, thus

²⁰ Heaney 1990, 18.

²¹ Carr 1999, 22. All further references are to the same edition, giving the relevant page numbers in parenthesis.

²² Cerquoni 2003, 182.

making a parody of the culturally defined role and meaning of the social event and the iconic value of the wedding dress.

Carr's subversive dramaturgy offers an alternative of the carnival as well, in that once the disruption and chaos it causes and feeds on are over, the usual order is not restored as the conventions of the device would require.²³ Medea-like Hester resorts to violence as the available means of resistance: she sets the house and property of Carthage on fire and then kills not only herself but also her daughter, to prevent that she become dislocated and vulnerable by losing her mother like herself. Only by these terrible, savage deeds is she able to reclaim agency and challenge the oppressive measures of patriarchy. Carthage's conscience-stricken hauntedness in the future is prefigured as wandering in his "big empty childless rooms" (74), the spatial image signifying loss and loneliness. At the same time, death liberates both Hester and her daughter from having to live in the physical and psychic incarceration that the patriarchal world involves for them. They are going to become spirits who rise with the "purlin' wind" (80) on the open, female territory of the Bog of Cats, ghosting and disturbing the "sleepwalkers."

Elaine Aston the Feminist drama critic appropriates Julia Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and symbolic modes to discuss "women's drive towards the semiotic" in the theatre and their tendency to produce texts which "explode the symbolic" as a specific alternative feature of female playwriting.²⁴ The pieces of Carr's trilogy realize the power of the semiotic through the poetically expressive use of fluid, maternal spaces whose mysteries and secrets attract the protagonists to themselves as empowering forces in opposition to the symbolic system of laws and rules. This effect is enriched by the Midlands dialect in the plays, most forcefully in *Portia Coughlan*, which carves out a rhetorical space evoking the sounds of Irish, the national language, the ancient mother tongue of the people largely suppressed by English as a result of colonialism. Completed after the trilogy the play *On Raftery's Hill* from 2000 also places its action in the writer's original homeland, rural Ireland. Continuing with the intertextual references of her earlier work it incorporates elements of Greek myth which are, however, just the vantage point to dramatize the combined issues of incest and intra-familial violence in our world. Perhaps Carr's most Beckettian, *On Raftery's Hill* has a particularly dark vision reinforced by the definite lack of any alternative space for the female characters to escape from their monstrous father-lover's paralyzing while also strangely seductive dominance that alienates them from each other and ties them to the house on the hill.

²³ See Bourke Op. cit. 143.

²⁴ Aston 1995, 53.

THE SPACE OF FEMALE TRANSFORMATION IN MARIE JONES

Marie Jones's *Women on the Verge of HRT* (1995) uses, again, two very different locations. Act one takes place in a public space, The Viking House Hotel in Donegal where the popular singer Daniel O'Donnell welcomes his middle-aged female admirers to his annually held tea party, whereas act two is set outside, on the beach of the bay at dawn. Contrasted, they spatialize the protagonists, Vera and Anna's changing way of experiencing and coping with the problem of aging and loss of value on the sexual market, which threatens them with invisibility.²⁵ The hotel bedroom as setting is associated with a social event which is heavily gendered, its participants are mature women. Vera ironically observes that ladies like themselves are "just a big mass of middle-aged nobodies,"²⁶ implying that the party may well turn out to be but an occasion to face their own mirror images in the others and become reminded of the narrowing of the social space they inhabit. The comparatively small and unhomely room where they are during the whole first act represents physical and also ontological confinement. Moreover, Vera and Anna's exchanges, which revolve around the problem of aging and a corollary of related anxieties, highlight an even more subtle kind of imprisonment by the discursive space regulated and made available for them by the categorizing practices of the culture they live in. It is manifest through their persistent use of a received vocabulary, the habitual choice of stereotypes and clichés referring to the symptoms and consequences of menopause.

The obtrusive presence of the two narrow, convent-style single beds Vera and Anna are preparing to occupy for the night marks the hotel room as an oppressively gendered area, an extension of the particular social space of the party, exposing the women's shared loneliness and the fact that they have to do without sexual partners. They experience their bodies negatively, as a site of dispossession and humiliation, their respective comments testifying to an increasing of the "tension, ambiguity, and duality" which, Stanton B. Garner observes, characterize a "woman's modalities of bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality" and underlie the tendency that she thinks of her body as an object.²⁷ Vera is painfully conscious of the impossibility to have an unmediated, untainted view of her body: "I stood in the changing room of C&A the other day with a whole pile of clothes and I didn't know what to buy. I just stood there looking in the mirror and I says; Vera, you don't know what you are supposed to look like anymore" (13). On her part, Anna describes her own

²⁵ Llewellyn-Jones: op. cit. 76.

²⁶ Jones 1999, 7. All further references are to the same edition, giving the relevant page numbers in parenthesis.

²⁷ Garner, Jr. 1994, 201.

menopausal symptoms through the lens of her dismayed husband, while barely mentioning how they affect her personally: "Dead embarrassing in company. It used to drive Marty mad. And then he would whisper to whoever was in our company 'It's the change.' [...] He might as well saying leprosy the way he twisted his face and rolled his eyes" (19). In short, influenced as well as manipulated by social images and categories, the protagonists are portrayed finding themselves on the verge of self-abjection, and not just on the verge of considering the hormone replacement tablet to be a possible remedy for feeling different.

In sharp contrast with the former physical confinement, act two of *Women on the Verge* is set on the open shore of the sea shortly before dawn, which constitutes a liminal space and hour, the realm of magic and transformation. The offstage presence of the male pop-singer is replaced by the wailing ghost of the Banshee, a solitary female spirit associated with mourning in Irish folklore. Patricia Lysight claims that the Banshee haunts the living by her lamentations and expression of grief, and her favourite time is "the dark or grey hours: midnight, dawn and dusk," while she favours to dwell in places near water and nature formations like strange-looking rocks.²⁸ Jones' *mis-en-scène* renders all this visible. A version of the Banshee's story involves her ruthless betrayal by a male fairy once she had grown old, and Vera recognizes her as a fellow victim of marginalization and stereotyping: "She could have been just like us. [...] You were not born a banshee. They made you a banshee" (22). For critic Margaret Llewellyn-Jones the Banshee's screaming is the displaced voice of Vera and Anna, whose sexual identity is threatened by annihilation through menopause, and, in this sense, the spirit does qualify as "a harbinger of death."²⁹

The role of the Banshee in the play, however, is not exclusively the foreboding of loss but may be connected with a more ancient layer of inherited beliefs. Lysight clarifies that the origin of the Banshee goes back to the mythical sovereignty goddess who represents the land with its power to bestow identity, and acts also as a kind of guardian or patron "concerned with the fortunes of her people."³⁰ Away from public territory, on the Banshee-controlled "verge" of the shoreland the protagonists are both audience and performers in a series of free-moving, imaginary scenes, an alternative reality introduced by the spirit's cries. Dissenting from mimetic strategies, the reshaped dramaturgy makes space for a reevaluation of aging and the subversion of prevailing stereotypes by recontextualizing expected forms of gender behaviour. Vera and Anna's "Finale Song" celebrates female re-embodiment through a kind of Kristevan *jouissance*, a sense of ecstasy which implies meaning³¹

²⁸ Lysight 1998, 10, 52, 59–60.

²⁹ Llewellyn-Jones op. cit. 77.

³⁰ Patricia Lysight op. cit. 92.

³¹ See Aston op. cit. 56.

– secured by the women's appropriation of the ancient function of the Banshee to renew their own feminine identity rather than lament its loss. The meanings imposed by patriarchal constraints are overwritten by a more personal and flexible view of women's aging, which admits difference without the compulsion to traumatize it, and the unavoidable “verge” ceases to be a space of “cracking” and entrapment but re-emerges as a site of transformation.

TOWARD HER OWN STORY IN ANNE DEVLIN

Belfast-born playwright Anne Devlin's *After Easter* (1994) multiplies spaces in the form of the socially and psychologically specific stages of the migrant protagonist, Greta's not only geographical but also spiritual journey. A Catholic from Ulster living in England and married to an Englishman, her route in the drama leads from the psychiatric clinic to her native Belfast and then back to her home in London. What starts her on the journey is a crisis of identity she articulates as having been pushed to move to live in the “outer room” instead of the “main room”³² of her self, underpinned by a keen sense of displacement and double invisibility. Like many other rootless people who are unable to feel at home in the new environment she became “a copier ... out of fear,” including herself with immigrants like “the man from Mayo [and] the Hindu Child” (59), who never really arrived in England. A self-renewing version of diasporic identity can be achieved, however, only by revising her understanding of home, which necessitates that she revisit scenes of her past. Back in Belfast, in various public places, a convent, a hospital and the city centre in addition to the family home, Greta is re-confronted with the religious, social and cultural divisions and prejudices in the patriarchal context of her birthplace under the Troubles. In Devlin's representation it is her placeless, liminal situation that allows her to perceive her the home society as one which determines people's attitudes and reactions whereas it also incites them to seek ways of transgressing strict boundaries and subvert the overused models of identity.

Visiting the convent Greta finds “a republic of letters” (27) organized around patriarchal dogmas and hierarchies where only male representatives of the Church are considered fully empowered, and her troubling personal problem can be treated only if she reconciles herself to the rules. She is but induced to steal a chalice to distribute wafers in the street, trying to bring peace to Belfast people as well as voicing the need to restore real human equality from within the traditions of the

³² Devlin 1994, 26, 28. All further references are to the same edition, giving the relevant page numbers in parenthesis.

Church itself: "If a woman can be a priest, God can be female. [...] It means that women might be loved" (57). The scene in the Belfast hospital reflects the sickness of a society paralyzed by sectarian divisions. Greta's younger brother Manus is playing the Irish tune "The Harvest Home" on his fiddle, which provokes mixed reactions, someone claiming he should play the loyalist "Ould Orange Flute" instead. A young pregnant woman, Melda, diagnosed mad, introduces the discourse of insanity and functions like a gothicized image of lonely and troubled Northern Ireland. Her babies were taken off her because of her psychic condition, paralleling the emigration of many young people from the chaos of the country. Yet she dances to the music Manus plays, managing to find a private language of transcendence even when distressed and abjected.

