

TRACING CULTURAL UN/BELONGING: THE WITCH IN WESTERN FEMINIST THEORY  
AND LITERATURE

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M.A., University of Klagenfurt, Austria, 1995

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Programme in Comparative Literature)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

JUNE, 2003

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Vancouver, Canada

Date June 13, 2003

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine selected narrative and theoretical feminist constructs of the 'witch' produced by women in the Western world over the last thirty years. The hypothesis is that the 'witch' figure is deployed to convey the diasporic or transgressive status of the/a 'woman' whose position is constructed as incompatible with the dominant phallogocentric discourse. The texts considered have been written in English, German, or Polish, since 1970. Bringing in a comparative dimension from the beginning, this dissertation demonstrates that despite differing political, cultural, and linguistic contexts, common 'threads' intertwine the destinies of the women conceptualized in these narratives as feminist (newly born, or re-discovered) witches, archaic mothers, and transgressive female boundary breakers. These reformulations of the 'witch' into a multiple site of strategic un/belonging, as proposed by the textual analyses in this study, converge with a number of theoretical concepts, such as Irigaray's proposal of a feminine "fluidity" that could shift the social order, Kristeva's "different legality" associated with a provisional, carnivalesque, but also strategically feminist project, as well as Butler's subversion of (Western) cultural foundations by undermining gender distinctions.

While representing a range of theoretical standpoints, different languages, and different cultural backgrounds, all the texts discussed here contribute to the feminist deconstruction and redeployment of a phallogocentric archetype of the witch-woman. What this coming together implies in the end is that transnational exchanges of feminist theories and narratives produce 'boundary work' – works 'on the edge' that reveal the witch as a set of constructs that is both contested and difficult to displace in contemporary representations of 'woman'. This recognition offers a point of departure for a new political theorizing on 'woman' that rejects the Western epistemological dichotomies of subject/object, I/the other, or belonging and unbelonging as basic categories of identification.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my mother, Wiesława, who did not tell me all

Traveling, dialogues, and the miracles of e-mail were very much part of writing this work. I thank first and foremost Dr. Valerie Raoul, former Director of the UBC Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations and chair of my doctoral committee, for her unrelenting support and accessibility that has helped me to transcend the many difficult moments associated with putting the manuscript together.

I owe a special debt of appreciation to Dr. Nancy Frelick, who was the chair of the Programme in Comparative Literature, and whose guidance, kindness, and unfailing encouragement during my doctoral studies were indispensable. I am also grateful to my supervising committee members: Dr. Daphna Arbel for providing an abundance of classical references and advice on the religious aspect of 'femaleness' in Western mythology, and Dr. Bożena Karwowska for valuable insights into Polish portions of my dissertation, as well as her spontaneous decision to join the committee when her expertise was needed. I am especially thankful to Dr. Sneja Gunev for her thoughtful guidance throughout this project, commenting on and refining my comparative and theoretical approach.

I also need to acknowledge the presence of other scholars, students, friends, family members, and those whom I briefly encountered at various stages of writing my dissertation for inspiring me with their enthusiasm that unfolded into an academic project. In particular, I am thankful to my husband, Sebastian Szachowicz, for his encouragement and unfailing affection, to my sister, Aleksandra Sempruch, and my friend, Catherine Rab, for their faith.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the University of British Columbia for the fellowships that made this work possible and for the courtesy that I enjoyed from both faculty and staff.

## INTRODUCTION

There is no woman but excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it has to be said that if there is one thing about which women themselves are complaining at the moment, it's well and truly that – it's just that they don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me. (Lacan 1975)

This statement by Jacques Lacan, the controversial French psychoanalyst and rereader of Freud, has often been interpreted in various feminist discourses as an example of phallogentric arrogance, bordering on cheap theoretical provocation. What woman/ 'woman' does it refer to, or even attempt to speak about? A 'woman' as an object of adoration or abjection, a 'woman' as an object of exchange?<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps something like 'womanhood', veiled, and always delegated to the margins of (Western) culture? In one of her responses to Lacan, Luce Irigaray addresses the complexity of this 'veiling':

[A]ren't you saying that what matters to you is what hides, masks, displays, renders impossible or prohibits any relation between two bodies, except – sometimes – one of breaking and entering? That the cause of your desire is a veil that has to be lifted – sometimes? (2000, 93)

Or is it the 'woman' Julia Kristeva refers to as "that which cannot be represented, what is not said, what remains above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies"? Referring to Lacan, Kristeva writes in "Women's time" (1981), "Indeed, she does *not* exist with a capital 'W', possessor of some mythical unity" (Kristeva 1997, 872). Caught in the system that envelops the phallus with the symbols of power<sup>2</sup>, this 'woman' has been castrated before she even knew anything about castration, and she cannot be spoken about, except through metaphors of negation. Her status is that of a permanent deferral of meaning in which all that matters is the veil itself. The veil conveys her identity, an identity that, in turn, learns to imitate endlessly evasive poses, meanings, and gestures.

In "Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order" (1981), Irigaray

examines this phallogentric nullification of 'woman':

The culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at the moment... I say to myself... let's have a look [at] this edifice that looks so clean and so subtle... let's see what ground it is built on. Is it all that acceptable? (Irigaray 2000, 47)

Displaying similar preoccupations, Hélène Cixous's and Catherine Clément's *The Newly*

*Born Woman* (1986) investigates the metaphors that envelope 'woman':

Where is she?  
Activity/ passivity  
Sun/ Moon  
Culture/ Nature  
Day/ Night  
  
Father/ Mother  
Head/ Heart  
Intelligible/ Palpable  
Logos/ Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground - where steps are taken, holding- and dumping-ground.

Man

---

Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection. (1986, 63)<sup>3</sup>

What these metaphors or veils have enabled us to realize more recently is that whatever has been said about 'woman' refers to illusionary projections, myths, and fantasies that have nothing to do with any existing woman. Yet, following Judith Butler's argument, it is impossible to separate the 'existing' woman "from the political and cultural intersections in which [she] is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler 1990, 3), or (as I will argue in this thesis) from the stigma of her cultural un/belonging. "Although the claim of universal patriarchy," in the period that some would call 'postfeminist', "no longer enjoys the kind of credibility it once did, the notion of a generally shared conception of 'women,' the corollary

to that framework, has been much more difficult to displace” (Butler 1990, 4). These difficulties are anchored in the illusionary projections perpetuated by feminist stances that assume a commonality among ‘women’ preexisting their oppression (1990, 4), as well as their subordination to the phallogentric metaphors referred to by Cixous. What common identities can possibly be discussed, if *nothing can be said about ‘woman’*, and if we cannot separate her from this cultural nothingness (that is already meaningful, filled with the ‘negative’ substance)? Within the phallogentric system, or what Irigaray calls ‘phallogentrism’, the/a woman is a ‘common noun’ with no identity; indeed, she is Lacan’s ‘not-all’:

(The/A) woman gestures towards what cannot be defined, enumerated, formulated, formalized. A common noun indeterminable in terms of an identity. (The/A) woman does not obey the principle of self-identity, or of identity with any particular x. She identifies with every x, without identifying with it in any particular way. (2000, 56)

The ‘witch’, simultaneously a particular and peculiar representation of ‘woman’ in history, culture, and philosophy, offers one of the most spectacular examples of these illusionary and very complex metaphors of ‘lack’. “Always already a cultural sign,” the witch’s body

sets limits to the imaginary meanings that it occasions, but is never free of an imaginary construction. The fantasized body can never be understood in relation to the body as real; it can only be understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy, one which claims the place of the ‘literal’ and the ‘real’. (Butler 1990, 71)

Constituted as hysterical and disordered in relation to that which claims to be ‘real’, the ‘witch’ is suspended at the point of crossing into the unspoken and forbidden. Her speech perverts the language of philosophers; laughter, spells, and evil incantations flow from her grotesque and filthy mouth. Emerging thus in asymmetric relation to the dominant logocentric structures, the ‘witch’ articulates, like Kristeva’s ‘woman’, “an unbelievable force for subversion in the modern world! And, at the same time, what playing with fire!” (Kristeva 1997, 872). But will this Kristevan “fire” suffice to separate her from the

nothingness metaphorically sustained in her 'womanhood'? Or is she, in today's much more heterogeneous society, a parody of a/the woman, as Butler suggests? There is certainly, to follow Irigaray's definition of 'woman', something in the witch that "exceeds all attempts to confine/define her within a system (of discourse, representation), or to appropriate her powers within the philosophical logos" (Whitford 2000, 27).

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of the present study is to analyze the traces of the 'witch'-woman in a selection of Northern American and European narratives. Those analyzed are all influenced by second-wave French and U.S. feminist attempts to redefine the cultural incompatibility of the/a 'woman' in relation to the dominant phallogocentric discourse. The choice of narratives is largely based on my personal experience with Central-Eastern European and North American cultural and literary contexts, and my on-going interest in cross-cultural feminist encounters. I was born in Poland, lived in Italy and Switzerland, completed my Master's Degree in Austria and my PhD examinations in Canada, and have written my dissertation while traveling through Europe. The narratives discussed here, written in the English, German, and Polish languages, have been subjectively selected from numerous contemporary women's novels and short stories about female 'witches' or witch-like characters that I have come across during my studies in Comparative Literature, or that were suggested to me at different stages of my project. This particular selection allows me to introduce German and Polish women's texts into the more widely known North American feminist context. These texts have not been translated into English, and are generally unknown to English readers, but provide a striking literary parallel to the French and American feminist stances which build the theoretical framework of this study. They clearly

demonstrate that contemporary feminist representations of witches are not exclusive to North American and British literature; however, their relation to second-wave feminism is different because of their communist and 'postcommunist' contexts. My selection of texts creates space for discussion on what these heterogeneous narratives have in common, what their references to witches convey, and whether they are attributable to different cultural traditions, political systems, and/or feminist ideologies.

As a frame for these cross-cultural encounters, my study sets out to bring a psychoanalytically informed discussion of feminist reformulations of the 'witch' into a dialogue with close readings of the narratives. The most relevant feminist theories are those developed by Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler, whose ideas provide a central theoretical tool from the start. The lack of agreement between these theoreticians on some issues is significant, and Irigaray's critique of patriarchy is particularly valid in the context of recent Polish feminist debates. Patriarchy, although increasingly difficult to define, operates in this context as a classic paradigm of male domination, undercut by feminist reactions to female subordination. According to the *International Encyclopedia of Women*,

Patriarchy is best understood as an institution of power and authority that is interwoven with other dimensions of social and cultural life. Cross-culturally, the institution of patriarchy is frequently embedded in the framework of kinship, in which individual members are not simply categorized as 'men' or 'women' but as 'fathers,' 'mothers,' 'sons,' [and] 'daughters'. (Kramarae and Spender 2000, 1491)

These often strictly predefined gender roles intersect with a complex web of social relations and obligations based on blatant biologism, resulting in various forms of women's cultural marginalization. While patriarchy is a shared target of various types of feminism, it exhibits different characteristics, especially in 'postcommunist' contexts, and these differences contribute to the evolving transnational exchange of feminist practices and theories.

Bearing in mind how critical discourses are institutionalized and “arrogated ...to police language” (McDowell 1997, 243), I will refer to a range of relevant theories, rather than one single perspective. In doing so, I draw on Deborah E. McDowell’s article, “Recycling: Race, Gender, and the Practice of Theory” (1992), in which she questions the policies that determine how “certain statements do not conform to what is acceptably sayable” (1997, 243). In poststructural theories, with their postmodern, postcolonial, or postfeminist jargons, criticism is often “reduced to a particular practice,” which disqualifies any other “as invalid, illicit, non-critical” (1997, 243). This deeply judgmental and suspicious exercise of power ironically recalls the processes demonstrated in the Western history of religion and philosophy, namely the trial, persecution and condemnation of anything subversive. One approach that is certainly relevant in my analysis of the ‘witch’ figure is the deconstructive ‘method’ of thinking which, as developed by Jacques Derrida, disables fixed points of reference and universal convictions. However, as Simon Critchley observes, “deconstruction needs to be sharply distinguished from analysis, which presupposes a reduction of entities to their simple, or essential, elements, elements which themselves would stand in need of deconstruction” (1999, 21). Radically neither a word nor a concept, but rather a condition of possibility and movement, the Derridean concept of *différance* departs from Western logocentric models and claims no meaning in itself; it escapes beyond reference and belonging.<sup>4</sup> Echoing Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophical project of ‘sensibility’ elevating otherness (and difference) above self-identity and presence, Derrida argues that before any finality can enter a linguistic process, a literary work, or a cultural situation, the textual ‘split’ will mark the folly of a/the sign, granting nothing but a *trace*, a hinge, or an *edge* position.<sup>5</sup>

Why of the *trace*? What led us to the choice of this word?... If words and concepts

receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation of space] and a historical strategy. (Derrida 1991, 41)

In referring to "all those boundaries that form the running border of what used to be called a text," Derrida puts into question "the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, or so forth" (Derrida 1991, 257). Various figures evoked in my thesis will therefore 'border on' witches, rather than refer to them directly. These include the pagan goddess, female vampire, murderess, or psychic, which all occupy the *edge*, the borderline position associated with the 'witch' as a phenomenon that escapes precise definition and needs to be traced under various names and structures. I will also refer to the 'witch' as a her(m)etic figure (hermetic and heretical), no longer to be thought of in terms of Western categories, but in terms of an experience of dissociation and distinction, of 'an encounter with alterity' that cannot be directly referred to or compared to anything within the system.<sup>6</sup>