Greta's original family home is the most crucial stage of the journey. Rendered multi-layered by the father still being there as a dead body laid out, marking his presence in the minds while family members are trying to reinterpret the past, the familial space opens up a view of relationships from a distance. The tensions between mother and father are revealed as connected with the larger conflicts engendered by sectarianism in the society: their private space was grossly violated when they had to move away from the land she inherited because "[t]hey were on the wrong side of the river for Catholics" (68). Moreover, their life bore the imprint of intracommunal conflict since the father, a believer in communist ideals, on writing "to the newspapers attacking the church" (67) was refused employment by their own people, while his wife had to make ends meet by selling communion veils. Realizing these truths, the family enjoys a reunion in spite of the usual threats of the Troubles looming outside, and the scene enacts an alternative consciousness Manus sums up as "You can stay and get away" (70), a parallel to Seamus Heaney's "inner emigré" idea about the possibility to live elsewhere in the mind.

Back in England Greta is shown at Westminster Bridge in London, the last stage of the journey figured as a space of crossing, where the ultimate test takes the form of suicidal feelings. Throwing the bag with the ashes of her father and not herself into the river, she makes the crossing and symbolically gets rid of the burden of her patriarchal past in Northern Ireland. The closing scene displays Greta's transformed sense of home through a story she tells her child. It is about wandering and reaching places united with her mother and making friends with a stag, who represents the other. The narrated journey relies on a new perception of "reconnection, of belonging within motherhood and m/otherland,"³³ which emphasizes dialogue, the harmonization of different sides and principles:

GRETA: [...] My mother and I were hunting. But because of the cold we couldn't feel anything or find anything to eat. So we sat down by the stream.

I looked up and saw it suddenly, a stag, antlered and black, profiled against the sky. [...] The stag's face was frozen and I had to be careful because it wanted to kiss me, and if I had let it, I would have died of cold. But gradually as it ate, its face was transformed and it began to take on human features. [...] So I got on the stag's back and flew with it to the top of the world. And he took me to the place where the rivers come from, where you come from ...and this is my own story. (75)

Geographically undefined, the settings in the story combine and layer several places, configurations of both origin and continuity. Appropriating the traditional role of the *seanchaí*, the Irish storyteller, Greta transcends divisions and redefines experience by way of a privately constructed narrative, coherent and uncopied. The story restructures her sense of home as part of a newly developed diasporic identity, which enables her to inhabit more than one place and culture at the same time, and arrive in her adopted country at last.

CODA

Reconsidered in Chaudhuri's terms, the protagonists in the above plays embark on "journeys" that lead them out of what they are no longer able or willing to cope with toward relocating themselves according to their own terms. In the case of Carr's work death means a redemptive escape to another stage of existence from the state of being treated as the eccentric and/or inferior other. The association of the heroines with liminal spaces, permeable between borders both physical and psychic, makes way for a new spatiality which, to seek analogy in Teresa de Lauretis's ideas, can serve as the "elsewhere of discourse," empowering women "to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective."³⁴

The both thematically and technically challenging achievement of contemporary Irish drama by female authors, which has become realized in successful and well-received productions, is gaining a place for this body of works in the national canon that they never inhabited so assuredly before. Their cultural impact is summarized in a fairly recent critical account as follows:

Women's writing for the theatre has contributed towards the diversity of models of theatrical practice, towards the search for new audiences, and towards the reworking of concepts of the family, of gender roles and of the nation, clearing a space in this art which has been so closely associated with

³⁴ De Lauretis 1987, 25.

'the national identity' for the cultural representation of the complexity and diversity of women's lives and the expression of their creativity.³⁵

The communal role of theatre has always been exceptionally strong in Ireland, where modern drama came into being as part of an inspired anti-colonial struggle and cultural renaissance with the aim to transform the life and mind of a whole nation. Negotiating this tradition, Irish female-authored drama today participates in the ongoing project of rebuilding the home of women by raising questions about certain discursive practices and social fixities. As a significant aspect of their dramatic arsenal, women playwrights draw inspiration from the century-old forms of Irish oral art including stories, songs, myths and legends in their works to locate the possibility of change in the borderless realm of the imagination and the liberating space of performance.

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³⁵ McMullan et al. op. cit. 1246.

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A MAGYARORSZÁGI FEMINISTA IRODALOMKRITIKA KORLÁTJAI AZ EZREDFORDULÓ TÁJÉKÁN¹

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FEMINISTA ÉRDEKEK

Úgy tűnik, napjainkban egyre nagyobb nyilvánosságot kap a nőirodalom, a nőtörténet, a női nézőpont kérdése a magyar irodalomkritikában (Horváth 2003.; Zsadányi 2003.). Ezzel párhuzamosan, mintha megtárgyalandó kérdés lenne a nyugati feminista elméletek és tudományos eljárások magyarra fordíthatósága, hazai viszonyok közötti alkalmazhatósága és intézményesíthetősége (Horváth 2002.; Marinovich 1997.; Kádár 2003.). Marinovich Sarolta, Horváth Györgyi és Kádár Judit is úgy látják azonban, hogy a nyugati egyetemeken már évtizedek óta intézményesült feminista elméletek tudományos eredményeinek, kulturális értékeinek és társadalmi jelentőségének elfogadására nem túl nyitott a fennálló magyarországi *irodalmi diskurzus* (Marinovich 1997, 119.; Horváth 2002, 3.; Kádár 2003, 100–102.). Bátran állíthatjuk, hogy jelenleg is egy férfi-orientált, a nemek közötti viszonyokat hierarchikusan elrendező nemi ideológiai rendszer mentén alakulnak az esztétikai normák, és a hivatalosan elismert értelmezési eljárások.

Dolgozatommal ehhez a vitához szeretnék hozzászólni egy regény (Gordon 1997.) irodalomkritikai fogadtatása (vagy inkább elutasítása) kapcsán. A regény „érdekessége” az, hogy a kortársnak nevezett magyar irodalomban a második olyan nő által írt regény, amely témáját tekintve azzal foglalkozik, hogyan élhető meg a nő-nő közötti szerelem egy patriarchális (erősen heteroszexista és homofóbiás) társadalmi rendszerben. A témaválasztáson túl, a kortárs magyar *irodalmi diskurzusban* „kuriózumnak” minősül azért is, mert egy a patriarchális nemiség

¹ A cikk „Nemiség és kánonformálás” című részének egy korábbi változata megjelent az *Eső* című irodalmi lapban (P. Balogh Andrea: A nő-irodalom lehetőségei a magyar intézményes irodalomkritikában. *Eső. Irodalmi lap.* 2003 VI/4. 110–113.).

felfogásra kritikusan reflektáló női nézőpontból szólal meg a női elbeszélő.² Így Gordon irodalmi tevékenysége számos olyan kérdést vet fel, amely komoly kihívást jelenthet nemcsak a magyar irodalomkritika patriarchális intézményére nézve, hanem a feminista irodalomkritika szempontjából is.

A magyar feminista irodalomelméletben jelenleg használt fogalmak (biológiai nem vs. társadalmi nem) és szempontok egy a patriarchális előítéletek mentén elmozduló heteroszexista bináris logika mentén képződnek, ahol csak a férfi nem függvényében bír értelemmel a női nem, azaz a nő fogalma kizárólag a férfihez való sztereotipizált heteroszexuális viszonyban értelmezhető.³ Így elgondolhatatlan marad a nő fogalma önmagában, vagy a nők egymáshoz való (társadalmi, kulturális, szexuális, stb.) viszonyain keresztül. Így a feminista irodalomkritika hozzájárul a nemi megkülönböztetést használó patriarchális társadalmi logikának a tudományos diskurzusban történő érvényben tartásához. A továbbiakban az esztétikai értékkel és normákkal kapcsolatos feminista vizsgálódásokat próbálom átgondolni egy a heteroszexizmust túlhaladó feminista irodalomtudomány lehetőségének reményében.

A SZÓLÁSSZABADSÁG MÉRTÉKE

Nyugati kultúrtörténeti perspektívából szemlélve akár hihetetlennek is tarthatjuk, hogy az ezredforduló tájkán a magyarországi vitákban felmerülő alapkérdés az, vajon lehet-e tudományos, kulturális és társadalmi *létjogosultsága* a női „nézőpont(ok)nak”, vagy a női történetmondásnak/történetírásnak. E kérdés megválaszolása annak eldöntését jelenti, hogy a nőknek van-e joguk ahhoz, hogy a nemiség társadalmi, kulturális, politikai vetületének függvényében foglalkozzanak saját tématerületükkel. A női szempontok tudományos létjogosultságának megkérdőjelezése ekképpen nem egyéb, mint az értelmiségi nők (tudományos)

² Gordon regényében ez a kritikai nézőpont nem csak esztétikai fogás, hanem tudatosan és következetesen felvállalt politikai hozzáállás a szó tágabb értelmében (Vö. Gordon 2003.).

³ Ennek a problémának egy szélesebb körű tárgyalására a média és a nyilvánosság viszonyában lásd Barát 2004. Mint arra Barát rámutat, “[e]ven the little space taken up by a feminist discourse is exclusively informed by gender that is defined in line with Western European and North American liberal feminism. That is, they assume a reductive continuity between anatomical sex and sexuality, and this naturalizing conflation will safely preclude sexuality from the conceptual space of the newly introduced term of gender that ironically translates into the so-called “social sex” (‘társadalmi nem’) in the Hungarian debates. Instead of destabilization then, what we had in the name of change is the reinforcement of the old masculinist separation of biological/anatomical sex and social gender, except this time with the hegemonic assistance of the self-identified (reformist) feminist social scientists.”

szólásszabadságának korlátozása, amit inkább tekinthetünk az autoritárius struktúrák továbbélésének, mint a demokratizálódás irányába mutató szellemiségnek.⁴

A feminista irodalomkritikával és általában a feminizmussal kapcsolatos fenntartások úgy tűnik, részben az ismeretlentől való félelemben gyökereznek. A magyar (főként férfiakkól álló) „szakmai” közönség a nyugati feminista irodalomkritikáról előbb hallott (ezt-azt) az összefoglaló tanulmányokból, mint hogy a nyugati feminista elmélet(ek)et megismerte volna kulturális elhelyezkedésükben és történetiségükben (Kádár 2003, 100–101.).⁵ Bár korántsem tűnik így tisztázottnak, hogy mit takar pontosan a feminista irodalomkritika fogalma, mégis annak „szakmai” elutasítása többnyire a következő „érvek” (előítéletek?) felsorakoztatására korlátozódik: „Politikus”, „ideologikus”, „elfogódott”, „arrogáns”, „reduktív”, „nem irodalmi olvasat”, „számításon kívül hagyja az esztétikai szempontokat”.⁶

Erre szemléletes példa lehet egy feministának tartott tanulmányról a *Literaturában* megjelent értékelések (Zsadányi 1997.; Kulcsár Szabó 1997.; Molnár 1997.). Az „esetnek” a történeti „érdekessége” az, hogy a rendszerváltás utáni *Literaturában* megjelenő első olyan tanulmányról van szó, amelyet a hivatalos irodalomkritika a „feminista irodalomkritika” kategóriájába sorolt (Kutatásom csak a 90-es években megjelent számokra terjedt ki.). Továbbá az, hogy a poszt-szocialista *Literatura* történetében szintén először (és kivételesen), két kritikai „hozzászólás” követi a „feminista” tanulmányt, amelyet a szokásos módon „reduktívnak” és „ideologikusnak” ítélnek meg a domináns irodalomkritikát képviselő értékelések. A hozzászólások „üzenete” az, hogy a „feminista olvasat” káros és elfogadhatatlan az irodalom szempontjából.

Az eset pikantériája viszont az, hogy a hosszabb lélegzetű dolgozatból a *Literaturában* megjelentetett részlet feminista volta egyáltalán nem magától értetődő, hiszen sem a hivatkozott irodalom, sem a használt értelmezési stratégia nem mutat ebbe az irányba. Az idézett szerzők főként olyan közismert irodalomelméleti szakemberek vagy filozófusok, akiket aligha szoktunk feministának tekinteni (Hayden White, George Lakoff, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Vladimir Propp, Paul Ricour, Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes.). A megjelent részben mindössze csak

⁴ Ez a tanulmány az irodalom intézményével foglalkozik, nem terjed ki a nők szélesebb körű kulturális és társadalmi helyzetének vizsgálatára.

⁵ Mint arra Kádár felhívja a figyelmet az MTA Nyelv- és Irodalomtudományok Osztályában egyetlen egy nő sincs (Kádár 2003, 106, 27. Jegyzet.). A 90-es évek elején pedig a feminizmus bemutatása a feminizmust „objektívan” összegző, de a feminizmust kívülről és bizonyos távolságból szemlélő férfiak tollából származó írások magyarra fordításán keresztül történt (Leitch 1992; Kádár 1994, 408–409. Kádár itt J. A. Cuddon „feminist criticism” szócikkelyét idézi a *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*-ből.).

⁶ Ezeknek a „szakmai érveknek” a felsorakoztatására lásd például: Kulcsár Szabó 1997.; Molnár 1997.

két feministának tartott szerző neve fordul elő (Simon de Beauvoir és Isobel Armstrong), de ezek a hivatkozások az érvelés kidolgozása szempontjából mellékesek és mellőzhetőek. Armstrong neve csak egy lábjegyzetben jelenik meg, de nem a feminizmus vonatkozásában, hanem egy a Joyce Carol Oates regénye recenzenseit felsoroló névlistában. Ezzel összhangban, a „feministának” aposztrófált írás egy formalista-strukturalista elemzés, amely általános poétikai modell létrehozására törekszik. Ennek ellenére, az egyik értékelő megítélése szerint az elemzés „odaláncolja magát a feminizmus diskurzusához” (Kulcsár Szabó 1997, 406.). Itt joggal merülhet fel a kérdés, miért került a tanulmányra a feminista címke, de a válasz nehezen lenne igazolható tudományos szemszögből. Az értékelésekből kirajzolódó feminizmus fogalom inkább gyökerezik kulturális előítéletekben, mint tudományos ismeretekben, mivel azt sugallják, hogy minden nő által írt, nők műveiről szóló, nőkkel foglalkozó tanulmány feminista (és egyben irodalom-ellenes), különösen, ha felbukkan benne a feminista szó is.⁷

Bár elméletileg tudjuk, hogy a feminista irodalomtudomány céljai között szerepel „a patriarchális előítéletek kimutatása az irodalmi alkotásokban,” valamint, a „nemi különbség és az esztétikum kapcsolatának vizsgálata,” még gyakorlatilag kidolgozásra vár ezeknek a problémáknak a magyar *irodalmi diskurzus* viszonyában történő tárgyalása (Kádár 2003, 100.). Első lépésben elemezni kellene a domináns irodalomtudományban használt, a feminista irodalomkritikát a hagyományos irodalomkritikától megkülönböztető ellentétpárok (politikus/nem-politikus, ideologikus/esztétikai, előítéletes/objektív) politikai jellegét. Ezekre az ellentétpárookra Kádár tanulmánya nem tér ki. Ennek következtében csak addig jut el, hogy amennyiben a demokratizálódás felé mutató társadalmi és kulturális változásokban gondolkozunk, valamint pluralizmusra törekszünk, akkor az irodalomban helyet kellene biztosítani a politikus, ideologikus, előítéletes és reduktív értelmezési eljárásoknak, mint amilyen a feminizmus is.

Mivel Kádár nem tárgyalja az irodalmi értelmezést egymással szembeállító ellentétpárok ideologikus természetét, érintetlenül hagyja azt a feltételezést, hogy ellentétben a feministákkal, létezik egy a kultúrán és társadalmon kívül (valamint felette) elhelyezkedő emberi közösség (*az irodalmárok*), akik képesek egy ideológiától mentes, apolitikus, tisztán esztétikai olvasat létrehozására. Kádár történeti áttekintése

⁷ „Sok feminista szerző azért támadja a meséket, mert a nemekre vonatkozó sztereotípiákat konzerválják. [...] Tanulmányom a mese egy másik potenciálisan káros hatására igyekszik rámutatni: a szabad választás elve kerülhet veszélybe. Míg Hamupipőke mindent megtesz azért, hogy a herceg őt válassza, önmagának nem teszi fel a kérdést, vajon ő kit is szeretne választani” (Zsadányi 1997, 390.). „Hozzá kell tennünk: a mesei pretextus és a dolgozat célkitűzései szükségszerűen reduktív perspektívát hoznak létre, a műértelmezések során elsősorban a nemi szerepek alakulását és az ezeket érintő reakciókat emeli ki a dolgozat. [...] [E]bből a szűkített perspektívából természetesen következik, hogy a poétikai elemzésben bizonyos „vakfoltok” képződnek” (Molnár 1997, 407.).

ekképpen kerüli az irodalom kérdésének politizálását (a szó tágabb, az aktuális pártpolitikáktól független jelentésében) és az *irodalmi diskurzus* patriarchális értékrendjének kritikáját.

Nem kerül szóba többek között az sem, hogy a feminista irodalomkritika túl megy a patriarchális előítéletek irodalmi alkotásokban (az esztétikán belül) történő kimutatásán. Vizsgálódásának tárgyát képezi az is, hogyan hatja át az esztétikai értékítéleteket, vagy az irodalomról alkotott általános fogalmakat és ismereteket egy patriarchális, a férfiakat előnyben részesítő, a nőkkel szemben előítéleteket tápláló nemi ideológia (Felman 1991, 11–12.; Friedman 1991, 371–374.; Russ 1991, 194–201.; Marinovich 1997, 120–121.; Horváth 2003, 114–115.). Így a feminista irodalomkritika arra törekszik, hogy rámutasson az irodalomtörténet során intézményesült („természetes,” „objektív,” „normális,”) értelmezések politikai, ideológiai és hatalmi érdekek mentén megformált jelentésvetületeire, különleges figyelemmel a nemi megkülönböztetés fenntartását biztosító retorikai, kulturális és társadalmi alakzatok működtetésére.

Röviden összefoglalva, a feminista irodalomkritika (hasonlóan a többi kritika-elméleti diskurzushoz) arra hívja fel a figyelmet, hogy *nincs* a kulturális/társadalmi rendszereken kívül (és felette) álló, teljesen semleges, ideológia- és politikamentes olvasat, vagyis minden értelmezés valamilyen mértékben ideologikus, politikus és reduktív, függetlenül attól, hogy ezt nyíltan felvállalja egy kritikus, vagy jelöletlenül hagyja az általa képviselt értékrendet. Ennek fényében viszont mindenképpen politika és ideológia kérdése az, hogy az intézményes irodalomkritika milyen értelmezési eljárás(oka)t ismer el irodalmiként, milyen szempontokat határoz meg esztétikainak, mely elméleteket és módszereket tart elfogadhatónak, és milyen megfontolásból igyekszik távol tartani másokat a magyar irodalmi színtértől.

A feminista vs. irodalmi, politikai vs. esztétikai ellentétpárok érintetlenül hagyása hallgatólagos elfogadása lenne annak a nézetnek is, hogy a feminista értelmezés, ellentétben az irodalmival, szükségszerűen mellőzi az esztétikai szempontokat, és kizárólag ideológiai és politikai érdekek alapján működik. Az előbb felvázolt gondolatmenet alapján viszont az esztétika és a politika nem egymás jelenlétét kizáró abszolút fogalmak, azaz minden irodalomértelmezés bizonyos mértékig esztétikai és bizonyos mértékig politikai. Éppen ezért, csupán az esztétikai vagy politikai irányultságok kifejezettsége és intézményes statusa közötti eltérésekről beszélhetünk. Megítélésük pedig változhat attól függően, hogy honnan és milyen érdekek mentén értelmezzük a dolgokat.