Corresponding to Levinasian 'other' as dissociation and incommensurability, the 'witch' as a her(m)etic figure offers a philosophical encounter with alterity which extends the boundaries of the phallogocentric system towards otherness. As a trace of the other, the witch is a trace of illeity (anarchy, infinity) and suggests a possibility of new ethics that 'begins' in the articulation of that trace. As Andrew Gibson explains in reference to Levinas,

the other whom I encounter is always radically in excess of what my ego, cognitive powers, consciousness or intuitions would make of him or her. The other always and definitely overflows the frame in which I would seek to enclose the other. But that means that the frame is broken or disintegrates. (1999, 25)

The cultural/national heterogeneity of the narratives selected for this study confirms the function of the witch figure as a reference to (or even a token for) otherness and incompatibility. I will attempt to examine this non-conformity as a parody of identity,



“vested with an agency...that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness” (Butler 1990, 142-3)<sup>7</sup>. In fact, as analyzed here, representations of the witch appear to be somewhat confusing, mainly because two apparently contradictory versions are conveyed simultaneously. The first is the witch as a phallogocentrically situated, universal, and archetypal construct (or set of constructs) of otherness that remains intact across time and geographical space. Like the “generally shared conception of ‘women’” (Butler 1990, 7) referred to above, this construct is difficult to displace. The second witch figure, introduced strategically by specific writers, in particular contexts and with different aims and effects, needs to be differentiated from this ‘universalized’ construct. However, rather than displacing or rejecting this recognizable construct altogether, I will regard the archetypal ‘witch’ figure as a Derridean *trace*, a reference and a point of departure for the analysis of culturally different narratives of ‘women’ entangled in the metaphor of ‘witch’.

My selection of narratives for this study can therefore be perceived as a Derridean “differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces” (Derrida 1991, 257). The ‘witch’, posited in this “differential network” as a dynamic figure, connects and disconnects culturally distinct narratives, all enveloped in various ways in Western ‘witch’ imagery. The cultural validity (identity) of the ‘witch’ appears in sequences of differential processes that authorize certain cultural justifications with regard to specific contexts, and even then such justifications are not final, but, as I will argue, release a multiplicity of meanings. Hence, the seemingly contradictory representation of the ‘witch’ as a ‘universal’ Western archetype on one hand, and as a specific literary character on the other, needs to be acknowledged as a necessarily dialogical and paradoxical structure of ‘being-the-two’. This, in a link to a Levinasian understanding of the concept, does not imply a fusion of one and the other, but “the interval between the I and

the You, the *Zwischen*, [as] the site where the work of being takes place” (Levinas 1976).

The ‘witch’, both as the ‘trace’ of an archetype and as a specific literary character, displays a type of gender resistance to the phallogentric culture in which she is physically and/ or philosophically placed. Her transgressive character relates to her lack of cultural belonging, and since the witches in my study are of exclusively/elusively female sex, this lack eventually becomes their defining property, their way of un/belonging. As I will argue, this un/belonging allows for a type of subculture that relates to the ontology of the interval ‘between the two’ which, as Gibson notes, finds echoes in a range of contemporary theories on gender, most notably in Irigaray’s recent work *Entre deux* (1997), but also already in questions posed by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1969), and later elaborated by Kristeva<sup>8</sup> and Butler: “Why should bodily margins be thought to be specifically invested with power and danger” (Douglas 1969, 121)?

While the biography of the writers whose texts will be discussed is not central to my analysis, the particular context in which they write is relevant, and their specific national/ist agendas (as represented in the texts), will be addressed, especially certain differences between the texts produced in Anglo-, Afro-American, British, German and Polish contexts, as well as their relationship to Western European and North-American feminist contexts. However, I would like to emphasize from the beginning that this study focuses neither on a comparative analysis of feminist theories, nor on how these theories differ in terms of their national belonging as represented by the selected literary works. In view of the limited number and subjective choice of these narratives, such a comparison would be far from convincing. Rather, in examining the ways in which these narratives interact with feminist theories, I will consider them as ‘boundary work’<sup>9</sup> representing a coming together of French/European and North American influences. These ‘national’ divisions are inadequate

in themselves, and should not limit the diversity of feminist approaches represented, (whether U.S., French, or Polish). Neither should this 'coming together' be confused with globalized forms of feminism evoking ambiguous images of international sisterhood.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as Judith Ezekiel and Mieke Verloo have recently observed,

[i]n the literature on women's movements in different countries, the reader is struck by surprising similarities among them (at least in comparison with contrasting political systems or other movements, such as labour and antiracist movements). Despite deconstruction of the category women, might there remain universal issues that make this so? (2002, 19)

These 'universal issues' will be broached in my analysis of the 'witch' as a network of identities, in which somehow, paradoxically, forms of local appropriation, opposition and resistance contribute to the conceptual dissemination of a phallogocentric archetype.

#### THE NARRATIVES SELECTED

The earliest narratives analyzed here are Andrea Dworkin's *Woman-Hating* (1974) and Mary Daly's *Gyn/ecology* (1978), two publications representing a radical multigeneric criticism of patriarchal culture. They focus on the construction of 'woman' as a fabrication of a misogynist imaginary order and fit neatly into the contemporary paradigm of U.S. feminists at the 'centre' helping their 'sisters on the periphery'. These works are compared with Sally Gearhart's ecofeminist *Wanderground* (1984) and Alice Walker's Afro-American contextualizations of the witch in *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), as well as with Irmtraud Morgner's *Amanda* (1983), an East German publication from approximately the same period. The latter offers similar reformulations of phallogocentric mythology, although Morgner has repeatedly rejected the 'feminist' label, maintaining that the socialist revolution a priori includes the abolition of all forms of exploitation, including those based on gender and religion. The Polish novels selected represent a so-called 'postcommunist' feminism,

formulated as a decisive counter-reaction to 'socialist emancipation': Morgner's text, on the contrary, produced in the atmosphere of an increasing secularization of East German culture, derives from this socialist context. There are few such literary examples from Poland, since this type of socialist fiction was believed to fall into the category of communist propaganda. Although Krystyna Kofta, one of the Polish authors discussed here, began her literary career at the height of communism in Poland, she published without a feminist label. Her novel, *Złodziejka pamięci* (She is a Thief of Memories) (1998), belongs to the post-Lacanian stance of a younger generation of women writers, represented here also by Olga Tokarczuk, the acclaimed author of *Dom dzienny, dom nocny* (The Day House, the Night House) (1998), and the less known, but very promising, author of *Siostra* (Sister) (1996), Małgorzata Saramonowicz.

In Polish 'postcommunist' discourse, two cultural developments are continuing. On one hand, there is an increasing masculinization of the power structures. Political discourses and 'scientific' practices are still the privilege of men, and even more than before, as is the management of the social in general and of the most private aspects of women's lives: abortion is illegal, contraception and divorce are discouraged by Catholic dogmas<sup>11</sup>. There is a return to social policies based on marriage and the family as primary to women's identities. On the other hand, one can observe the growing popularity of 'intellectual' feminism, borrowed from U.S. and French second-wave feminist positions, as well as 'digging into' a collective national 'feminist' past<sup>12</sup>. The texts selected for discussion here belong to a category which visibly draws on Irigaray's theories, and displays preoccupations overlapping with those of second-wave English-speaking feminists, whose presence is also felt in Morgner's text. Topics addressed include the inadequacy, or even failure, of the sexual revolution from women's point of view, theorizing women's difference as a source of

cultural possibility rather than simply a source of oppression, analysis of the mother's role in the family, and of the mother-daughter relationship (as in Kofta's and Saramonowicz's texts), attacks on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as a discourse normalising patriarchy, and the re-evaluation of hysteria as the unheard voice of the woman whose language is reduced to psychosomatic symptoms (as in Tokarczuk's novels)<sup>13</sup>.

The psychoanalytical context and connections allow me to compare two Polish novels, Tokarczuk's *E.E.* (1999) and Saramonowicz's *Siostra* (Sister) (1996), with narratives more familiar to English-speaking readers, such as *Alias Grace* (1996) by Margaret Atwood, or short stories by Sara Maitland and Angela Carter, who likewise analyse mothers, daughters, and their language(s) in relation to the 'symbolic'. Hindering this analysis, however, is the invisibility (or lack) of theory related to Polish feminist history, or to resistance there and elsewhere to feminism when the latter is perceived as a stereotypical monolithic anti-male stance. In her book *Cinderella Goes to Market* (1993), Barbara Einhorn attributes Eastern European antipathy to feminism to previous experiences with meaningless, socialist-feminist emancipatory slogans and the association of women with the private, apolitical domain. Indeed, the few women "who did participate in the authoritarian-oppressive regime wore the stigma of being elected on the basis of quotas and the majority of the population viewed them as tokens in the politics" (Nash 2002, 305)<sup>14</sup>. In addition, as Laura Busheikin observes, "there is a tradition of refusal that is already part of the Eastern European psyche – refusal of propaganda, ideology, political messianism, big liberatory ideas" (1997, 14). Furthermore, feminist discussions in the Polish context (and more generally in Eastern Europe) often become frustrated by the theoretical imperialism of Western Europe and the U.S. (Nash 2002, 292), and the marginalization of (elsewhere) untranslated opinions and voices. To some extent, it is more accurate to describe

'postcommunist' women's attitudes to gender issues in general as different rather than less aware than those of the West. An interesting parallel can be made to Afro-American feminists' attempts to defining their own culturally specific place within the canon. However, the problem of elucidating any 'different' gender sensitivity (or consciousness) is itself problematic, because it is measured in relation to the 'same', more established or familiar, Western scenarios<sup>15</sup> that in themselves are actually far from monolithic.

In fact, as Natasha Walter observes, Western feminism is "a large collection of single-issue organizations that press for feminist aims in many different accents" (1998, 44). British feminism, for example, which is relevant here as the context of Angela Carter's and Sara Maitland's texts, "grew rapidly as a mass movement [from the late 1960s], peaking in the mid-1970s before dissolving as a coherent organization by the end of that decade" (Segal 1999, 9). According to prevailing European 'postfeminist' convictions, "explanations of cultural difference do not produce a greater understanding or make differences any less real" (Strathern 1988, 29), while many women, as Nash argues, value their roles as mothers and wives, and do not want to be involved in political decision-making (2002, 305). The most recent (Western) German narratives discussed here (Korte's and Finckenstein's) both contribute to recognition of the 'inadequacies' of the U.S. sexual revolution, and raise acute questions about gender and identity addressed to present-day ('third-wave') feminists.

Finally, texts written out of (or representing) Afro-American culture, and Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998) in particular, bring up issues of race/oppression in relation to gender, just as the nationalist agenda addressed in Polish texts raises similar issues. Postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories of otherness/othering are relevant in both cases. A comparative perspective, with Morrison's novel juxtaposed with Carter's "Impressions: The

Wrightsmen Magdalene" (1996) and "Black Venus" (1985), or Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* (1980), emphasizes the ambiguity or interchangeability of racial roles, which go beyond cultural stereotyping of the gendered body to posit women's embodiments and collective crossing of boundaries and territorial borders as modes of delineating gendered identities which are not only national or racial. Their differential positions need to be acknowledged in terms of ethnicity, class, age, local social divisions, and ambivalent family relations. Like gender, the terms ethnicity/race refer in this study to cultural constructions rather than biological conditions. Ethnicity, whether African-American, Bulgarian-French, or Silesian (Polish-German), refers to a cultural orientation, and, as Warhol argues,

it has been shaped by the traditions and experiences associated with that person's race, which is itself not a matter of biology, but another arbitrarily defined category within culture and society. Just as the usage of 'gender' has, until recently, implied a focus on women while masculinity remained the invisible norm, the usage of 'race' has connoted a focus on people of color, as if persons in the white mainstream had no race. (1997, 741)

To take any of these constructs for granted thus implies to retreat into reasserting the principle of self-sameness, and into futile attempts to return to an origin: "*Where and how does it begin...? ... But a meditation upon the trace should undoubtedly teach us that there is no origin, that is to say simple origin; that the questions of origin carry with them a metaphysics of presence*" (Derrida 1991, 46). From the beginning, as Levinas and Derrida repeatedly state, we are irrevocably suspended in the movement of 'excendence' and the indeterminacy of constructs that it engenders.<sup>16</sup> As explained by Gibson,

*Excendence* is the spontaneous and *immediate* desire to escape the limits of the self, a desire generated as those limits are experienced in their narrowness, even their sheer absurdity. It is thus a principle of unease within and inseparable from the self that is of a different order to being and more profound than it. Evasion is the ethical impulse towards or openness to the other that effects a release from the confines of the self. (1999, 37)

In this sense, it is impossible to determine our class, gender or ethnicity, however much they

are assumed, and it is with this recognition that an ethics of un/belonging may begin.