A feminista irodalomkritika következképpen nem az esztétikai szempontok kiküszöbölésére törekszik a politikai érdekek érvényesítése érdekében, hanem a patriarchális ideológiai rendszerekben természetesnek és magától értetődőnek vett értékek és normák ideologikus, politikus, reduktív, diszkriminatív stb. jellegére mutat rá, helyet követelve egy olyan norma vagy értékrend érvényesítésének, ami

figyelembe veszi a nők szempontjait (Felski 1997, 423.; 425–426.). Az esztétika feminista átpolitizálása így egyszerre irányul az esztétikai normák ideológia és politika beágyazottságának kritikai feltárására és egy nyitottabb, heterogénebb irodalmi szemlélet megteremtésére. Ebből a szempontból nézve, a feminista irodalomkritika ellenzése nem esztétikai szempontok alapján történik, hanem egy meglehetősen szűk, homogén társadalmi csoportnak a patriarchális struktúrák és normák megtartásához fűződő érdeke mentén.

Egy leszbikus regényként is definiálható irodalmi alkotás értelmezését a magyar *irodalmi diskurzusban* nehezíti még, az a patriarchális társadalmi-logikára jellemző jelenség is, hogy a nyilvános vitákban a nem-heteroszexuális identitások napirendre kerülésekor többnyire a férfiakra korlátozódik e kérdés tárgyalása.⁸ Ez azt a képzetet kelti, hogy ellentétben a férfiakkal, a nőknél nincs nem-heteroszexuális (kulturális) identitás. Magyarán, a nők szexuális orientációjával összefüggésben feleslegesnek tűnhet a másság fogalmának tisztázása a nyilvános beszédtérben. E miatt nem nyílik lehetőség többek között arra sem, hogy a női identitásokat átgondolhassuk a nők közötti kulturális és társadalmi különbség viszonyában.

E probléma szemléltetésére jó példa lehet, Csapó Csaba a „meleg–leszbikus tanulmányok” és a meleg irodalom és irodalomkritika bemutatására vállalkozó az *Élet és Irodalomban* megjelent cikke, amely témája szerint elvileg teret nyithatna egy leszbikus regényként is definiálható könyv köztérben való elgondolására (Csapó 2001.). Csapó cikke azonban nem teremti meg ezt a lehetőséget, mivel mire a „meleg–leszbikus tanulmányok irodalmi aspektusának” tárgyalásához ér, addigra a meleg–leszbikus tanulmányok lehetségesként létező alanyának és tárgyának a férfiakat teszi meg. Mindez három lépésben történik: 1. Kezdetben a meleg–leszbikus felosztás a nem-heteroszexuális férfiak és nők csoportjának megkülönböztetésére szolgál. 2. Majd az „egyszerűsítés kedvéért”, (és a politikai korrektség nevében) a meleg szó jelöli mindkét csoportot (Csapó 2001.). Ekképpen a nem-heteroszexuális férfiakat kategorizáló fogalom jelenti a nem-heteroszexuális nőket is, ami következtében a nők nyelvi szinten láthatatlanná, fogalmi szinten pedig értelmezhetetlenné válnak.⁹ 3. A meleg irodalom és irodalomkritika bemutatásakor a nők lehetséges témaként végképp eltűnnek. Ez a rész, az irodalomról alkotott patriarchális elképzeléseket erősítve a férfiak tárgyalására szorítkozik. Az irodalom így itt is kizárólag a férfiakhoz társítható fogalom, a meleg irodalomkritika pedig a férfi szerzők heteroszexuális olvasatainak a meleg férfiak szempontjából történő újraolvasásával lesz azonos. A „meleg–leszbikus tanulmányok” nyilvános ismertetése

⁸ A leszbikus regény kifejezést itt specifikus értelemben használom. A leszbikus regény mint irodalmi kategória, az irodalmi műfajok egyike. (Vö. Stimpson 1991.)

⁹ Ennek a kérdésnek a részletes tárgyalására és a Csapó által használt fogalmak jelentésalakulásának történeti áttekintésére az Észak-Amerikai Meleg-Leszbikus Tanulmányok tekintetében lásd de Lauretis 1991.

így konzerválja azt a patriarchális dogmát, hogy a női irodalom kizárható az esztétikai vizsgálódások területéről, a nő fogalma az irodalomtudományban értelmezhetetlen, a női identitás-politika kérdése pedig tárgyalhatatlan. Csapó cikke alapján a nagyközönség akár arra a következtetésre is juthat, hogy még a „meleg–leszbikus tanulmányokon” belül sincs lesbikus irodalomkritika.¹⁰

NEMISÉG ÉS KÁNONFORMÁLÁS

Gordon Agáta *Kecskerúzs* című regénye ugyanakkor (1997-es Ünnepi Könyvhét) és ugyanannál a kiadónál (Magvető) jelent meg, mint Závada Pál *Jadвига párnája* című regénye. Akkoriban Závada neve közel annyira volt ismeretlen az irodalomkritika és a nagyközönség számára, mint Gordoné. Azóta Závada neve közzismert lett, és regényét figyelemre méltónak ítélik meg hivatalos irodalmi körökben. Ma az irodalomkritika a 90-es évek magyar prózájának egyik kérdéses, de mégiscsak meghatározó alkotásaként tartja számon. Ezzel szemben a Gordon Agáta név továbbra is ismeretlenül cseng a nagyközönség számára, a *Kecskerúzs* pedig egy pillanatig sem volt irodalomkritikai viták tárgya. A szakmai közönség nem tekinti a 90-es évek kérdéses, de azért figyelemre méltó irodalmi alkotásának, és nem foglalkozik vele a feminista irodalomkritika sem. Ezt a *Kecskerúzs*t övező kritikai csendet tekinthetjük akár furcsának is, hisz Gordon prózája új hangot képvisel, új nézőpontot vezet be a magyar irodalomba, azaz új kérdéseket vett fel és további dimenziókat nyit meg az irodalom és az esztétika fogalmával kapcsolatban.

Konkrétan arról van szó, hogy Závada diskurzusa az erotikáját a magyar irodalomban szokásos, a heteroszexuális (és többnyire heteroszexista) férfi szemszögéből elképzelt patriarchális nőértelmezésből nyeri, Gordon diskurzusának erotikája viszont a heteroszexuális társadalmi rendben élő, nőkhöz vonzódó nő perspektívája alakítja ki. Ezzel a magyar irodalomban hagyományosnak nem nevezhető narrációs alaphelyzettel Gordon egyszerre tematizálja egy nő nőkhöz való viszonyát, és a lesbikus identitásnak a heteroszexuális normarendszeren belüli megfogalmazásának nehézségeit. Ezzel teret nyit a patriarchális társadalmi logika mentén megformált irodalom felfogás megvitására, a jelenleg érvényben lévő

¹⁰ Csapó cikke az angol-szász irodalmi hagyományokat jelöli ki hivatkozási pontnak. Bár technikai szempontból indokolható, hogy Csapó rövid ismertetője a meleg-leszbikus tanulmányok tekintetében a férfiak csoportjára korlátozódik, annak elhallgatása, hogy az angol-szász hagyományban a meleg-leszbikus tanulmányokon belül létezik egy jól körülhatárolható lesbikus irodalomelméleti és irodalomkritikai hagyomány is, mindenképp félrevezető és politikáját tekintve kérdéses. A lesbikus irodalomkritika történeti áttekintésére és az azzal kapcsolatban felmerülő módszertani kérdések tisztázására lásd Zimmerman 1991.

esztétikai normák és értékek újragondolására, valamint a nem, társadalmi nem és szexualitás fogalmának átpolitizálására az irodalom viszonyában. Éppen ezért tarthatjuk különösnek, hogy nemcsak a politikai rendszerváltás utáni hivatalos irodalomkritika, hanem a női irodalommal foglalkozó feminista irodalomkritika sem figyelt fel a *Kecskerúzsra*.¹¹

Gordon és Závada regényének angol nyelvű szakmai értékelése együtt olvasható a világhálón (Györfly 2002.). Ez a könyvismertető a magyar domináns kritikai diskurzus érték és norma rendszerét jeleníti meg, így a magyar irodalmi berkekben megszokottként és elterjedtként határozható meg nemi ideológiai rendszere. Éppen ezért példaértékűnek vehető. Amennyiben viszont az angol nyelv által feltételezhető kulturális szemléletet és társadalmi logikát vesszük alapul, egy angol hegemonikus irodalomkritikai kontextusban, kirívónak tekinthető a regény irodalmi minőségét értékelő kritikai kijelentésből kirajzolódó nemi ideológiai rendszer konzervativizmusa. A továbbiakban arra teszek kísérletet, hogy a könyvrecenzióban képviselt esztétikai normák ideologikus jellegét és politikai vetületét felvázoljam.

Györfly megítélése szerint Gordon regénye irodalmi szempontból komolytalan, gyenge utánérzés, „könnyed,” „játékos,” de valójában „súlytalan” és „felszínes”.¹² A *Kecskerúzs* egy olyan regény, amely nem hoz semmi újat a magyar irodalom számára. Ezek a megállapítások tűnhetnek különösnek, mivel a *Kecskerúzs* mellett a magyar kortárs irodalmi kánonban csupán egyetlen egy olyan alkotás van, Galgóczi Erzsébet *Törvényen kívül és belül* című regénye, amely egy nő nőkhöz való viszonyát politikai és társadalmi megélhetőségének/megvalósíthatatlanságának szempontjából ábrázolja.

Galgóczi regénye azzal a kérdéssel foglalkozik, hogy egy a kizárólag a patriarchális rendet elfogadó politikai diktatúrában a leszbikus identitás nyilvános vállalhatósága hogyan lesz lehetetlen, és a leszbikus egyént a politikai rendszer hogyan zárja ki és áldozza fel a társadalmi rend fenntartása érdekében.¹³ A rendszerváltás utáni hivatalos irodalomkritika egyik szaktekintélye, a rendszer váltás előtti kortárs irodalmi kánon újragondolásakor, Galgóczi már valamennyire kanonizáltnak mondható regényét, a Gordon regényének irodalmi értékével kapcsolatban megfogalmazott fenntartásokhoz hasonlatosakkal igyekszik kizárni az irodalmi kánonból. Galgóczi viszonyában az ítélet úgy hangzik, hogy „kivételes alkotói elkötelezettsége azonban nem társult hasonló prózaművészeti erudícióval”

¹¹ Tudomásom szerint eddig egyetlen egy magyarnyelvű elemzés jelent meg a *Kecskerúzs*ról: Sándor 2000, 32–38. A *Kecskerúzs*ról angol nyelven lásd még Sándor 1999. Köszönettel tartozom Sándor Beának, amiért rendelkezésemre bocsátotta ez utóbbi tanulmányát.