Writing of gender, Butler addresses “[t]he theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness” as invariably closing “with an embarrassed ‘etc.’ at the end of the list” (1990, 143):

Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete. This failure, however, is instructive: what political impetus is to be derived from the exasperated ‘etc.’ that so often occurs at the end of such lines? This is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself. It is the *supplément*, the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all. (1999, 143)

Thus, to insist on belonging and self-recognition is precisely to ensure and to intensify a continuing confusion of and about the predicates in question.<sup>17</sup> An alternative title for this work, taking into account the narratives discussed, might be ‘The witch as a trace of cultural un/belonging’, as the *supplément* and the excess opening new ways out of the limiting significations.

#### THE WITCH AS A TRACE OF CULTURAL UN/BELONGING

What is central in this dissertation is the historical figure of the witch, viewed as a merger of various metaphors of exclusion and placed in the context of feminist theoretical and literary reconfigurations. As indicated above, the historical aspect of the ‘witch’ evokes the privileged status of her negative presence within a phallogentric structure, as a stereotypical figure of female abjection and a cause of horror. In my discussion, the ‘witch’ will be perceived as representing the Kristevan limit, or margin, occupied by ‘woman’. The latter constitutes “the necessary frontier between man and chaos, but because of [her] very marginality [she] will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside” (Moi 1989, 127). Second-wave feminist representations of the witch, such as



Cixous's and Clément's, thus enter, in my analysis, into dialogue with some of the most peculiar phallogentric assumptions that "enabled male culture sometimes to vilify women as representing darkness and chaos, to view them as Lilith or the Whore of Babylon, and sometimes to elevate them as the representatives of a higher and purer nature, to venerate them as Virgins and Mothers of God" (Moi 1989, 127). In discussing these extreme versions, or 'limits', of 'woman', I will view them, following Kristeva, as "porous" models, models that both interconnect and deconstruct women's cultural bodies.<sup>18</sup> The very contours of these bodies, as Butler suggests in reference to Douglas, "are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence" (1990, 131). My objective is to reformulate the 'witch' as a trace of cultural un/belonging, of bodily margins "invested with power and danger" (as referred to by Douglas); a trace that is constantly present and absent in such Western figures as the Judeo-Christian Lilith, Eve, and Jezebel, and the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene, as well as in the classical Greek figures of the Sirens, Circe, or Cassandra, all of whom are evoked in the discussed literary texts.<sup>19</sup> Other body contours, metaphors, and parodies of identity providing reference points for this study are the Middle Ages and Renaissance projections of the witch as an evil crone who impersonates the mother, kidnaps and devours children, or as a powerful and dangerous seductress associated with the mythical *vagina dentata*.

Embedded in these allusions and metaphors, the female body is relegated to conceptual categories (such as the virgin, mother, wife, whore, or post-menopausal crone) that constantly overlap and therefore disturb "certain taboos regarding the appropriate limits, postures, and models of exchange that define what it is that constitutes bodies" (Butler 1990, 131). It is within these overlapping categories that un/belonging (as a parody and pollution within system) starts. As Douglas observed earlier, the main function of purifying,

demarcating, or punishing transgressions is “to impose system on an inherently untidy experience... It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created” (1969, 4). According to Butler, Douglas’s analysis, although clearly subscribing to a “structuralist distinction between inherently unruly nature and an order imposed by cultural means,” provides

a possible point of departure for understanding the relationship by which social taboos institute and maintain the boundaries of the body as such. Her analysis suggests that what constitutes the limit of the body is never merely material, but that the surface, the skin, is systematically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions. (Butler 1990, 131)

The contingency of these transgressions translates the boundaries of the body into the limits of the socially sanctioned, the “hegemonic,” the phallogentric. The term ‘phallogentric’, as used in this study, refers to a (post)-Lacanian concept that claims to distinguish the “phallus” from the “penis,” yet is unable to erase the immediacy of this association and hence fails to represent an abstract (gender-neutral) cultural condition.<sup>20</sup>

‘Being’ the Phallus and ‘having’ the Phallus denote divergent sexual positions, or nonpositions (impossible positions, really), within language. To ‘be’ the Phallus is to be the ‘signifier’ of the desire of the Other and to *appear* as this signifier. In other words, it is to be the object, the Other of a (heterosexualized) masculine desire, but also to represent or reflect that desire. This is an Other that constitutes, not the limits of masculinity in a feminine alterity, but the site of a masculine self-elaboration. (Butler 1990, 44)

The very concept of ‘desire’, dense with intertextual connotations, is understood here, as used by Lacan in correlation with the exteriority of linguistic experience, as “a gap between expressing a wish and receiving its answer” (Warhol and Herndl 1997, 485)<sup>21</sup>, and a ‘hole’ in the ‘self’ that the subject attempts to ‘close’ through an endless metonymic chain of supplements. For Lacan, as Herndl argues,

our desire is always for *jouissance*, a term that refers both to orgasm and to a state of

blissful, ecstatic union that would complete us, would heal the 'split' that occurred when we entered language. This desire is unrealizable. Its impossibility does not, however, keep us from continually seeking its fulfillment. (1997, 485)

'Desire' becomes an issue for French and Anglophone second-wave feminists because of the phallogocentric model of 'woman', who is said "to be desirable to man because of the (false) beliefs that she will be able to complete him, that she is his Other (all that he is not)" (Herndl 1997, 485). Within feminist psychoanalytical discourse, this concept of 'desire' clearly limits the possibilities open to women in the world of lived experience, that is, an experience ruled by 'the symbolic' discourse which delegates female types of desire to the dyadic 'imaginary'.<sup>22</sup> The 'symbolic', imposed by Lacanian psychoanalysis "as a universal, innocent of any empirical or historical contingency," is in fact, as Irigaray argues, a "monosexual" (or "hom(m)osexual") imaginary, "transformed into an order, into the social" (Whitford 2000, 72). In this phantasmatic system of topo-logic order of phallus as a signifier of fullness of being, otherwise referred to as The Law of the Father, woman (and as a result women) has been made into the material support of male narcissism; she does not exist or belong. Projected as 'being the phallus', she is 'in exile' (2000, 72), in cultural diaspora.<sup>23</sup>

In exploring the witch's cultural incompatibility, I use 'un/belonging' as a term to convey the diasporic location of a cultural topography of the stigmatized body. Deconstruction, and in particular the *différance* that 'produces' and defers differences (Derrida 1991, 66) as well as its ethical value, as developed by Levinas, are crucial to my use of stigma as a concept both deriving from and defining un/belonging.<sup>24</sup> Un/belonging is a form of Levinasian "resistance" of the other to the same, of the stigmatized (signified) to the stigmatizing (signifying). This resistance as a point of exteriority to the philosophical logos is located in the face of the Other, but still articulated in the language of logos (Levinas 2001, 290). In this work, un/belonging refers thus to the fantasmatic, the semiotic, and the heretic

space associated with the otherness of the 'witch'. Similarly, female diaspora refers to a very tangible socio-psychological and theoretical gap between identity (self-sameness) and difference, a borderline position of philosophical rather than geographical suspension in the stigma. In *différance* and diaspora alike, there is no maintenance of one position, but a never-ending interplay of spacing and temporization: "to differ as distinction, separation, and to defer as detour, relay, reserve" (Derrida 1991, 62)<sup>25</sup>. It is in that interplay that the resistance and parody take place. Diaspora is also used as a key metaphor for a cultural ambiguity interconnecting the variety of witch-stories to be discussed here, which are all related to nation (and race or class) as stigmas, and 'responding' to phallocentric constructions of the 'witch' as the ambiguous ("invested with power and danger") limit or 'pollution' of the patriarchal symbolic order. This 'pollution' will be explored (and reversed) in the context of Irigaray's analysis of *Oresteia*, where she argues that Western culture has not been founded on patricide (Freud's hypothesis), but on matricide. Irigaray rereads the story of Clytemnestra as

an account of the installation of patriarchy, built over the sacrifice of the mother and her daughters (one daughter, Iphigenia, literally sacrificed by Agamemnon, the other one, Electra, abandoned to her madness, while Orestes, the matricidal son, is designated to found the new order). The major cultural taboo is on the relationship with the mother. The stress on Oedipus, on castration, serves to conceal another severance, the cutting of the umbilical cord to the mother. This relationship with the mother needs to be brought out of silence and into representation. (Irigaray 2000, 25)

The unpunished matricide, followed by "the burial of women in madness," institutes the new model of the virgin/goddess, one "born of the father and obedient to his law in forsaking the mother" (Whitford 2000, 38).

The phallus erected where once there was the umbilical cord? It becomes the organizer of the world of and through the man-father, in the place where the umbilical cord, the first bond with the mother, gave birth to the body of both man and woman. (2000, 38)

If we link Irigaray's reevaluation of the maternal with Douglas's anthropological readings of

pollution as associated with the feminine, it becomes apparent how Irigaray's notion of the placenta as the "first house to surround us" and "whose halo we carry with us everywhere, like some child's security blanket" (Irigaray 2000, 40) 'constitutes itself' as nothing but a waste to be disposed of. And how it is constructed, naturalized, and misrepresented in culture as the "openness" ("ouverture de la mere") that is threatening, that unleashes the danger of pollution, contamination, and "engulfment in illness, madness and death" (2000, 40). In Douglas's words,

pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong... developed some wrong condition or simply crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone. (1969, 113)

According to Genevieve Lloyd and Pamela Sue Anderson, from the beginning of Western philosophy (reasoning) in ancient Greece, 'femaleness' is "symbolically associated with what Reason supposedly left behind – the dark powers of the earth goddesses, immersion in unknown forces associated with mysterious female powers" (Lloyd 1993, 2).

In ancient Greece, Aristotle defined reason by stipulating what distinguished humans from animals. Humans are defined as animals, but with a difference: their difference is the capacity to use reason in the context of a community (polis); so animals other than reasoning political animals, i.e. other than men, could not be rational. Moreover, the origin of this capacity to reason is conceived to be both divine and male. But even before Aristotle, the Pythagoreans (570 BCE), as well as Aristotle's archetypal predecessor, Socrates (469-399 BCE) and Aristotle's mentor, Plato (428-347 BCE), all made reason the central focus of western philosophy. (Anderson 1998, 8)

The 'witch' thus, as the Western embodiment of non-reason, and anti-rational procedures, emerges in this study as an icon (or a symptom) of cultural un/belonging, traceable back to certain origins or archetypes and simultaneously putting them under erasure. The presence of erasure (the slash) is important, since it acknowledges the inadequacy and provisional status of

the archetype employed. The difficulty, or even absurdity, of the 'witch' as the Derridean trope for an archetype, model, or construct (in fact of anything that has been taken for granted) starts with the fact that there is nothing but a trace of the witch, a linguistic 'play' set up to avoid irreducible finalities and to emphasize *différ-a-nce*. As a contemporary protagonist, the 'witch' becomes a deconstructive designation for the *difference* that challenges her historical displacement, indicating a permanent break-down of authority, a gap between the signifier and signified, and the manifestation of an ontological inconsistency. As such she/it relates to the Derridean "past that has never been present," and gradually, reverses the course of Western history in which the concept of the witch develops in tandem with philosophical and religious denials of the female authority. This reversal theoretically converges with Butler's "laughter in the face of serious categories" (1990, viii) as an indispensable feminist tool, a way to trouble the "historical configurations of a nameless female indisposition which thinly veiled the notion that being female is a natural indisposition (1990, viii). The witch's inconsistent identity becomes a 'formula' evoking Levinas's attempts "to qualify the trace and enigma of absolute alterity: the Other" (Derrida 1991, 74):

The concept of the trace, like that of *difference*, thereby organizes, along the lines of these different traces..., in Nietzsche's sense, in Freud's sense, in Levinas's sense – these 'names of authors' here being only indices – the network which reassembles and traverses our 'era' as the delimitation of the ontology of presence. (1991, 74)

Here, it must be emphasized that the theory of deconstruction cannot be infused as a philosophical method, but only de-fused as an antithesis (difference) that operates from within the existing logocentric structures, and suspends all that is culturally taken for granted. In a continuous process of un/doing, deconstruction simply hints at diasporic locations, the 'unsaid' and the 'impossible'. As Annette Kolodny points out in "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a

Feminist Literary Criticism” (1980), such a theoretical approach does not “give up the search for patterns of opposition and connection – probably the basis of thinking itself – what we give up is simply the arrogance of claiming that our work is either exhaustive or definitive” (1997, 185).

#### FEMININITY AND FEMALENESS

Before examining how the witch-figure has been deployed in the selected narratives to represent the margins of a physical/ cultural female body, I must address the conceptual con-fusion of femininity and femaleness. The use of ‘feminine’, understood as a cultural construction of woman’s biological body, needs to be differentiated from both ‘female’ and ‘feminist’. Following Moi’s distinction between these concepts, I will refer to the “conjuncture of logocentrism and phallogentrism” that, since Derrida, has often been termed a phallogocentric process (Moi 1989, 125).<sup>26</sup> According to Moi, phallogocentrism, as employed in feminist psychoanalytical theories, “is in itself fraught with dangers” and “to propose a new definition of femininity is “to fall back into the metaphysical trap” (1989, 126)<sup>27</sup>.

Femininity is a cultural construct: one isn’t born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for ‘femininity’ are natural. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labeled both *unfeminine* and *unnatural*. It is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. (1989, 123)

Although sympathetic to Levinas’s ethical position, Irigaray notices, in “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas,” that his use of the term of ‘feminine’ is nevertheless persistently defined as the masculine other, the ‘other of the same’.

Defined by 'modesty,' 'a mode of being which consists in shunning the light' [in Levinas's *Time and the Other*], the feminine appears as the underside or reverse side of man's aspiration towards the light, as its negative. The feminine is apprehended not in relation to itself, but from the point of view of man, and through a purely erotic strategy, a strategy moreover which is dictated by masculine pleasure [jouissance], even if man does not recognize to what limited degree his own erotic intentions and gestures are ethical. (Irigaray 2000, 178)

What Irigaray suspects Levinas is seeking is "neither the qualities of the other's flesh nor of his own," but the very same phallogocentric play "with something elusive," a play

with something other, always inaccessible, always in the future. The caress is the anticipation of this pure becoming, without content. It is made up of this intensified hunger, of promises ever richer, opening new perspectives onto the ungraspable. It is nourished by innumerable hungers. (Levinas 1987)

In this aesthetic play, as Irigaray asserts, "the only function of the feminine other is to satisfy the hungers of the philosopher, to renourish the intentionality of his pleasure"

(2000, 179); the feminine is thus marginal, available, at his service.<sup>28</sup> More recent feminist interpretations of Levinas extensively allude to Irigaray's standpoint and are far from rejecting it:

What can be the meaning of Irigaray's objection to Levinas that the feminine lacks the face, if the term *feminine* is not intended to designate women as such?

It is true that Levinas's understanding of the feminine as a disruption of the virile categories of mastery, domination, and self-possession opens up the possibility of another way of (non)being, a different mode of existence. This feminine way of being (which is not properly a way of being but rather a slipping away from the light) interrupts the economy of being. It is an interruption of the intentional movement of knowledge, whereby a subject who seeks to know the world ends up negating the otherness of objects and reducing the world to itself. The suspicion remains, however, that while Levinas might well open up a space for the rethinking of the feminine, he does not follow through on this promise, but rather closes it down. (Chanter 2001, 16)

With respect to 'femininity', the present study adopts Butler's and Kristeva's perspectives, which refuse to define it otherwise than by questioning it in reference to the philosophical marginality of the 'feminine'. The symbolic repression of 'femininity', according to Kristeva, should be viewed "in terms of positionality rather than of essences"



(Moi 1989, 127). Like any other cultural construct, 'femininity' is a shifting *position*.<sup>29</sup> Or, to quote Butler:

If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a construction that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. (1990, 33)

Such a positional perspective on 'femininity' offers "a way of escaping the dangers of biologism" (Moi 1989, 128), but it does not resolve the problematic concept of sexual difference. In "Women's Time", Kristeva posits this concept as a three-fold process developing along with liberal feminist demands of equal access to the symbolic order towards radical feminist rejection of phallogocentric sameness, and culminating more recently in a 'postfeminist' rejection of the metaphysical dichotomy between masculine and feminine constructs (Moi 1989, 128). Advocating a deconstructive approach to sexual difference, the third position "necessarily challenges the very notion of identity" (1989, 128), however it makes sense only in reference to the first two positions<sup>30</sup>:

Perhaps the most important point in all this is to realize that these three 'labels' are not essences. They are categories we as readers or critics operate... The definitions proposed here are intended to be open for debate, not to put an end to it, although they are also supposed to say something about the terrain on which the debate might fruitfully be staged: politics, biology and marginality would seem to be key issues here. (1989, 132)

What this employment of a positional, non-exclusive simultaneity offers is a perception of women's sexuality as a physio-social category combining 'nature' and 'culture' into a form of (repressed) supplementation which does not privilege women as the only possessors of prephallogocentric discourse. As defined by Morgner (one of the authors selected for this study), in "Making Use of Sexuality as a Productive Force" (1975),

[s]exuality is a precious state of unrest that makes erotic relations possible, not only towards people, but also toward landscapes, sounds, colors, smells – phenomena of this world in general. Without sexuality, there would be no enthusiasm, no intellectual passion, no *esprit*. (2001, 277)

Finally, the emphasis here on a Western specification of the witch as female will be viewed in connection with Judeo-Christian associations between the sacred/heretic and feminine/maternal, as elaborated by Kristeva in “Stabat Mater” (1986) and in her letters to Clément in *The Feminine and the Sacred* (2001). In “Stabat Mater”, Kristeva identifies Christianity as “doubtless[ly] the most refined symbolic construct in which femininity, to the extent that it transpires through it – and it does so incessantly – is focused on *Maternity*” (1986, 161). Moreover, Kristeva posits “the virginal maternal” as a way “of dealing with feminine paranoia” (1986, 180)<sup>31</sup> in an elaborate reference to Warner’s study of the Virgin Mary, *Alone of All her Sex* (1990), to which she returns in her dialogue with Clément:

In her beautiful book, Marina Warner quotes lines from Caelius Sedulius, who marvellously captures the uniqueness of that figure, who is really and truly steeped in mysteries: ‘She... has no peer / Not in the first woman nor in any other / who were to come, but alone of all her sex / she pleases God.’ A woman, Mary? Not so clear. Rather, ‘alone of all her sex.’ A clever construction, all things considered, which calms the social anxiety on the subject of birth, satisfies a male being anxious about femininity, and also satisfies a woman, no less anxious about femininity. (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 75)

Disagreeing with the last comment, Clément doubts whether this construction can satisfy (every) Western woman. In her reply to Kristeva, she writes:

I cannot ‘frame’ or ‘abide’ the Virgin you show me. Let’s say I would like her better naked. No doubt the benefits of ‘your’ Virgin have played their role in the history of women, but even so... Remember the way her son roughly pushes her aside. ‘How is it that ye sought me?’ Woman, what do you want? Me? (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 106)

Exploring thus the intersection, the coming together, of the feminine and the sacred, both Clément and Kristeva create chains of associations between faith, sexuality, the female body, and the senses. The ‘women’ emerging from their culturally heterogeneous discussions embody paradoxical crossroads of heretic/sacred and religious experiences. I will focus on their evaluations of Western religious constructs, such as the Judeo-Christian concept of virginity or the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, as

intersecting with the historical persecution of Eve-like women stigmatized as witches, heretics, and monsters. As referred to by Warner, whose text is constantly present in Kristeva's analysis of the Christian Virgin, medieval images of the Virgin Mary are those of the second Eve, constructed as positive female figures that supplement and substitute for the negative Eve.<sup>32</sup> Eve is the woman seduced (bitten or penetrated) by the (evil) snake and she bleeds every month thereafter: "The penalty of eating the fruit of knowledge offered by the snake was partly the curse of menstruation; and the implication of the Immaculate Conception, whereby Mary conquers the serpent, is that she is spared it" (Warner 1990, 268).

In Warner's analysis, as in Kristeva's and Clément's, Christian virginity becomes a locus of female in/dependence, a fluctuating concept carrying the traces of ancient fertility<sup>33</sup> and magic, but representing a body devoid (alone) of (all her) sex. Diasporic locations of the Virgin Mary as a "paranoia" of the 'feminine' which both erases pagan traces of carnality and remains unable to detach itself from the (eroticized) body, will intersect in my textual analysis with the border-locations of the 'witch'. Thus, one of the premises underlying my argument about the diasporic status of the 'witch' is Irigaray's evoking of the sacrificed state of the earth's fertility, which "delineates the cultural horizon of the father tongue [langue] (wrongly termed the mother tongue)." And that, as Irigaray observes, "is never talked about. A hole in the texture of language corresponds to the forgetting of the scar of the navel" (2000, 41)<sup>34</sup>. The 'witch' as a trace of the presence/absence of the Virgin's navel will therefore build a symbolical counterpoint to the female sex as equated with evil desire and pollution<sup>35</sup>. The witch's womb, fantasized as "a devouring mouth, a cloaca or anal and urethral outfall, a phallic threat, at best reproductive" comes to represent her only way to communicate, her only language in fact:

And in the absence of valid representations of female sexuality, this womb merges with woman's sex [sexe] as a whole. There are no words to talk about it, except filthy, mutilating words. The corresponding affects will therefore be anxiety, phobia, disgust, a haunting fear of castration. (Irigaray 2000, 41)

According to Warner, the Judeo-Christian concept of femininity replicates the Greek tradition of equating female innocence with ignorance, and translates virginity as the lack of (sexual) knowledge (1990, 185). The same femininity, the "sweetness, submissiveness, and passivity" (that constitutes Levinas's other in *Time and the Other*) permits the Virgin "to survive [as] a goddess in a patriarchal society" and stigmatizes the non-virginal witch as a locus of abjection. Hence, the witches' cult or condemnation flourishes in countries where the cult of the Virgin is particularly strong, and where women rarely participate in public life but are, paradoxically, relegated to the domestic domain (1990, 191) as mothers, i.e. no longer virgins. In close reference to Warner's observation, Kristeva speculates whether

the 'virgin' attribute for Mary is a translation error, the translator having substituted for the Semitic term that indicates the socio-legal status of a young unmarried woman the Greek word *parthenos*, which on the other hand specifies a physiological and psychological condition: virginity. (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 163)

In associating the sacred with eroticism, Kristeva's own understanding of "virginity" differs from the constructions discussed above, since it refers to "a protospace, a timelessness," to a "radical transcendence" of the feminine and the maternal.<sup>36</sup>

#### COMBINING THEORY AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The theoretical approach and concepts introduced in these introductory remarks will frame the discussion of selected texts in the three chapters to follow. The narratives analyzed in the first chapter, grouped under the title "The Witch as *Herstorical Fantasmatic*," illustrate the second-wave feminist sense of urgency, the need to construct a political 'we', to create a common identification with the historical oppression of women (Irigaray's

bringing together of mothers and daughters). The figure of the 'witch' represents here a dimension of radical (feminist) identity that inserts the history of her oppression into contemporary ideological and political spaces. Conveying the tension between past and present, the 'witch' becomes a central signifier of women's cultural sovereignty in a "curious epoch in which 'cold' hypertechnicity goes hand in hand with rustic magical passions, with a rather worrying irrationality. With medicine, and all its resources, being called in to help" (Irigaray 2000, 140). This figure of the 'woman-witch' becomes a crucial metaphor for *herstory*, that is, a form of feminist mythology constituting an alternative to the established male-centered master-story. In response to the poststructural dismissal of traditional identities, and what in psychoanalytical theories has been diagnosed as 'cultural castration'<sup>37</sup>, I will employ Cixous's and Clément's strategies of appropriating and reenacting the cultural locations of the 'witch' as "the newly born" woman. I will also address radical feminist extensions of the historical 'witch' towards a 'woman' traditionally exiled from the symbolic order.

It all comes back to man - to *his* torment, his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father. There is an intrinsic connection between the philosophical and the literary ... and the phallogentric. Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman's abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery's functioning. (Cixous and Clément 1986, 116)

If this "suddenly came out," Cixous continues, "all the history, all the stories would be there to retell differently; the future would be incalculable; the historic forces would and will change hands and change body" (1986, 116). The concept of the *herstorical fantasmatic* (which I derive from Irigaray's "hysterical fantasmatic" in *Speculum* (1974)) is developed as an attempt to assess this "incalculable change," positing the feminist 'witch' as a radical denunciation of Lacan's *objet petit a*, the embodiment of the 'woman's' lack. Vilma, one of the female characters in Morgner's *Amanda*, puts it this way:

I am done with the first life naturally, in which I had to work in terms of history and in terms of what we are used to. Specialization. The first life forced me to specialize in service and sacrifice. The second belongs to the science [witchcraft] and me. (Morgner 1983)<sup>38</sup>

Drawing on McDowell's definition of history as "a fantastical and slippery concept, a making, a construction" (1997, 234), the first chapter will also address the feminist need to historicize the 'witch', to show in historical perspective how knowledge about her "was constructed, by whom and with what consequences" (1997, 234)<sup>39</sup>. This need will be seen as a specific form of desire to establish an unchanging point of historical reference from which to start new processes of speaking. An emotional and very personal feminist engagement with the witch as a victim of phallogocentric metaphors enters, in these narratives, into a dialogue with institutional 'knowledge' and the homogeneity of phallogocentric discourse. *Herstory* will come to realize that it works, as a consequence of history, with its tongue cut out, but that it has the capacity to weave her/story instead, like Arachne.<sup>40</sup> At stake here, to follow Nancy K. Miller,

is what I think amounts to a *mise en abyme*, as it were (the pun is not only terrible and irresistible but important), of a female signature, the internal delineation of a writer's territory... The desire for another logic of plot which by definition cannot be narrated, looks elsewhere for expression: in the authorization provided by *discours*, and in descriptive emblems tied to the representation of writing itself. A practice of overreading self-consciously responds to the appeal of the abyss. (1986, 279)

Radical feminist writers are thus often located 'inside' the discourse they construct; as narrators and protagonists they are incapable of distance, of a textual disconnection, and of self-hiding. In analyzing the narratives selected for this section, I will consequently read them as literary unveilings of the 'witch' and her in/ability to reenter history as a speaking/operating subject. Most importantly, I will view the radical feminist 'archetype' of the witch as attempting, and to some extent failing, to be "fluid and dynamic, empowering women's personalities to grow and develop" (Pratt 1981, 135). Although this 'archetype'

should not be confused with a 'stereotype' (as Pratt postulates, archetypes and stereotypes are not synonymous (135)), these *herstorical* narratives hazardously focus on constructing an identity and therefore a theory of 'woman'. And as Jane Gallop argues, to have "a theory of woman is already to reduce the plurality of woman to the coherent and thus phallogocentric representations of theory" (1982, 492). Like a feminist theoretician, to quote Rosi Braidotti, the witch figure

can only be 'in transit,' moving on, passing through, creating connections where things were previously dis-connected or seemed un-related, where there seemed to be 'nothing to see.' In transit, moving, dis-placing - this is the grain of hysteria without which there is no theorization at all (1994, 93).