¹² “Alongside the Proust reminiscences, the distant influences of Alain-Fournier, Péter Nádas and others can be sensed. But Agáta Gordon is lighter, more playful and indeed more unsubstantial and superficial than her models” (Györfly 2002, 104.).

¹³ Galgóczi regényének részletes tárgyalására lásd Sándor 1999.

(Kulcsár Szabó 1994, 105–104.). Magyarán, Galgóczi nem rendelkezett prózaművészeti műveltséggel/képzettséggel/olvasottsággal.

Mindkét női íróttal azzal az indokkal nem veszik be a szakmailag értékelhető szerzők körébe, hogy nem tekinthetőek komolynak, mivel alkotásaik irodalmi minősége vagy esztétikai értéke nem üti meg az elfogadott mércét. A helyzet paradox az, hogy azok az esztétikai kritériumok, amelyeknek ezek az alkotások nem felelnek meg, teljesen tisztázatlanok maradnak. Melyek azok az irodalmi normák, amelyek alapján egyértelműen megítélhető egy írás irodalmi értéke? Milyen szempontok szerint tudjuk eldönteni, hogy egy regény felszínes, súlytalan, stb., vagy egy ember prózaművészeti műveltsége/képzettsége elégséges vagy elégtelen egy jó irodalmi mű megírásához? Pontosan mely elvárásoknak nem felelnek meg ezek az írók?

A mi szempontunkból az lesz érdekes, hogyan működteti egy olyan férfi-központú, heteroszexista ideológia az esztétikai ítéleteket, amely mentén (az irodalom irodalmi értékének megóvása érdekében) már eleve komolytalannak láttatja azokat az alkotásokat, amelyek egy nő kritikus szemszögéből jelenítik meg a patriarchális rendet, és egy radikális női identitás irodalmi kifejezhetőségével kísérleteznek. Mivel a nemi előítéletek esztétikai értékítéletekben burkoltan jelennek meg, így szakmailag igazoltnak látszhat a szóban forgó két regény kizárása az értékes irodalmi művek köréből. Így viszont a kritikai értékelés azt is biztosítja, hogy a leszbikus elbeszélés/írás ne jelenhessen meg az irodalom fogalmával társulva a nyilvánosság előtt, vagy hogy a nem heteroszexuális női-identitás témája beletartozhasson a nyilvánosan tárgyalható irodalmi kérdések körébe.

A Gordon Agáta tulajdonnévvel jelzett biológia személy kiléte felől – talán nem véletlenül – kevés információ hozzáférhető a nyilvánosság számára. Gordon Agáta esetében a szerzőkről szokásosan megadott minimális életrajzi adatok, mint születési hely és idő, valamint irodalmi tevékenység sem kerül nyilvánosságra. A *Labrisz Könyvek* „Leszbikusok a szépirodalomban” című számában sem, ahol a többi magyar író, költő, művész és kutató megadja ezeket az adatokat.¹⁴ Részben a szerző valós kilétét övező bizonytalanságok miatt, egy névtelen rádió interjúra hivatkozva, Györffy arra a következtetésre jut, hogy „a női név férfit rejt,” vagyis a *Kecskerúzs* írója bizonyára férfi.¹⁵ Bár a kétes információ nem oszlatja el teljesen a szerző biológiai nemét övező kételyeket, lehetséges szerzőként a férfi nem részesül előnyben. Innentől a Gordonnal szemben támasztott elvárások kettősek: Egy férfi irodalmi hagyományba illeszkedő férfi-szerző legyen (Proust, Alain-Fournier,

¹⁴ *Labrisz: Szembeszél. Leszbikusok a szépirodalomban* (Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület, 2001.)

¹⁵ “Nothing is well known about her, allegedly even the publishers only know a Post Office Box address, although recently an anonymous radio interview revealed that the woman's name concealed a man” (Györffy 2002, 104.).

Nádas), ugyanakkor, nyíltan ábrázolja a leszbikus párkapcsolatnak a nagyközönség számára ismeretlen intim részleteit. Ekképpen az írói gyengesség jelének minősül az, hogy a regényben a „viszonyok bemutatása teljesen ártatlan” és még a négy főből álló leszbikus közösség megalakulása után is „kerüli a regény a nyílt erotikát”.¹⁶ Paradox módon, a leszbikus viszonyok pornográf ábrázolása biztosíthatná Gordon regényének irodalmi értékét a hivatalos irodalomkritika területén belül.

Az irodalom szempontjából a gond az, hogy a magyar intézményes irodalomkritika által (el)ismert irodalmi kánon túlságosan szűk és egynemű ahhoz, hogy történetileg elhelyezhető, értelmezhető és értékelhető lenne Gordon regényének esztétikája a jelenleg érvényesnek tartott rendszerében. Sándor elemzése rávilágít arra, hogy „a Gordon Agáta név alatt megjelent *Kecskerúzs*” leszbikus regény, amelyben Gordon arra törekszik, hogy létrehozzon a magyar irodalmon belül egy leszbikus irodalmi hagyományt (Sándor 2000, 32.). Ennek a törekvésnek része egy sajátos mitológiai rendszer kidolgozása is. Gordon a regény utalási rendszerén, képi világán és nyelvi stratégiáin keresztül formálja a regény szövegének identitását.

Gordon a *Kecskerúzs*-ban így arra tesz kísérletet, hogy létrehozzon magyar nyelven egy leszbikusként azonosítható írásmódot és intertextust, egy sajátos esztétikát. Ennek jelrendszere paradox módon egyszerre igyekszik elrejtetni, és közben egyfolytában a nyilvánosság elé tárni a szöveg leszbikus jellegét. E kettős cél retorikai megvalósíthatóságának elengedhetetlen feltétele az ön-reflexió alkalmazása és a szöveg narratív-stratégiájának a szövegen belüli allegorizálása. Gordon irodalmi projektje ekképpen számos a jelentéssel, az olvashatósággal, az értelmezhetőséggel és az irodalmi konvenciókkal kapcsolatos általános kérdéseket vet fel, pontosan azokat, amelyek a jelenlegi hivatalos irodalomelmélet és irodalomkritika központi témáit képezik. Gordon regénye továbbá lehetőséget teremt arra, hogy az irodalom területén belül, de az irodalmon túlmutatva, megvitatásra kerüljön a nemiség fogalmának használata a kultúránkat és társadalmi berendezkedésünket érintő általános kérdések viszonyában. A *Kecskerúzs*-ra tekinthetünk úgy, mint a leszbikus társ kapcsolat társadalmi létjogosultságával és irodalmi megjeleníthetőségével foglalkozó narratívára, vagy mint a magyarországi leszbikus lét társadalmi lehetőségeit és korlátjait taglaló irodalmi vízióra. Gordon regénye e tekintetben teret nyithat az uralkodó heteroszexista nemi ideológia és társadalmi logika diszkriminatív normáinak megvitatásának lehetőségére az irodalomkritikán belül és kívül.

HIVATKOZÁSOK

¹⁶ „...from the point of view of moral conventions the events, situations and relationships presented are absolutely innocent. [...] Anyway, the novel continues to avoid open eroticism” (Györfly 2002, 104.).

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CLIMBING/SOARING, LIFTING – FROM MATTY TO MATILDA IN A.S. BYATT'S *MORPHO EUGENIA*

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A STORY OF OUR OWN

I have been wondering for a long while what to present as a gift at this most precious celebration of ours. I have wanted to do something that is personal, and includes both Sári and to a certain extent myself, and, at the same time, I have wanted to be academic—a gap that is not always easy to bridge. I have been wondering: should this paper be on a *Romantic female poet*, or on a *Victorian*, perhaps on a *modernist woman writer or a female contemporary*? And what genre? I will always remember the enthusiasm with which Sári recommended to me, more than ten years ago, Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market," and added how strange it was that the text for a long time had been read as an innocent *fairy tale* for children, whereas, if we interpret the *fantastic* element of the text as a code, as a kind of a cover, it is just as innocent as children are in Freudian theories of sexuality. Or should I, rather, choose a *Gothic* text, something by Mary Shelley that keeps haunting myself as well, surfacing every now and then as the uncanny? And what about yet another favorite genre of Sári's, the *female Künstlerroman*? Or, could this paper possibly be on several of these? But is there a text that encompasses if not all, at least most of these areas?

I knew I would stumble upon a text that I needed—and I did. The moment I checked its publication date I knew this was what I needed: the year is 1992. A very special year for me. This is when I first met Sári in Hull, a place that for several years connected our institutes via a TEMPUS program. I am wondering how many of you can claim that you have spent weeks with Sári living in adjacent rooms, and using the same kitchen. I can, and I am both very proud of, and grateful for that. At that time I was less than an emerging feminist scholar—rather an absolute beginner in the discipline. Since then, I have frequently wondered how much I owe to those chats in the kitchen. Certainly a lot—and as we all know this is one Sári's

gifts: her support of all kinds that cannot be quantitatively defined, we cannot even put our fingers on it-yet it is there, she is always there, *lifting* us.

Let us come back, though, to the text. Touching the book I realised one more thing: it was a gift to me by two male exchange students of ours, a linguist and a historian. They subscribed to a book club while in Hull in the same year, and on receiving this book they considered it useless for themselves, and passed it on to me. This apparently superfluous book, I suppose, reached its destination and its aim: it was destined to be related to Hull, it was destined to be related to the year 1992, thus it was destined to be related to Sári and me. This book is A.S. Byatt's *Angels and Insects*, a book that Marilyn Butler declared Byatt's "best work to date" in the *Times Literary Supplement* (22), a volume of two novellas (*Morpho Eugenia* and *The Conjugal Angel*), out of which I think particularly the first one has more links to what Sári has been doing than one would think at first reading.