The difficulties encountered by feminists in working against the 'symbolic castration' of women are further explored in the second chapter, under the heading "The Witch as Archaic Mother." Going beyond the *herstorical* socio-sexual victimization of women, the narratives selected here illustrate Butler's and Kristeva's conviction that women's oppression is not only material and political but is established in the very logos, in the reasoning and in the subtle linguistic procedures through which 'abjection' and 'monstrosity' are connected to 'mother', 'sister,' or 'daughter'. At this point, in contrast to the 'symbolic castration' analyzed in the first chapter, another issue is at stake, namely that of a 'real incision'. With reference to psychoanalytical concepts developed by Gallop, Juliet Mitchell, and Elisabeth Bronfen, 'real incision' will be posited as a continuous separation from the (archaic) mother, perpetuated through women themselves as carriers of patriarchal ideology. My analysis of the narratives, viewed as feminist configurations of the archaic mother (projected in Western imagery as a figure of horror, monstrosity and abjection), will also parallel Butler's belief that the "critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities," but rather

to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (Butler 1990, 147)

Although depicting cultural constructs of 'mothers' and 'daughters' as (evil) witches, expelled outside the symbolic structure, or as phallic rather than *om-phallic* mothers (*omphalos*, the navel, is the scar left by separation)<sup>41</sup>, these narratives will be viewed as participating in Butler's "strategies of subversive repetition". In reference to Creed's concept of the *monstrous-feminine* and her analysis of the Freudian *uncanny*, as well as to the Kristevan "abject," the 'witch' will be conceptualized as embodying the instability of the symbolic structure, disturbing sexual/gendered identity, and collapsing into a polluting, abject monster. As defined by Kristeva in *The Powers of Horror*, the "abject" designates bodily discharges, excrements rendered alien, other, and to be expelled. By their expulsion they establish, according to Bulter, "the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject" (1990, 133).

Nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself. (Kristeva 1982, 3)

In linking the cultural limits of the body with the concepts of pollution, danger, and death, I will attempt to reformulate the concept of the archaic (pre-phallic) mother as a therapeutic territory, allowing space for the emergence of resistance to the hegemonic, symbolic (in the Lacanian sense) discourse. This archaic figure will be viewed as a pre-symbolic/ semiotic mother, in contradistinction to the phallocentric fantasy of the pre-Oedipal mother-fetish, and will serve as a chain of metonymies for a particular (peculiar) space of nullification of the phallic function that fails to represent 'all' of the sexes. Consequently, the 'witch',



textually translated into a semiotic form, will come to represent the unconscious in a way that the patriarchal mother, as frequently defined, does not.

The Freudian concept of the unconscious intersects here with the Derridean concept of “the unconscious” that “is not... a hidden, virtual, or potential self-presence. It differs from, and defers, itself” (Derrida 1991, 73). This form of the unconscious will be linked to feminist psychoanalytical narrative tools that work against the phallogentric assumption that female creativity can have no metaphysical sanction (except the Christian model of the Virgin Mary); in fact, against the very concept of creativity symbolically placed on the male side, in opposition to female procreation. As Irigaray argues, this “lack of a self-representation to venerate, contemplate, admire or even adore” posits ‘female’ in the field of “the infinite/unfinished” that permanently transgresses the phallic sphere, the Lacanian sphere of “support” without which “the infinite” collapses into an endless “formlessness, into the archaism of a primitive chaos” (2000, 111). Although the ‘fe/male’ is a priori inscribed with/through the phallus, s/he is not entirely there; s/he “belongs to it, but not really,” as Kristeva writes (following Lacan):

Each confronts (phallic) power and (paternal) meaning (removed from the sensible connection to the mother), a power and a meaning both erotic and symbolic; but the boy tries out that confrontation with the conviction of ‘belonging to it,’ and the girl with the impression of *strangeness*. Because she will acquire and strengthen her capacity to speak, her capacity to assess herself in terms of the law of the other, to enter the order (of thought and of society), the girl will be part of the phallic order. But since she will remain a stranger there, she will preserve a sense of inferiority, of exclusion, or, at best, of irony: ‘I belong to it, but not really, I play the game, I act as if’. (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 59)

The archaic mother will thus be approached as an “unconscious” trace, leading towards the emergence of the ‘witch’ as a therapeutic reconfiguration of language in which “women can speak” (Irigaray 2000, 55), “a female transcendental against which each woman can measure herself rather than progressing only by taking the place of the mother, the other

woman or the man” (2000, 112). Like the Derridean “alterity of the ‘unconscious’,” the ‘witch’, as a trace of the archaic mother, “makes us concerned not with horizons of modified – past or future – presents, but with a ‘past’ that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a production or a reproduction in the form of presence” (Derrida 1991, 73). ‘She’ also allows us, speaking in the context of psychoanalysis, “to perceive that there are strategies of sense without signification, “memories,” if you like, but far below language and the signifier” (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 151). According to Kristeva, “as applied to the treatment of psychoses,” psychoanalysis proceeds to

the arrangement of new spaces, gratifying substitutes that repair old deficiencies in the maternal space. I could go on giving examples. But they all converge on the problematic of space, which innumerable religions of matriarchal (re)appearance attribute to ‘woman,’ and which Plato, recapitulating in his own system the atomists of antiquity, designated by the *aporia* of the chora, matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics. (1997, 862)

Composed of deficiencies, subversions, gaps, and historical silences, the ‘witch’ figure, as revealed in my analysis of the archaic mother, encounters an *aporia*, the type of paradox frequently evoked by Derrida as occupying “a suspect, even sinister, place in the system of traditional rhetoric” (Norris 1990, 49).

*Aporia* derives from the Greek word meaning ‘unpassable path’, a sense that fully lives up to its later paradoxical development. In Derrida’s hands it represents the nearest one can get to a label or conceptual cover-term for the effects of difference and the ‘logic’ of deviant figuration. (Norris 1990, 49)

Recalling Kristeva’s *aporia* of the chora, this ‘witch’ still embraces the essence of maternal space, even if this essence indicates the absence and ‘lack’ of an essence, emerging as a ghostly, spectral materiality in search of its own (cultural) body. The semiotic chora is therefore to be approached both as an absent (repressed) and persistently recurring desire for a provocative subversion (Derrida’s deviant figuration), which entails unexpected exposure to new un/conscious and

multiple forms of expression. As Gabriele Dietze writes in "Overcoming Speechlessness" (1980),

[s]ome things have been identified that promote the overcoming of speechlessness and many that hinder it, but this does not achieve a true approximation of the place from which speech is possible. Perhaps the seeming lack is also an opportunity. Maybe there are no places, systems, or identities where an individual woman can stand phallically erected in order to survey the world. Maybe it is not the place but the journey, not the system but the aphorism, not the identity but the multiplicity from which one speaks. It could be playing with theory fragments, juggling with standpoints on a trial basis, just [like] unabashed eclecticism, that women put to their service. (2001, 293)

However, surviving from the pre-linguistic phase, Kristava's semiotic patterns exist only in dialectical relation with the linguistic and cultural order, and therefore assume marginal positions. To follow Butler (who rejects Kristeva's concept of the semiotic), the pleasures of maternity constitute only "local displacements of the paternal law, temporary subversions which finally submit to that against which they initially rebel" (1990, 88). As I will argue, it is the witch's diversity emerging from a constitution of hierarchies and asymmetries of power, her condensation of the roles of therapist, rapist, madwoman, and patient that allows her to represent new processes of responding to woman's cultural denigration. Hence, all of the activities (or performances) of the witch result in a dialectical process of deconstructing the mother in the symbolic. The witch as a semiotic in/disposition cannot exist without constantly challenging the symbolic order (of language), and without being constantly silenced by it.

The narratives discussed in the final chapter, "The Witch as Transgression of Identity," are grouped in an attempt to locate the witch as a trans-cultural and inter-national space of suspension, a borderline phenomenon, involving both *herstorical* fantasies and archaic traumas which derive from the inability to express the feminine and the maternal in phallogocentric discourse. My objective is to suggest a theoretical framework for explicating the transgressive locations of the witch as a feminist literary configuration. Focusing on the

concept of un/belonging, I propose to view these narratives as subversive and dislocating accounts that establish what Kristeva (in *Desire in Language*) calls “a different legality”:

They are upheld not by the subject of understanding, but by a divided subject, even a pluralized subject, that occupies not a place of enunciation, but permutable, multiple, and mobile places; thus, it brings together in a heteronomous space the naming of phenomena (their entry into symbolic law). (1980, 111)

The ‘witch’, formulated in these narratives as a culturally diasporic figure, will be associated with the Derridean “undecidable”, and thus with a stigma in terms of cultural intelligibility. As “a convenient weapon in the defence against the unwelcome ambiguity of the stranger” (Sarup 1996, 10-11)<sup>42</sup>, this stigma will constitute the witch as a specifically female, and therefore different, locus of un/belonging: “The essence of stigma is to emphasize the difference of the undecidables; and a difference which is in principle beyond repair, and hence justifies a permanent exclusion” (1996, 11).

Although culturally distinct, the narratives selected for this (inter)relational context will also be discussed in view of the witch’s cultural transcendence in her evoking of forms of heresy and sacred disorder recognized as female. The sacred alludes here to specifically ‘feminine’ traces of *jouissance*, formulated by Irigaray and Cixous as crossing the forbidden border to bodily context, eroticism and sensuality, and further posited by Kristeva and Clément as spaces beyond (Western) religious and symbolic structures. In contrast to the *herstorical* narratives, the other is no longer perceived as a symmetrical opposition to sameness, but as an independent system corresponding to Kristeva’s “different legality,” a her(m)etic *jouissance*, and a strategically provisional carnivalesque structure. Moreover, drawing on Etienne Balibar’s, Butler’s, and Anzaldúa’s definitions of cultural identity, I will posit the ‘witch’ as a figure violating symbolic restrictions, and thereby making the limits of these restrictions obvious in a way that is culturally and /or collectively unbearable, or

abject. Following Levinas's insights into the delusion of possessing the other, I will emphasize the urgency of positing the other as a non-condition and non-reference that connects with *difference*, defined by Derrida as a concept that "is not ... governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter" (Derrida 1991, 74). In a way, as John Rajchman argues in *The Identity in Question* (1995), it does not "make sense to speak of an 'Other' whose logic would not be one of contrast or opposition (as in the idea of the 'non-Western') – something 'other to' identity, rather than an 'other identity'; something which, therefore, no group (not even a 'non-Western' one) may be said to 'represent'" (1995, xiii). If the witch, as presented by the selected narratives, stands for the subversive, incommensurable traits of the other found in overlapping cultural traces (of language and geography), these traces can only be referred to as moments of crossing, or transgressing culture, moments of tension and ties, and of cultural slip-knots contributing to constant changes in the value of the *newly born* witch<sup>43</sup>. The 'witch' as a cultural transgressor is a dialectical figure (carnavalesque, inherently oppositional, strange-to-itself), a strategic site of the cultural collapse of borders between the historical and the fantastic (and fantasmatic), the conscious and the unconscious, the sacred and the heretic; between categories that will be seen not as mutually exclusive binaries, but in the context of Kristevan relational definitions.

Having come to the end of the preliminary inquiry, which aimed to set up the theoretical framework for discussing a variety of narrative configurations of woman as 'witch', I can now isolate the three modalities of this figure: herstorical fantasies, maternal paradoxes, and sacred/heretic transgressions are all particular/peculiar loci of the 'witch'. All three, in their specific ways, subvert patriarchal constructions of the 'veiled' (castrated, mysterious, feminine) woman. In deploying the 'witch' as a *herstorical fantasmatic*, as an

archaic mother, and as a transgression of identity, my approach will resist the “symmetrical conception of otherness” which Shoshana Felman, in “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy” (1975), calls “a theoretical blindness to the woman’s actual difference” (1997, 9). It is not enough to be a woman, as Felman observes, in order to *speak as* a woman, which in itself implies a repetition of logocentric reductions of the woman to a silent and subordinate object inherently *spoken for*. This ‘actual difference’, “currently asserting itself, and asserting precisely its claim to a new kind of logic and a new type of theoretical reasoning” (1997, 9) is to be perceived in the following chapters as a culturally specific experience of female dislocation in relation to still dominant phallogocentric structures.

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<sup>1</sup> In patriarchal culture, as analyzed by Luce Irigaray in ‘The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine’, only men are subjects of exchange; women are among the objects of exchange and function as a living ‘commodity’ (Whitford 2000, 16).