THE STORY AND ITS READINGS

You may ask why, what it is about, what it is like. As not a widely known text (not even those can claim to know it who have seen the 1995 film version directed by Philip Haas as there are so many differences between the text and the film) a brief summary of the plot would be needed to see my points. In 1861, William Adamson, a Yorkshire butcher's educated son, a Darwinist natural historian, after spending years in South America among the natives, and after a shipwreck in which he loses practically all he has (i.e. all the rare specimens, except for one, he had hoped to make money from by selling them), returns to England and is generously invited to Harald Alabaster's aristocratic mansion, Bredely Hall, Surrey, where, as a return for his keep, he is asked to make order in Sir Harald's infinite piles of natural collection. He irresistibly falls in love with Eugenia, the eldest daughter, who has just lost her fiancé, under circumstances no one talks about. Aware of the social differences, all William attempts is to give Eugenia a transient present: a cloud of butterflies. Yet, while sitting in the hothouse, Eugenia proposes that William should talk to her father, and thus there is a double wedding: that of Rowena, the second daughter, and that of Eugenia. As the day of the wedding approaches, Edgar, the eldest son, who is Eugenia's stepbrother, makes it clear to William that they will never be on equal footing. The Adamsons' conjugal life is rather erratic, its rhythm dictated by Eugenia's recurrent pregnancies (she gives birth to twins, then a son, then twins again), during which William is always excluded from the marital bed.

In the meantime, he gets engaged in other duties and activities. He is asked by Lady Alabaster to contribute to the tuition of the smaller children by teaching them natural history, an idea proposed by Matty Crompton, a female dependant in the

house who is at help in this activity. Furthermore, she proposes that William should write a book on their observations of the ants, and she even offers her assistance in making drawings and in copying the manuscript. However, she herself is also secretly engaged in writing a book of her own: a combination of fairy tales and natural sciences, which she can sell and make money from. William manages to find a publisher for his own book as well, and by this time he learns that from their childhood on, there has been an incestuous relationship between Eugenia and Edgar (the cause of suicide in the case of Eugenia's former fiancé, Captain Hunt), and it is still going on so much so that no one is sure who the children are fathered by. Before he can figure out his future life, Matty Crompton informs William that she has ordered two berths on a ship leaving off for South America the following week, for the two of them.

Morpho Eugenia, written by a contemporary woman writer, thus, is a text situated in the Victorian era. Critics, however, disagree whether it can be considered a Victorian pastiche or it is a postmodern conglomerate of texts, whether it is a suffocating web of discourses (genres) rooted in the far-away Victorian past, either in a negative or in a positive sense of the word, carrying on with the Victorian tradition of writing, or it can be considered a postmodern text displaying and playing with various textual traditions, which, as a result, mutually reflect upon each other.

That Byatt's text is somehow embarrassing and puzzling for us, contemporary readers is clearly indicated by the troubled comments of a male critic who claims that "the more successfully Byatt recreates the Victorian novel of ideas, the more she persuades us of the irredeemable pastness of the past she recreates, and the more the ideas she deals with, of determinism, individual freedom [...], seem to announce that these are no longer our concerns, at least not in this way, in these contexts, in these words and forms" (Barrell). When analyzing this statement, one finds difficulties in locating the problem with the text: whether it is at the thematic or the textual level. Apparently at both since the critique is aimed at the "ideas" and "the novel of ideas" as he defines, to me rather suspiciously, the genre, and, in an implied way, as well as at the tropes and figures of speech of the text (see: words). This is a critique which, if justifiable, would proclaim Byatt's text a very bad one.

The text, however, can be approached in a more positive way as well. By another critic, Byatt is claimed to be a "postmodern Victorian" who finds the grounds of her postmodernity in 'an earnest attempt to get back before the moderns and revive a Victorian project that has never been allowed to come to completion'" (Levenson quoted in Hansson 453), and Heidi Hansson goes on to make an apparently simple claim that "Byatt is a storyteller who continues the Victorian tradition of describing the individual in society" (453), which seems the age-old question in novels, and which, for that reason, seems an almost pre-empted statement. We can, however, make the link between this claim and that of John Barrell's, since both can easily be

translated into more contemporary issues like the question of the subject and subjectivity, or the subject and power. On this basis, one can raise the question how the text functions in its complexity, how the “ideas” are inevitably defined by the figures, tropes, and, what my primary focus of investigation will be here, by the proliferation of genres. More precisely, I will explore how certain genres (the Gothic novel, the fairy tale, the governess novel and the *Künstlerroman*) and certain textual features (metaphors and fantastic elements) are so much intertwined with the “ideas” of the text (like determinism and freedom, the individual and the society) that they are actually brought about by these very textual features. In this analysis, I will put particular emphasis on the female *Künstlerroman*, that of Matty Crompton, which in my reading evolves in a Darwinian plot.¹

The centrality of the metaphorical structure is underlined by Byatt, who claimed in an interview that she “began with a visual image [. . .] compar[ing] an ant heap to a Victorian mansion. And in the middle of the ant heap there's this large fat white queen simply producing children. [. . .] It didn't have a plot for a long time-it was just this metaphor, which is a very simple one but works. And it got bigger and bigger. I had this vision of all these slightly sexless female servants, scurrying along the corridors of the gothic mansion like the worker ants” (“Interview”)-among them Miss Matty Crompton, both in her semi-visibility and her sexlessness.

If we think about this simple allegorical, parabolic aspect of the text based on this “simple” metaphor, we may realize: what else could be a more proper metaphor for revisiting the Victorians than the Darwinian narrative? And, at the same time, what else could be a more disturbing metaphor for revisiting the Victorians than the Darwinian narrative? Byatt's Victorian pastiche is as embarrassing for its contemporary readers as the implications of the Darwinian theory were for the Victorians. Much has been written on the latter, i.e. how the Victorians resisted and felt embarrassed by the Darwinian notions of evolution and the descent of man, a story that is concisely replicated by Byatt in Harald Alabaster's figure, who is rational enough not to reject Darwin and the findings of natural history, yet cannot accept the lack of a primary creator, cannot do without the concept of God-and this irreconcilability drives him to endless self-debate and to his unfinished (because unfinishable) philosophical-theological project.

But why is Byatt's text embarrassing for its contemporary readers? Are we still Victorians in a sense? Are we still entangled in the web of questions like determinism and freedom? The answer is, perhaps, yes, but in my view the Darwinian plot of this text only partly means determinism; partly it means the potential of survival and adaptability. It perfectly fits the texture of *Morpho Eugenia*

¹ When using this phrase, I implicitly rely on Gillain Beer's monograph *Darwin's Plots* on evolutionary narrative in Darwin and George Eliot, which analyses rhetorical moves, the use of metaphors, etc. in 19th-century narratives.

to suppose that the Darwinian metaphor is far from stable and to be understood literally (it is a metaphor, anyway)-if that is the problem of Barrell's with contexts, words and forms that are no longer our concern; rather, in perfect harmony with the text the most central metaphor of which is perhaps transformation, transfiguration and metamorphosis (the essence of metaphor as well), the Darwinian metaphors of determinism and adaptation seem most appropriate tools to explore even our own contemporary issues of subjectivity, and the emergence of the female subject, the emergence of the female artist in particular. This mode of textuality has serious, and at the same time playful, implications in terms of gender. Although apparently relying on natural history for the representation of human genders, and as such at first sight approaching genders in an essentialist way, the text uses the very confluence of natural and human history through this complex metaphorical structure to destabilize gender as an essentialist notion (partly because what natural history implies in the text is that not even natural history is natural, nor are genders as natural as natural essentialists claim), and brings about a textual world in which central Victorian gender metaphors like the oak and the ivy, or the angel-in-the-house lose their firm grounds.

In terms of genres and genders, however, there is a clear division in the text-although both genres and genders are subversively rewritten. My claim is that the first part of the text is primarily focused on William Anderson, the natural historian returning from Brazil, and situates him into the fairy tale and the Gothic novel, and, in a special sense, the governess novel, but in a rewritten form of all these; whereas in the second part one can discover the governess novel in a different format again, and the female *Künstlerroman* in a more and more emphatic way. This proliferation of genres brings about a web that in itself raises the question of the "freedom" of storytelling, and of stories as such, which may be the reason why some readers may be embarrassed and feel the text's tightness as outdated. But why are these "contexts," "words" and "forms" no longer ours? I would, quite the contrary, claim that these are our concerns and contexts, no matter how much we want to leave them behind-which may be the reason for the very embarrassment. The Victorians used these genres partly as a kind of a code to veil whatever was not supposed to be revealed. In these subversive, rewritten forms of the genres, however, the text reveals perhaps more than is otherwise decently covered by the (Victorian) surface. But what is revealed, then?

A MALE CINDERELLA

The text, at the beginning, focuses on the story of the Alabasters and particularly on Mr. Adamson, one of those archetypal-no matter how everyday-Victorian heroes

of natural sciences who go out to unexplored territories, spend years there, risk their lives, but (or rather: and) contribute to several Victorian self-myths that include the good works done “out there” in terms of geographical exploration, of spreading civilization, and of creating scientific knowledge by collecting, and, at home, categorizing new or rare species. Up until this point the plot is certainly Victorian, neatly covering what has happened to William Adamson “out there.” This Victorian hero, however, wants to be an English self-made man, if not after the American fashion, but according to the rules of a rigidly hierarchical class system and society where the butcher's son tries to find his way in life, to which the only solution is offered by a fairy tale: a Cinderella story, reversed in gender terms. At Bredely Hall, “William found himself at once detached anthropologist and fairytale prince trapped by invisible gates and silken bonds in an enchanted castle” (21), where, instead of being allowed to carry out heroic deeds, all he is offered by his patron in terms of a job is sorting out and categorizing Harald Alabaster's endless collection of natural specimens. This job looks absolutely hopeless, partly because it is endless, like Cinderella's task, and it is only after he has completed this project that there beckons a more heroic, and amply masculine, future: another voyage to South America, which Harald Alabaster vaguely promises to finance (“I intend to provide for you. In due course.” [90]); partly, however, this sorting out is hopeless because Adamson has no proper conception of how to make a system of those innumerable specimens, has no proper knowledge, or, put it in another way, he is incapable of naming, and making order of all those randomly purchased and very often partially destroyed or broken natural history findings. This might be a reason for the ironical name: *Adamson*, as if a new mythical history of mankind were written in his story, that of someone in control neither of his own life story, nor of controlling and arranging *life* around himself, and he is also destined to be dependent on his employer financially, even when he is married to his daughter-in no way is his “share” specified on marrying Eugenia.

The reversed-and to a great extent class-based-power structure of the Adamsons' marriage is further emphasized by the fact that it is him who is literally taken and proposed by Eugenia, and all he can offer in terms of a wedding present is the cloud of butterflies that is just as flimsy and decorative as any young woman's bridal gift to her fiancé, and what he is given in return is similarly flimsy, something typically given to a young woman: “new hairbrushes, ivory-backed” (66). The emphatically reversed gender roles and particularly the power imbalance as implied in these reversed gender roles, at first sight, seem to point in the direction that economic dependence afflicts both genders in an equal way, and brings about distortions in human relations. On second thoughts, however, although we can recognize that in spite of his name doubly indicating his masculinity, Adamson is greatly feminized; the marked exposedness and vulnerability of William Adamson due to his financial

dependence also make us aware of women's *unmarked* exposedness and vulnerability, and how this state is taken for granted by readers of romance stories.

Accordingly, his extreme dependence turns the (neo)gothic mansion of Bredely Hall into a genuine space for a Gothic story. Eugenia's house is transformed into just as claustrophobic, violent and incestuous a space for him as any other Gothic mansion for any female Cinderella, where, behind the curtains, he is met with the realities of what the Gothic facade and architecture tend to veil. It is after his wedding that he explores deeper, and starts using the back stairs, where he first discovers that each and every morning a “kitchen maid, a diminutive black sprite with a mob cap” (74), anonymous at this moment (later known as Amy, who helps in the ant-watch as well) collects into two buckets “a mass of black beetles, several inches deep, stumbling and waving legs and feelers, slimed with something glutinous” (74), and the kitchen maid becomes “confused in his memory with his imprisoned Coleoptera,² struggling and hopeless” (75).

These insect images turn out to be symbolic in significant ways, expressing the hopelessly claustrophobic social space, eternally and inevitably recreating its own filth, its own abject. It becomes obvious in two incidents: both are related to powerful, almost omnipotent, and in one way or another violent acts of male sexuality, and both of them going on for long, with no beginning or end, behind the facades. One takes place in “the scullery, [. . .] over the sink” (106), where, symbolically, the dirt should be washed off, yet, instead, it is eternally recreated. This is where Adamson notices Edgar raping “the little beetle-sprite, Amy” (106), and Edgar's words, talking to Amy, can be considered the epitome of his omnipotence: “Run off, then, child [. . .]. I can always find you when I need you” (107). Shortly, Amy gets pregnant, has to leave the place, and live in a workhouse. This incident, at the same time, is a step in the emasculation of William Adamson as at this point Edgar clarifies his position: “The servants in this house are no concern of yours, Adamson. You do not pay their wages, and I'll thank you not to interfere with them” (107).

He does have guesses of his real position in the house, though. When his wife gives birth to his son, and wants to call him Edgar, he puts down his feet, insists that the child should be given his own father's name, and self-consciously claims: “I should like something *of my own*. And my son is my own, in some sense” (72). This “in some sense” proves to be prophetic and at the same time betrays his own half-admitted fears: “the child, like all five children, was an Alabaster, a pale, clean-cut, nervous creature” (72). Fatherhood to the children never becomes certain, but after revealing Edgar and Eugenia's incestuous affair that has been going on since their childhood the remains of Adamson's masculinity are shattered by this transgressive sexual act behind the facades of the Gothic mansion. This is the

² A species of butterflies.

ultimate act of violence, breaking the most basic taboo that is supposed to inform all human communities. Victorian patriarchy, nevertheless, by its omnipotence, is beyond rules, its structure allows any violation, producing its own filth (like the mass of black beetles, just eating up-destroying- anything), and deterministically locking up fragile creatures (not only butterflies but human beings as well).

FROM SEXLESS FEMALE TO *KÜNSTLERIN*

Adamson's gradual emasculation goes parallel with his recognition of his own position as similar to that of Matty Crompton, and it seems the turning point in the narrative as well in the sense that from this moment on Matty starts emerging both in her personhood in the eyes of Adamson, and as a female artist, and parallel with that she seems to take over the narrative. Not coincidentally, I suppose, it coincides in the narrative with Edgar's "clarification" of Adamson's standing. Adamson himself thinks about it in different terms:

If he had a place, it was in the spaces between the cushioned family softnesses and the closed-away servile hierarchies in the attics and cellars and back rooms. In the schoolroom, [...] occasionally he would find Matty Crompton, whose status in the household, he sometimes ruefully thought, had the same uncertainty as his own. They were both poor, both semi-employed, both, now, relations of the masters but not masters. (75...76)

In social terms, this position is quite close to that of the governess or tutor, and, actually that is the activity how Adamson and Matty "make [themselves] useful" (76): by teaching the young ones. This position is analyzed by Jeanne M. Peterson, and she calls it "status incongruence" as the governess, by her social origins (impoverished middle-class family) and functions (that of the middle-class mother, teaching the young ones) belongs to the "masters," to the genteel class, yet she is paid for what she does, which is a paradoxical situation (cf. 3–19). True, neither Adamson, nor Matty is literally paid for the work they do, yet for their maintenance and keep (and Adamson for the future, no matter how vague, promise of a new South American voyage) they are expected to be useful for the masters. At this point, in the narrative one can discover not only the shift of focus from Adamson to Matty, but also the merging of two plots, in the form of the same genre: the governess novel (or, as an alternative, the tutor novel-the archetype of which could be also a novel by Charlotte Brontë: *The Professor*).

There is, however, a major, and in terms of gender, a significant difference between how Adamson's "tutor novel" and Matty's governess novel are created by

and in the text. Whereas Adamson's plot can be characterized by a gradual narrowing and dead end as a result of a Darwinian determinism, so much so that he almost falls out of the system of the house as uninterpretable for himself (he cannot any longer consider himself even a drone in this human beehive), Matty's governess plot goes in another direction: she proves to be the great survivor of the text, the one who can perfectly adapt to her circumstances, and by adaptation, change it so that what evolves on the basis of determinism is freedom and independence. These subversively mirrored governess/tutor plots would be interesting enough for anyone who adopts gender as a focus of investigation. More intriguing is, however, the process of how Matty turns into Matilda, that is, her female *Künstlerroman*, and what it implies. When in her own room (which, by this time, is turned into a room of her own) she informs Adamson of her decision to go to South America and that she has actually booked two berths for themselves on board a ship, Miss Crompton, everybody's Matty, always at hand and at disposal, says the following: "My name', she said, 'is Matilda. Up here at night there is no Matty. Only Matilda. *Look at me*'" (157). This personal declaration of independence and of gaining home grounds, which includes creating herself as a sexual being as part of her personhood, another component of which is her self-naming, is the result of a series of minor steps that are not devoid of elements of Darwin's plots.

How is Miss Matty Crompton represented by the text? She is certainly one of those "slightly sexless female servants, scurrying along the corridors of the gothic mansion like the worker ants" (Byatt, "Interview"), even though she is not called like that. Yet, she is seen as sexless by Adamson (105), and she is aware of it when she challenges Adamson in her room: "You do not know that I am a woman. [...] You have *never seen me* (156); and she does function like a worker ant: intellectually feeding (teaching) the Alabaster children. As a paradigmatic female dependant, with no income of her own, and at the mercy of the family, she does not only figure as a pseudo-governess, but she is one of those superfluous or redundant women who the Victorians had great troubles to define as they were a contradiction in terms: women but not married-so what should they do with their lives, as the question went. This is the question that intrigues Adamson as well: "He did begin to wonder how she spent her days [...] and came to the conclusion that Matty Crompton was required to 'make herself useful' without any demeaning named post" (76). Mid-nineteenth-century discourse on the so-called "redundant" or "superfluous" women, including "spinsters, nuns, nurses, political and philanthropic activists" (Nestor 4), went on further to ask the question from the position of authority as well: in 1862 (the very time when the novel takes place) Frances Power Cobbe posed the question "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" (Nestor 7), which is clearly related to the other question: "How far could women be trusted without male supervision?" (Nestor 4), both implying that women left on their own, out of

the bounds of (patriarchal, authoritarian) control may go awry, end up dangerously-both to themselves, and to the social structure as well.

In a manner appropriate for a pseudo-governess, or a female dependant of the house, Matty is present in the text from the very beginning in a matching semi-visibility, semi-presence and non-defined position. For long, it counts as an element of surprise for Adamson if she displays activity as a “patient huntress” (29) in the project of observing the ant community, or if she has a voice and knowledge of her own when, for example, she recites Milton's *Paradise Lost* – a butt of an ironical remark by Eugenia (“clever Matty” [31]), or implied misogyny by Adamson, who makes the comment: “You think a great deal, Miss Crompton,” the implication of which is made explicit by Matty: “For a woman. You were about to add, 'for a woman', and then refrained, which was courteous. It is my great amusement, thinking” (41). And she does think-more than Adamson does. Whereas Adamson is puzzled at how Matty spends *her* days, *she* realizes how futile *his* engagements are, and thinks of a new employment for him: he is included, as natural historian, in the children's private tuition-a project initiated by Matty. From that moment on, Matty is the initiator, the think tank, who can make most of the current circumstances-of apparent entrapment and determinism, of power discourses-, and carries on an incessant dialogue with the environment, a dialogue that can be described as adaptation, which turns out to be a more active attitude, and transfigures itself into changing the environment, and as a result, Matty gains her subjectivity by resisting the dominant power.