<sup>2</sup> The patriarchal-phallogocentric, according to Moi, “denotes a system that privileges the phallus as the symbol or source of power” (1985, 125).

<sup>3</sup> As Anderson writes, the “classic list of opposites used to define reason in western philosophy is first developed by the Pythagoreans in fourth-century BCE Greece and is restated by philosophers from Aristotle to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). The Pythagorean list of opposites contains a series of contrasting terms in which reason above all is represented with images (terms) of that which limits, unifies, enlightens, orders, rests, straightens” (Anderson 1998, 9). Besides Cixous and Clément, this list has been alluded to and criticized by contemporary feminist philosophers such as Michèle Le Doeuff, Luce Irigaray, and Margaret Whitford.

<sup>4</sup> As Derrida claims, one can “no longer include difference in the concept of the sign, which always has meant the representation of a presence, and has been constituted in a system (thought or language) governed by and moving towards presence” (Derrida 1991, 62).

<sup>5</sup> Derrida relates this concept of trace to what is at center of the Levinas’s critique of ontology in “La trace de l’autre” (1963), that is a “relationship to the illeity as to the alterity of the past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence” (Derrida 1997, 42).

<sup>6</sup> I refer to Levinas’s concept of exteriority of the Other as developed in *Time and the Other* (1947) and pursued in his later work. In *Time and the Other*, he defines ‘alterity’ as “a nonreciprocal relationship” at the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life. “The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other’s character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other’s very alterity... The relationship with the alterity is neither special nor conceptual” (Levinas 2000, 83-84).

<sup>7</sup> Butler writes, “The question of locating “agency” is usually associated with the viability of the “subject,” where the “subject” is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates. Or,

if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive meditation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness" (Butler 1990, 142-3).

<sup>8</sup> In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva assimilates Douglas's notion of body boundaries to her reformulations of Lacan. She writes, "Defilement is what is jettisoned from the symbolic order. It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals and, in short, constitutes a classification system or structure" (1982, 65).

<sup>9</sup> In "International crossways", Abigail C. Saguy draws on the term 'boundary work' developed by sociologist Michèle Lamont (1992) in reference "to the way in which social actors emphasize 'symbolic boundaries' between themselves and others. By drawing inclusive boundaries, individuals affirm similarities between themselves and specific others, thereby affirming some group identity. In contrast, by drawing exclusive boundaries, individuals define their own identity in opposition to others" (Ezekiel and Verloo 2002, 252).

<sup>10</sup> Following Kathy Davis's argument in "Feminist Body/Politic as World Traveller," the assumption "that 'we' are victims of the same kinds of oppression and that patriarchy operates in similar ways across national borders neglects historical and material differences in women's situations, which give rise to different concerns and require different political struggles. As Kaplan (1996) has noted, this move has allowed some US (and European) feminists to avoid confronting painful class or racialized differences among women in their own cultures, while obscuring the dominance of middle-class women around the globe. The relative ease and perhaps preference with which middle-class feminists around the world forge alliances with other women across borders rather than with their less affluent or marginalized 'sisters' at home attests to this" (Ezekiel and Verloo 2002, 227).

<sup>11</sup> This observation parallels and is paraphrased from a lecture given by Irigaray at a conference on "Women and Madness" held in Montreal in May 1981, published as *Le corps-à-corps avec la mère* (1981), thus, approximately twenty years before the first Polish responses to Irigaray were formulated.

<sup>12</sup> One of the first Polish women to initiate the debate on women's emancipation was Eliza Orzeszkowa with her study *Kilka słów o kobietach* (Some Words on Women) (1870), the novels *Marta* postulating women's presence in public spheres of life (1876), and *Dziurdziowie* (1885) in which she describes an atrocious crime committed by drunken superstitious peasants against a woman suspected of witchcraft. In *Nad Niemnem* (1887) (On the Banks of the Niemen), her most famous positivist novel, she presented a panorama of rich landowners and impoverished nobility, in contrast with the Niemen country people rooted in the folk culture of song, work, and moral order, as well as in the democratic and patriotic notions of the year 1863. Using the motif of a misalliance (a daughter of a landowner marries a poor nobleman), she ended the plot with the reconciliation of both social strata to serve their common good and benefit the country. The cultural presence of women was proposed here to enliven the national revival of Poland. In the period of so-called "naturalism", another wave of women writers, such as Gabriela Zapolska (*Moralność pani Dulskiej*) (The Morality of Ms. Dulska), and later, in between the two World Wars, Kuncewiczowa (*Cudzoziemka* (The Foreign Woman), *Przymierze z dzieckiem* (A Pact with a Child)) consciously began to write about women's lives of poverty, adopting French naturalistic models, and shocked contemporaries by their exposure of bourgeois hypocrisy and treatment of subjects such as prostitution, syphilis, rape, and illegal abortion. Some of these texts have recently been republished in Poland, owing to an increasing interest in feminist re-readings.

<sup>13</sup> According to Whitford, Irigaray "was in advance of the movement of Anglo-American feminist thought, which is perhaps why *Speculum* does not seem to have been well understood on its first appearance in 1974." Moreover, "one could speculate that it is in Catholic countries", such as Poland, (or France and Italy) that "the importance of attending to motherhood as an institution, sanctioned by the divine, was [is] more immediately obvious" (2000 27), and thus contributes to the growing popularity of Irigaray's theories.

<sup>14</sup> However, as noted by Nash in "Exhaustion from Explanation. Reading Czech Gender Studies in the 1990s," Einhorn "seems to wonder when women will rise up and begin speaking out against discriminatory politics in work and the family on their own behalf" (2002, 305).

<sup>15</sup> As Katalin Fábri has recently observed in her article "Cacophony of Voices," "[t]he lack of a fitting theoretical framework to incorporate and explain the changes has been keenly felt in East European women's circles, because accepting the existing feminist literature as accurate and appropriate has been akin to the

discomfort of wearing other people's too tight or overly loose clothes... The borders defining the roles of the individual, the family and the state are not the same in post-Communist East and Central Europe as they are in the continuously capitalist western democracies" (Ezekiel and Verloo 2002, 271).

<sup>16</sup> As Gibson observes, the concept of 'excedence' is central to Levinas's *De l'évasion* (1935), which is "marked by his presentiment of the Nazi horror. If so, there is surely a connection between the political concerns that underlie *De l'évasion* and the fact that it has been seen as Levinas's exodus (an 'exodique'). As an 'exodus from being', the beginning of a long journey that will culminate in the major philosophical works, *De l'évasion* is concerned with the movement or process that *precedes* the encounter with alterity" (1999, 36).

<sup>17</sup> I draw on Gibson's suggestion that "there is an ethical space in narrative for Butler's illimitable et cetera', understood as 'the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all'" (1999 36) as well as the link he makes between the excess in question to that designated by Levinas's term of 'excedance'.

<sup>18</sup> In *The Feminine and the Sacred*, Kristeva refers to the porousness of women's bodies in reference to Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*, proposing "perfume as a figure for that problematic repression, that troubling porousness of women" (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 16).

<sup>19</sup> This particular selection of 'figures' relates to the actual characters as presented in the narratives analyzed here. In addition to works cited, other works consulted in reference to these figures are: *Women in the ancient world. The Arethusa Papers*, J. Peradotto and L. P. Sullivan, ed. (1984); *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*, Pierre Brunel, ed. (1997); *The Distaff Side: Representing the female in Homer's Odyssey*, B. Cohen, ed. (1995); Tikva Frymer-Kensky's *In the Wake of the Goddesses. Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (1993); David Goldstein's *Jewish Folklore and Legend; A History of Women in the West*, G. Duby and M. Perrot, eds. (1980); Carol Meyers's *Discovering Eve. Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (1988); *Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis*, G. A. Robbins, ed. (1988); Elaine H. Paghs's *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (1988); John Pollard's *Seers, Shrines and Sirens: the Greek Religious Revolution in the Sixth Century BC* (1965); Sarah B. Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves. Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975); Howard Schwartz's *Lilith's Cave. Jewish Tales of the Supernatural* (1988); Agathe Thornton's *People and Themes in Homer's Odyssey* (1970); Phylis Trible's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978); *Woman's Power, Man's Game: Essays on Classical Antiquity in Honor of Joy K. King*, M. DeForest, ed. (1993); Barbara Koltuv Black's *The Book of Lilith* (1986); Jacob Lassner's *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba. Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (1993).

<sup>20</sup> Jane Gallop questions Lacanian projects of abstracting the phallus (le/la phallus) from its association with the male organ: "By denying the 'phallus' as a fantasy, Lacan denies it as an object, and even as an organ (penis or clitoris, which it symbolized) and renders it dangerously abstract and detached from a cultural context: 'Is phallic signifier intrinsically neutral', transgressing the linguistic rules of gender? The Lacanian subject is castrated, that is to say, deprived of the phallus, and therefore can never satisfy desire... Most of Lacan's explanations of the phallus's privilege are 'vague', that is to say, veiled" (1982, 134-154).

<sup>21</sup> According to Diane Price Herndl, Lacan argued that "language is a force that utterly changes the being who uses it and that creates and structures the unconscious. Because language is always metaphorical... there is always a gap between expressing a wish and receiving an answer, since language can never fully express exactly what we want. That gap is desire" (Warhol and Herndl 1997, 485).

<sup>22</sup> For Lacan, as Herndl argues, "language exists in 'the order of the symbolic', because language symbolizes things in the world. 'The symbolic' refers to the connection between signifier (a word) and signified (what it stands for), which is always arbitrarily established... The system in which these symbols work is always outside the subject who uses it, and that subject is never in control of the system. Lacan calls this arbitrary system the 'Law of the Father', because of its structural similarity to the establishment of paternity and its chronological connection to the Oedipal complex. 'The imaginary', on the other hand, is the realm of the image. Unlike symbols, whose connection to what they signify is arbitrary, images have a visual relation to the signified. The imaginary is typified, for Lacan, in the relation of the subject to his/her mirror image: that image both is and is not the subject. Whereas the symbolic is triadic – signifier, signified, and signifying system – the imaginary is dyadic – image and signified" (Warhol and Herndl 1997, 486).



<sup>23</sup> In examining the cultural absence or ambiguous representations of the mother and her threatening transformations, I will also draw on Foucault's socio-historical conceptualization of juridical devices as sophisticated, institutionalized methods of empowerment and elimination. I designate these maternal locations as diasporic, because of the philosophical questions raised by Derrida in relation to the ontological impossibility (or paradox) of origin and identity. Language itself perpetuates an unsuccessful attempt to imprison experience in the categories of subject and object, therefore "distinctions that obey the analytic drive towards the mastery of nature by reason" (Norris 1990, 69) are marks of erasure that draw attention to their own highly provisional status. The device of placing words *sous rature*, one of Heidegger's/ Derrida's strategies for achieving the suspension of concepts, can be seen as a type of linguistic warning not to accept words at their face value. This dynamic applies to persistent failures to grasp the essence of the 'witch', as a 'woman' and/or a 'mother'.

<sup>24</sup> As Critchley argues, Levinas's "ethics occurs as the putting into question of the ego, the knowing subject, self-consciousness, or what Levinas, following Plato, calls the Same," and which "maintains a relation with otherness," a relation in which "the 'I', ego, or Dasein reduces the distance between the Same and the Other, in which their opposition fades... Ethics, for Levinas, is critique; it is the critical mise en question of the liberty, spontaneity, and cognitive emprise of the ego that seeks to reduce all otherness to itself. The ethical is therefore the location of a point of alterity, or what Levinas also calls 'exteriority' (extériorité), that cannot be reduced to the Same" (1999, 4-5).

<sup>25</sup> In the preface to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak writes that a text does not possess a "stable identity, stable origin" and that "each act of reading 'the text' is a preface to the next," the reading/ writing/ speaking, the whole communicative process, turns into a torturous game which will forever suspend assumed correspondences and significations" (1977, xii).

<sup>26</sup> In "Feminist, Female, Feminine" Moi proposes to view 'feminism' as "a political position", 'femaleness' as "a matter of biology" and 'femininity' as "a set of culturally defined characteristics" (1989, 117).

<sup>27</sup> As Moi observes, "[a] set of culturally defined characteristics' or a 'cultural construct' may sound irritatingly vague to many. It would seem that any content could be poured into this container; it does not read as a 'proper' definition. The question is, however, whether it is desirable for feminists to try to fix the meaning of femininity at all. Patriarchy has developed a whole series of 'feminine' characteristics (sweetness, modesty, subservience, humility, etc.). Should feminists then try to develop another set of 'feminine' virtues, however desirable? And even if we did want to define femininity normatively, would it then not just become a part of the metaphysical binary oppositions Hélène Cixous rightly criticizes? There is also a danger of turning a positive, feminist definition of femininity into a definition of femaleness, and thereby falling back into another patriarchal trap" (1989, 123).

<sup>28</sup> As Tina Chanter argues in the Introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, "while Levinas cannot be accused of definitely or intentionally marking the inferiority of the feminine sex, there are ways in which this inferiority is marked in his texts, despite his best intentions. If there is no sense in which paternity, the father, and the son are accorded a certain priority, why are they marked in sexual, rather than neutral, terms? Even if the feminine designates a tendency, and not a being, and even if paternity and fecundity are taken to refer beyond the biological, the question remains of what significance these terms acquire (2001, 17). By the same token, to follow Whitford, "the Derridean equation of the feminine with writing" has been rejected by Irigaray "as a discourse of mastery". Irigaray focuses instead "on the 'double syntax', that is to say, a possible articulation between conscious and unconscious, male and female," as well as on "the way the unconscious works in each philosophy and perhaps in philosophy in general". In doing so, she "proposes the strategy of a self-conscious mimicry in order to bring to light the mechanisms which maintain sexual indifference in place" (Whitford 1991, 76).

<sup>29</sup> "This relational 'definition' is as shifting as the various forms of patriarchy itself, and allows [Kristeva] to argue that men can also be constructed as marginal to the symbolic order, as her analyses of male-avant-garde artists (Joyce, Celine, Artaud, Mallarmé, Lautremont) have shown" (Moi 1989, 127).

<sup>30</sup> As Moi argues, "to advocate position 3 as exclusive of the first two is to lose touch with the political reality of feminism." She agrees with Kristeva in seeing these three positions "as simultaneous and non-exclusive positions in contemporary feminism" (1989, 128).

<sup>31</sup> "The Virgin assumes her feminine denial of the other sex (of man) but overcomes him by setting up a third person: *I* do not conceive with *you* but with *Him*. The result is an immaculate conception (therefore with neither man nor sex), conception of a God with whose existence a woman has indeed something to do, on condition that she acknowledge being subjected to it. The Virgin assumes the paranoid lust for power by changing a woman into a Queen in heaven and a Mother of the earthly institutions (of the Church). But she succeeds in stifling that megalomania by putting it on its knees before the child-god" (Kristeva 1986, 180).

<sup>32</sup> "The idea of the second Eve, through whom the sin of the first was ransomed, was important to the west, where it inspired the ingenious imagination of the medieval Christian to pun and riddle with a characteristic sense of delight and love of symmetry" (Warner 1990, 73).

<sup>33</sup> In her guise of *Mater Dolorosa* "who invaded the west beginning with the eleventh century, reaching the peak of its influx in the fourteenth" (Kristeva 1986, 173), "Mary most resembles the fertility goddesses of antiquity. For she receives the broken body of her son in her arms and gazes upon his features with such avidity not only because she mourns her loss - for she knows, as theology states most clearly, that he will rise from the dead - but also because she is propitiating those same forces of sterility and death that the sacrifice of her son is attempting to appease ... He is the blood offering, she the principle of the abiding earth" (Warner 1990, 221).

<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, in German 'mother tongue' also translates as 'Muttersprache', but in Polish, for example, it is 'the language of the father' (język ojczysty).

<sup>35</sup> I am specifically drawing on the image of the fifteenth century Virgin, radically opposed to the idea of female carnality, which continued to expand over the course of the centuries coinciding with the most severe witch trials on the European continent.

<sup>36</sup> Kristeva writes: "The fact that this nonplace before the beginning has been designated feminine or maternal is not likely to displease me, and it has led me to understand the 'feminine' as something completely different from a symmetrical double of the masculine" (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 73).

<sup>37</sup> As Jean Wyatt argues in "The Violence of Gendering: Castration Images in Angela Carter's *The Magic Shop*, *The Passion of New Eve*, and *Peter and the Wolf*" (2000), "[f]eminist answers to this question begin with de Beauvoir's notion of woman as man's other ... If woman's lack is integral to a male sense of sufficiency, then it is imperative to make a plausible case for her deficiency: what more convincing way to argue the inferiority of a woman than to ground that inferiority in her body? It then seems to be a part of factual reality - irrefutable. Freud's insistent iteration of 'the fact of her castration' then responds to a cultural imperative" (Easton 2000, 62).

<sup>38</sup> All translations from German are mine, unless otherwise attributed, and the original text is provided in the endnote. Unless otherwise stated, all italics are the author's and all ellipses mine: "Schluss mit dem ersten Leben natürlich, darin ich arbeiten musste, was Geschichte und Gewohnheit unsereinem aufgeladen haben. Spezialisierung. Das erste Leben hat mich spezialisiert auf Dienstleistungen und Verzicht. Das zweite gehört mir und der Wissenschaft" (Morgner 1983, 204).

<sup>39</sup> McDowell draws on Renato Rosaldo's article "Others of invention: Ethnicity and its discontents," *Voice Literary Supplement* (Feb. 1990) 27.

<sup>40</sup> In *Classical Mythology in English Literature*, Miles classifies the tale of Arachne (one of the female characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) as one of the Tales of Punishment: "Arachne claimed to be a better weaver than Athena; the goddess turned her into a spider, to continue spinning and weaving webs in that form" (1999 41).

<sup>41</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen's "redefinition of the omphalos," as she explains in *The Knotted Subject* (1998), "follows Jacques Lacan's discussion of the psychic history of the subject as structured by a fundamental loss of the maternal body - a loss we never own or represent but one that we repeat". Drawing on the ancient Greek "trajectory from Gaia's to Apollo's omphalos," Bronfen proposes the following interpretation: "Initially, the omphalos signified the maternal emblem, marking the site of a manifest worship of the chasm at the center of existence - Earth's cleft - with a visible connection to the transparent maternal force given shape in the figure of Python. In the second, Apollonian phase, the omphalos was transformed into an apotropaic emblem, a shield from any direct acknowledgement of our mortal debt to the maternal Earth. After this shift in belief, brought

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about by virtue of a form of matricide, the omphalos came to serve as site of purification and prophecy, at the same time, however, commemorating the now invisible umbilical cord" (Bronfen 1998, 19).

<sup>42</sup> In *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, Madan Sarup refers to the 'undecidables' as discussed by Derrida. The 'undecidables' include "the 'pharmacon', the hymen and the supplement. In French, the word 'supplement' has a double sense: to supply something that is missing, or to supply something additional. 'Pharmacon' is a Greek word which means both remedy and poison. The hymen is another ambivalent Greek word, standing for both membrane and marriage, which for this reason signifies at the same time virginity – the difference between the 'inside' and the 'outside' – and its violation by the fusion of the self and other" (Sarup 1996, 10).

<sup>43</sup> I refer to Cixous's and Clément's work *The Newly Born Woman* (1986) which constitutes the theoretical core of my analysis of second-wave feminist figurations of the witch.

## CHAPTER 1: THE WITCH AS *HERSTORICAL FANTASMATIC*

### DESIRE AS A PLACE<sup>1</sup> OF HYSTERICAL INCONSISTENCIES

What a magnificent idea it was to invent the benevolent character of the witch therapist, to describe the indomitable tenacity of 'paganism' under the mantle of Christianity! The more time I spend with healers on every continent, the more I verify Michelet's intuition. Magic uses the implements of a now-proscribed past, and it is always women who hold its secrets. (Clément 2001, 130)

Anglo-American radical feminist versions of the 'witch' remain stubbornly and cohesively polarized between the victim of phallogocentric hegemonies or the benevolent 'wise-woman'. This particular divergence derives above all from mythic stories of the "Burning Times" and beliefs in the "Craft of the Wise," both drawing on the historically documented medieval and postmedieval European witch-craze. Most of these "mythic" sources were invented (and invention is one of the key words here) "at the point when the women's movement began to turn away from rights-centred public-sphere issues towards crime-centred, private-sphere issues" (Purkiss 1996, 15):

Sexuality was to be identified as the site of women's oppression in the sense that property was for Marx the site of class oppression. Rape, sexual violence, pornography, wife-battering and (eventually) child sexual abuse became the central signifiers of patriarchy, replacing signifiers such as legal asymmetries and pay differentials. (1996, 15)

The feminist narratives from this period shift their critical interest to the witch figure as a signifier for physically abused and culturally neglected 'woman', the one Cixous, in the French feminist context, refers to in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975): the woman "in her inevitable struggle against conventional man," the "universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history" (Cixous 1997, 347).

But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression that has kept [women] in the 'dark' – that dark which people have been trying to make them accept

as their attribute – there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have *in common* I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible. (1997 347)

The narratives which I have selected for analysis here, especially the Anglo-American radical feminist texts, revalorize thus the roles of midwives, healers, herbalists, and crones, reflecting Cixous's 'women' who "return from afar, from always: from 'without', from the heath where the witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond 'culture'; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget" (1997 348). These narratives are primarily viewed as attempts to remove witches' history (identified with women's history) from the entrapment of their female 'physiological' bodies stigmatized by 'symbolical castration': the "little girls and their 'ill-mannered' bodies immured, well-preserved, intact unto themselves, in the mirror. Frigidified" (Cixous 1997, 248). They are mostly so-called *herstorical* (in contrast to historical) narratives, and their objective is to escape the stereotypical link between fascination and revulsion as inscribed onto the 'castrated' and melancholic female body.<sup>2</sup>

The forms taken by feminist figures of the witch address the question of how witches have 'become' who they are in history, which is mostly the history of their cultural marginalization. Associated with "drugs,... altered states,... madness and hysteria,... the disruption of language, ... forbidden words," and "excitingly unsayable desires", the historical witch-woman is "a signifier of all the power of the outsider" (Purkiss 1996, 79). My discussion of her focuses on (radical) feminist reformulations of a female sexuality culturally inscribed as abject, and based on the negative 'difference', that is 'abnormality', attributed to the female body. They represent, according to Moi, the "undeconstructed" form

of feminism that, still “unaware of the metaphysical nature of gender identities,” “runs the risk of becoming an inverted form of sexism” (Moi 1986, 129). The narrative reconstructions of the witch-craze are particularly troublesome, and here I follow Purkiss’s argument, because the myth of the “Burning Times” has become “such a key part of many feminists’ identities that to point to its limitations is bound to be painful and divisive” (Purkiss 1996, 26). Recently, as Butler argues, the “prevailing conception of the relation between feminist theory and politics has come under challenge from within feminist discourse” (1990, 1). The female subject of a feminist identity, assumed to be shared, obvious, and crucial to the understanding of the following narratives, has since been recognized as far from monolithic. Indeed, the arguments developed by Luise Pusch, Elaine Showalter, and Sylvia Bovenschen that will frame this discussion (in addition to the theories discussed in the introduction) emphasize the fragmentation of feminist identity and “the paradoxical opposition to feminism from ‘women’ whom feminism claims to represent” (Butler 1990, 4). This opposition, a type of adversative reaction, suggests in itself “the necessary limits of identity politics” (1990, 4).<sup>3</sup>

Precisely because it operates on a basis of assumed identity politics, *herstory* emerges in the present analysis as a form of feminist mythology<sup>4</sup>, and constitutes a challenging alternative to the established (Western) male-centered master-story. This phase of “intellectual rebellion, gynocentrism, and critical separatism,” to follow Showalter in “A Criticism of our Own” (1989), can be seen retrospectively as “a crucial period in the experience of women who had always played subordinate roles as dutiful academic daughters, research assistants, second readers, and faculty wives” (1997, 224). As an alternative discourse, *herstory* (or rather herstories, taking into account their conceptual plurality) initiates important processes in the cultural interrogation of existing historical and

mythical representations of gender. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, because of the *herstorical* inventions and re-definitions of language, I posit *herstory* as a therapeutic attempt to break through the silence and invisibility of female history, and to elevate the notion of female alterity over the complementarity (symmetricity) of the phallogocentric system. Precisely in this context, the feminist witch becomes a central strategic signifier, a crucial metaphor or metonymy for *herstorically* transmitted female values. I therefore bring these attempts into association with the problematic concept of the Levinasian feminine as “absolute alterity” (Levinas 1987, 85) which, as Tina Chanter argues, “plays a major part in the challenge he issues to a philosophical heritage that assumes the primacy of the same” (2001, 3):

Given that Levinas, against the Western philosophical tradition inaugurated by Parmenides, claims a priority for alterity over the one, the idea that alterity is accomplished in the feminine amounts to a radical claim, which must alter the traditional association of the feminine with otherness. Levinas, it must be conceded, is in fact according the femininity a certain priority. The *feminine* is a privileged term for Levinas, since in it alterity is accomplished. (2001, 5)

In a similar mode, the ‘witch’ (or the alterity of the woman) becomes a privileged term for *herstorical* narratives. As Morgner writes in *Amanda* (one of the narratives to be analysed here), the witch “is not only possible, but actually she is needed, desired” (1983, 635). The perspective offered is that of an *other woman*, defined by Irigaray as one that is exterior to phallogocentric metaphorizations, “a woman who does not yet exist, but whose advent could shake the foundations of patriarchy” (Whitford 2000, 29).