In this process, Matty gains control not only of her own story, but that of Adamson as well. As a next step after the idea that Adamson should be included in the children's teaching, Matty takes over Adamson's realm, the insect world, and starts her own observations of the ants, makes drawings of them, while encouraging Adamson, who keeps moaning about his lack of opportunities, to pick up natural research on home grounds instead of South America (77). As she says, when she proposes the observation of the ants, “[m]y sphere is naturally more limited. I look naturally closer to hand.” (77) This almost self-deprecating remark, diminishing the significance of the step, can be interpreted as an evolutionary gesture: perfect, but active adaptation to the circumstances in which Adamson, the male in the same position, is totally paralysed. As a further step, it is Matty who inspires Adamson to write a book of their observation of the ants (92), she even offers herself as an assistant (93). As yet another step, she starts making drawings of the ants (in an anthropomorphic way), but she practically asks for Adamson's permission if her drawings could be included in his book (95). Characteristically, this is the moment when Adamson ponders upon the graceful movements of Matty's wrist bones, which signifies not only her becoming an artist, but also her gaining visibility, sexuality, and personhood. Not until she starts creating does anyone consider her a woman, whereas the movements of her wrist bones start off a chain of

signification that results in the creation of his desire for her: “abstractedly studying her [. . .] absorbed in her work[,] William found himself suddenly sharply inhaling what must have been her peculiar smell, a slightly acid armpit smell” (95–96)-a smell he recalls later in Eugenia's bedroom, a smell that emphatically appears in Matty's room in her final transfiguration as an indicator of her personality and sexuality.

The book, thus, becomes a joint project of Adamson and Matty's: the text written Adamson, and Matty not only making anthropomorphized drawings but also “brighten[ing a] passage considerably with little forgotten details” (109). Apparently Adamson is in control of the project, yet, “[s]he was determined and inventive about the book. She was fiercely intent, not only on its production, but on its success” (105). This is the moment when Adamson admits to himself:

It interested him, that he thought of her as sexless. That thought itself might have arisen out of some analogy with the worker ants. [. . .] He was beginning to think that there were all sorts of frustrated ambitions contained in that sharp, bony body, behind those watchful black eyes. [. . .] He did not think she was so altruistic a being. (105)

What is she then like? She is clearly a most self-conscious, self-confident, and self-made female artist, who is capable of reversing gender roles not only in the sense that whereas she pretends only to help and assist (“I can draw-and record-and copy if necessary-”, [93]), or only to slightly contribute to William Adamson's book, she is the prime mover behind his creation and movement, thus she acts as the *oak* on whom Adamson-*ivy* can always lean and rely for support. This is not so surprising a role since women have played it for centuries: they have acted in, and from, the shadow, unnamed, invisible, as in this case too: her name does not feature on the cover of Adamson's book. Yet in his narrative of “The Swarming City” “he found himself unable to characterise either himself or Matty Crompton, and used a narrative voice that was a kind of royal, or scientific 'We' to include both of them, or either of them, at given points of time” (108).

Matty or, by this point, rather Matilda, goes further, and writes a story of her own, called “Things Are Not What They Seem”-a title that can very well characterize *her* as well. How she hands it over to Adamson to read is telling of the ambivalence of the situation. On the one hand, she pretends apologetic humbleness, on the other hand admits the pleasure and joy of creation, and the unadmittable ambition behind:

'if you would cast your eye over this writing when you have a spare moment. I meant it for no more than an illustratory fable-you will see-I amused myself by tracing the etymology of [butterflies], and thought I would write an instructive fable around these strange beasts-and found I had got rather

carried away, and written something longer than I intended and perhaps, for a simple puzzle-tale, over-ambitious-and now I am puzzled what to do with this.' (118–119)

Her tale can be read as the *mise-en-abyme* of the text: both thematically and in terms of textuality, it functions as metafiction in which, as put in the tale, “names [. . .] are a way of weaving the world together, by relating the creatures to other creatures and a kind of *metamorphosis*, you might say, out of a *metaphor* which is a figure of speech for carrying one idea into another” (131–32), but also because by the confluence of the children's fairy tale and of natural history, there comes about a textual universe in which everything and anything is possible, where facts, reality and imagination are not separated, and in which names function as “*walking figures of speech*” (141). She writes a fable for children in which “Things Are Not What They Seem” (as she is not what she seems either).

The story is about the youngest son of a poor man, Seth, who leaves home to try his luck, and on his voyage he and his mates, like Odysseus, are turned into tiny animals by eating and drinking of what was offered. Seth is only partially transformed, this is why he can be helped to regain his figure, and he can also help the others to escape. In the escape, he is supported by creatures of the insect world that-quite like themselves-are not what they seem, or what they are called. This fairy tale, not devoid of elements of the fantastic either, utilizes the etymology of names and all the mimicry that the insects use as self-protection. In this way, there comes about a highly metaphorical text in which no meaning can be fixed, everything is shifted over to something else, everything is covered either by its name or by its looks. As such, it is a tale of appearances, but more than that: by mobilizing all her resources, Matty/Matilda creates a texture made out of all her materials “to hand” (her knowledge of natural history, mythology, etymology, and also her imagination) which turns out to be a successful attempt at making sense of the world in a holistic way-as opposed to Adamson's failed attempt at making sense of, by categorizing, Harald Alabaster's collection of specimens.

The tale, thus, is in several senses a fancy work (and what more feminine could one imagine), which, at the same time, can be turned into materiality: can be, and is, sold and finally Matty emerges as Matilda. In William Adamson's eyes she appears first as an alternative to the angel-in-the-house image: as a fairy with a wand (156)-and what more appropriate image could be applied to a woman who unbelievably makes money and buys boat tickets to South America for two. Ultimately, however, she emerges as a flesh-and-blood, visible and seen person, with a will of her own, and with an awareness of what she can do:

I will learn. I am strong. I have not lived softly, contrary to appearances. I am resourceful. You need not heed me, once the voyage is over. [. . .] It is what

I will do.'

[...]

And she put up her hands to her head and undid the plaits of her hair over her ears, and shook it out, and came and stood before him. And her face between the dark tresses was sharp and eager and hungry, and he watched how trimly she turned and said, 'I have seen your wrists, Matilda. I dreamed about them now and then. You have-remarkable-wrists.'

'I only wanted you to see me,' said Matilda, less confidently, once she saw that he had indeed seen her. (157)

With this self-disclosure, Matty's transformation is over. At the beginning of the text Harald Alabaster, who is otherwise anti-Darwinian, makes the following comment: "Transfiguration is not a bad thing. Butterflies come out of the most unpromising crawling things" (49). One can add, transfiguration can take place unnoticeably, so that no one notices the steps. Yet, transfiguration is there, and in this sense, the narrative of the text, with its almost uninterruptedly dominant focus on the male protagonist, re-enacts the history of Victorian literature by revealing the almost unnoticeable emergence of a woman writer, a single woman who takes control of her life, her story, and her life story by the end of the text—even against all odds, by making most of what is at hand, of what is possible, of all the bits and pieces that are available—presenting us (to carry on with the biological metaphor) the paradigmatic phylogenesis and ontogenesis of women writers. Furthermore, she gets out of patriarchal control (fulfilling the paranoiac Victorian fear of women without male supervision), threatens and destabilizes the social structure; and whether the result of her transformation from "the most unpromising crawling thing" is considered a butterfly or a disgusting moth depends on the perspective of the interpretation, or interpreter.

The text, written by a *female contemporary*, thus, takes place in the *Victorian* period, furthermore, includes elements of the *fairy tale*, the *Gothic*, and the *fantastic*, and can be read as a *female Künstlerroman*, and a special one at that, in which the woman artist emerges from another Victorian genre: that of the governess novel (from which the elements of the *Künstlerin* are not absent either—let's think of Jane Eyre or Agnes Grey and their paintings), or, in social terms, from that nondescript class that the Victorians kindly termed as redundant or superfluous women. By the end, however, Matty, Miss Crompton, or rather Matilda does her best in terms of social Darwinism: perfectly adapts to, and utilizes, her circumstances; and whereas we—and all the characters of the text—tend to think that (and let me now refer you to the saying of black women in Susan Arpad's³ address) she "must lift while she is

³ Susan Arpad, Woman Studies, California State University, Fresno, helped Sari to start the Gender Studies stream in Szeged in the early 1990s. She was approached by the organizers of the conference to send her welcome address on the occasion on a DVD and, by way of cyber

climbing,” by the end she can even soar as a butterfly-while lifting as well. Let's suppose and hope that these two elements indicate a basic feature of the paradigm that Matilda represents: the emerging and self-made female creator, and let's celebrate the ones who seem to be *climbing* (but, as we know from the title of Matilda's story: “Things Are Not What They Seem” [119]), so, even if unnoticeably in the eyes of many, are *lifting and soaring*.

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This volume of the *Papers in English and American Studies* is a tribute to Sarolta Marinovich-Resch on the occasion of her sixtieth birthday. She has been instrumental in the life and development of the Szeged English Department since the 1970s. For several years she was the head of the Department (1992-95) and she became the first director of the Institute of English and American Studies in 1995, thus tactfully and with great empathy administering the complicated process of institutional restructuring. Sarolta Marinovich-Resch started her scholarly career with studying English Romantic and Victorian literature and soon broadened her interest towards women's writing in this period and beyond. She has written important studies on Gothic female writing and the postmodern recycling of these works. She is an internationally acknowledged author of women's writing as well as the theory of Women's Studies; her essays have been published in prestigious periodicals and collections. From the viewpoint of the evolution of English Studies in Szeged, her most important achievement has been the establishing of the Gender Studies Stream, an academic specialization offered to English majors, which at the same time created an important research circle as well. Several successful international conferences mark the activities of this teaching- and research unit.

The authors of this collection of essays represent Gender- and English Studies nationwide. Next to members of the Universities of Budapest, Debrecen, and Pécs, Dr. Marinovich-Resch's own colleagues from the Szeged Institute also contribute to it. The topics range from broad theoretical issues (Mária Joó on the influence of Simone de Beauvoir in Post-socialist thinking; Andrea P. Balogh on feminist criticism in Hungary) to specific case studies, relating to Anglo-American literature and culture (Irén Annus on Mormon female bio-histories, Éva Federmayer on Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, Anna Kérchy on Angela Carter, Mária Kurdi on Irish female drama, and Nóra Séllei on A. S. Byatt's *Morpho Eugenia*). These excellent studies are not only a testimonial to Sarolta Marinovich-Resch's influence on Hungarian scholarship, they also represent the high quality of it in English-related gender studies.

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