In *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous’s and Clément’s witch figures replicate the traces of subversive symbols (the evil eye, menstrual pollution, the castrating mother) as well as feminine/female symbols of transcendence (the virginal mother/ goddess). Evoking both medical and sexual implications, the sorceress and the hysteric are posited as tropes for the

female condition, that is, for cultural incompatibility and deviance which, if excessive, will be vomited “into protected spaces - hospitals, asylums, prisons” (1986, 6). There the witch-woman is ‘veiled’, hidden, and kept under restraint. This female condition, according to Cixous, has to be re-written against the heterosexual ideology of two physiologically different but supposedly complementary ‘halves’; an ideology that Butler later reformulates as “literalizing fantasy”:

The conflation of desire with the real - that is [for Butler] the belief that it is parts of the body, the ‘literal’ penis, the ‘literal’ vagina, which cause pleasure and desire – is precisely the kind of literalizing fantasy characteristic of the syndrome of melancholic heterosexuality. (1990, 71)

Also, the ‘dark’ origin of female condition, to continue with Cixous, has to be re-written, since the “*Dark continent*” a/the woman has been relegated to is in fact “*neither dark nor unexplorable*” (1997, 354):

It is still unexplored only because we’ve been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they [the phallogocentric culture] want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it’s still going on. (1997, 354)

In analyzing the/a woman as a hysteric figure in *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous indeed analyses the parts of her body, and leads back to the Greek *hyster* (womb), to the witch-woman as a creature with a “wandering, even wondering womb” which manifests a “distinctively female bonding” of mind and body,

the inescapable female connection between creation and procreation, the destiny that is inexorably determined by anatomy. And the sorceress - the witch, the wisewoman, destroyer and preserver of culture - is she not the midwife, the intermediary between life and death, the go-between whose occult yet necessary labors deliver souls and bodies across frightening boundaries? (Clément and Cixous 1986, xiii)<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, in a striking reliance on the ‘original craft’ of words, Mary Daly and Barbara Walker draw on the hag’s metamorphosis from the wise-woman into the witch that



transforms her medieval cauldron “from a sacred symbol of regeneration into a vessel of poisons” (Walker 1985, 122). According to Daly, the hag is a female *eccentric*, in reference to the Greek *ek* (out of) and *kentrum* (center of a circle) (1978, 186), who deviates from established patterns and defines gynocentric cultural boundaries. This malevolent stereotypical hag “still haunts elder women today. If a man is old, ugly, and wise, he is a sage. If a woman is old, ugly, and wise, she is a *saga* - that is, a witch” (Walker 1985, 122)<sup>6</sup>.

The tension between past and present, as argued by Purkiss, “is experienced in all feminist histories, but only radical feminism resolves it by denying the difference,” by presenting its narrative “not as a reconstruction of the past, but an account of the way things *always* are” (1996, 10). This *herstorical* tendency to invoke the mythical past as atemporal, and its insistence on the erasure “of the traces of [its] own historicity,” (1996, 10) is undoubtedly intertwined with the desire to manifest one’s own sovereign presence, even if that presence appears to be hysterical. As Bovenschen argues in “The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch, and the Witch Myth” (1978), the “assimilation of the witch into feminist visual and linguistic parlance happened spontaneously, not as the result of a plan” (2001, 231). The revival of the word, the image, and the motif of the witch allowed for highly emotional “digging” through several layers of history, and led to the re-discovery of the witch pogroms of the late Middle Ages as an uncontestable archeological proof of female oppression (2001, 230-231). Alice Walker’s references to witches, in the ethnic context of her African heritage, also seem to fall into this category of emotional “digging”. As explained by Lissie, one of her protagonists in *The Temple of My Familiar*,

[t]he first witches to die at the stake were the daughters of the Moors... It was they (or, rather, we) who thought the Christian religion that flourished in Spain would let the Goddess of Africa ‘pass’ into the modern world as ‘the Black Madonna’. After all, this was how the gods and goddesses moved from era to era before, though Islam, our official religion for quite a long time by now, would have nothing to do with this

notion; instead, whole families in Africa who worshipped the goddess were routinely killed, sold into slavery, or converted to Islam at the point of the sword. Yes... I was one of those 'pagan' heretics they burned at the stake. (Walker 1990, 222)

These types of emotional "proofs" explain, perhaps, why "the radical feminist history of witches often appears to offer a static, finished vision of the witch" (Purkiss 1996, 10), one that reflects the feminist *desire* for an irrefutable reference that could be considered ultimate and eternal. This form of historicizing, which is dogmatic and often historically inadequate, can be understood as a resistance to what Felman calls the persistent attribution of incompleteness, deficiency, and envy (1997, 9) to the female. Hence, I propose to consider certain radical feminist texts as theoretical and narrative forms of hysteria, that is, as examples of a discourse that carries in itself an inherent division between the methodical, logical, and reasonable on one hand, and the hysterical, that is *eccentric* and out of control, on the other. As Irigaray argues, there is a revolutionary potential in this type of hysterical discourse:

Even in her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desires... A movement of revolt and refusal, a desire for/of the living mother who would be more than a reproductive body in the pay of the polis, a living, loving woman. It is because they want neither to see her nor hear that movement that they so despise the hysteric. (Irigaray 2000, 47-48)

In *herstorical* deconstructions of male sameness, femaleness becomes a state of permanent conceptual reconfiguration (thus, a permanent lack of authority), since, as Felman argues, the "possibility of a thought which would neither spring from nor return to this masculine Sameness is simply unthinkable" (1997, 8-9). At the same time, paradoxically, *herstory* attempts to challenge the unthinkable, and this is perhaps the most hysterical part of it, since the challenge comes very close to trying to normalize the unthinkable. "More present than ever," the witch becomes (or transgresses into) *the newly*

*born woman*, “the ancient/ innocent/ fluent/ powerful/impossible woman,” as Clément and Cixous have imagined her. And everything about her, as Sandra M. Gilbert writes in the introduction to *The Newly Born Woman*, is “intense, indeed hyperbolic” (Clément and Cixous 1986, x).

To dance: at the heart of *The Newly Born Woman* is the story of a southern Italian ritual, the tarantella. Early in the book, as she discusses the rebellious celebrations with which repressed (female) subjects have responded to their subjugation by patriarchal hierarchies, Clément tells a tale of women in the Mezzogiorno who can be cured of imaginary spider bites only by doing a ceremonial dance, which sometimes lasts for twenty-four hours. A village orchestra plays; a woman/ patient dances - dances in a ferocious ‘festival of metamorphosis’ ... which subversively... expresses her passionate rage... At the end of the episode, she transcends the divine bite and ‘leave[s] risk behind . . . to settle down again under a roof, in a house, in the family circle of kinship and marriage . . . the men’s world’... But she has had her interlude of orgasmic freedom. (1986, xii)

It is in her “orgasmic freedom” that Cixous’s witch personifies the assimilated abjection of the witch’s body, her ambiguity of form, and her re-enactment of the absence of patriarchal culture that cannot be conceptualized in the historical language of ‘the symbolic’. As a linguistically abstracted, imaginary position assigned to the witch, Cixous’s and Clément’s cultural absence defies symbolic ‘cultural castration’ by a strategic reenacting of inconsistency, transgression, trance. Similarly, Irigaray’s feminine ‘sex’ “which is not one” has its point of departure in a linguistic absence<sup>7</sup>, which, as Butler argues,

is not marked as such within the masculine signifying economy - a contention that reverses Beauvoir’s argument (and Wittig’s) that the female sex is marked, while the male sex is not... On the contrary, the female sex [for Irigaray] eludes the very requirements of representation, for she is neither ‘Other’ nor the ‘lack’. (Butler 1990, 10)

The following analysis of selected narratives focuses on symbolically suppressed female transgressions (desires, fears, and rage) which integrate the new (radically re-invented) qualities of the witch as a metonymic extension of the female limits in the symbolic, an extension that in fact eradicates these limits. Mary Daly’s and Andrea

Dworkin's narratives, like Cixous's texts, both associate with and disassociate themselves from the conflictual and self-perpetuating desire to celebrate an exclusively female (*herstorical*) type of suffering. The momentary 'dis/integrity' of the dancing, carnivalesque body, as posited by Cixous, revives the experience of inquisitorial interrogation, and links this experience with the "possession" of a/the woman who "by her opening up is open to being 'possessed', which is to say, disposed of herself" (Cixous 1994, 42). Hence, the witches' sabbath is evoked as a recurring spectacle of *trans-*, a *trance*, and a *trace* associated with monstrous, dislocated female elements. Moreover, to follow Cixous, "those" who did not experience the "festival of metamorphosis" can neither articulate nor negotiate it. But "she" (the female pronoun, the one designated She, the "orgasmic" witch-woman), who has participated in this experience has to return in order to speak of it, and so she no longer speaks from, but only about, the/a position of otherness. The "she", once placed in the symbolic structure, cannot, or can no longer, speak from the place of the Other since this place resists symbolic articulation. Her otherness, deriving precisely from her negotiating status between speaking and speechless (the one that cannot be articulated) positions, refuses to complement the Law of the Father. The 'witch' in fact embodies the otherness of 'woman', the otherness transmitted in *herstory* as an ambiguous (transgressing) value that cannot be culturally mapped but is already symbolically 'castrated'.

At this stage, I propose to link the ambiguity of the 'witch' with the problematic position of the other that is a "floating signifier,"<sup>8</sup> a "senseless flow that produces its own significance," and speaks "(in) the name of no one" (Kristeva 1980, 190). In 'speaking' thus, she "laughs at the solemnities of sacrifice that constitute culture" (Clément and Cixous 1986, xiii), and refuses the historical construction of the abject hag as a zone of exclusion from the 'symbolic'. The phallogentric construct of the hag represents, therefore, a salient

challenge to *herstory* which sets another equally imaginary zone against it, the zone of fantasy, that of the positive other, Irigaray's "fantasmatic" woman. As Irigaray explains in *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mere* (1981):

To begin with, I wanted to do a sort of tetralogy, tackling the problem of the four elements: water, air, fire, earth, applied to philosophers nearer our time, and at the same time, interrogate the philosophical tradition, particularly from the side of the feminine. (Irigaray 1981)

In contextualizing this fantasmatic woman, it seems therefore necessary to refer to a mobile discursive locus of the/a woman: a dialogical impossibility, or incongruence, between history and *herstory*, ending up, strategically, in female hysteria (*hysteria*). As Irigaray concludes,

woman will not yet have taken (a) place. And 'not yet' which no doubt corresponds to a *hysterical fantasmatic* but/and which acknowledges a historical condition. Woman is still the place, the whole of the place where she cannot appropriate herself as such. Experienced as all-powerful where 'she' is most radically powerless in her indifferentiation. (2000, 53)

In deriving the *herstorical fantasmatic* from Irigaray's *hysterical fantasmatic* in *Speculum* (1974), I emphasize the feminist appropriation of sexual difference, "whether written in opposition to the phallogocentrism of Lacan (Irigaray) or as a critical reelaboration of Lacan," as a necessary attempt to view the feminine "as the unrepresentable absence effected by (masculine) denial that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion" (Butler 1990, 28). Although Irigaray's philosophical texts, like Cixous's, "are dazzling, allusive, deliberately polysemic, difficult to unravel, and for the most part still untranslated" (Whitford 2000, 9),<sup>9</sup> they are significant for reminding us that it was Freud, and not Lacan,

who brought to light something that had been operative all along though it remained implicit, hidden, unknown: *the sexual indifference that underlies the truth of any science, the logic of every discourse*. This is readily apparent in the way Freud defines female sexuality. In fact, this sexuality is never defined with respect to any sex but the masculine... The feminine is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the

other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex. (Irigaray 2000, 119)

Hence sexual difference, which has not been recognized in phallogocentric discourse, is necessary to overcome the split between the incompatible sensibilities of the maternal and the paternal versions of intelligibility.

Above all, the *herstorical fantasmatic* draws our attention to the inconsistency of the presence/ absence of *herstorical* location(s) attributed to witches, who

of course, could also fly on broomsticks, and often did. Before going to the sabbat, they anointed their bodies with a mixture of belladonna and aconite, which caused delirium, hallucination, and gave the sensation of flying. (Dworkin 1974, 148)

The trans-formed broomstick, “an almost archetypal symbol of womanhood, as the pitchfork was of manhood” (1974, 148), serves here as an excellent example of Cixous’s “orgasmic freedom,” the *herstorical* trance beyond ‘the symbolic’, in which the flying broomstick also denotes escape from housework, domestic ties, and oppression. In flying on her broomstick, the radical witch of the seventies personifies an alarming “indifference to the boundaries between memory and invention, fact and fancy, truth and fiction” (Purkiss 1996, 53). Her fantasies do not address the phenomenon of flying itself, but rather its metaphorical potential. As Cixous explains it:

Flying is woman’s gesture – flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we’ve been able to possess anything only by flying; we’ve lived in flight, stealing away, finding when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It’s no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense. It’s no accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. (Cixous 1997 356-7)

Bovenschen, in a German feminist context, also refers to these “fantastic qualities of imagination” that “go far beyond what theoretical discourse, hostile towards images as it is, can transmit” (2001, 232). However, in agreement with Purkiss’s line of argument,

Bovenschen points out that “to elevate the historical witch *post festum* to an archetypal image of female freedom and vigor would be cynical, considering the magnitude of her unimaginable suffering” (2001, 232). It is rather the witch’s hysterical placement on the border between suffering and freedom that evokes the desire to perform, to take part in the enactment of deliverance, the emancipation of body, form, and structure. This borderline location is central to a contemporary political resistance that, as Bovenschen claims, “is not based in mythology even though it occasionally makes use of mythological imagery” (2001, 232).

For Irigaray, this emancipation of the female body is inseparable from a female self-knowledge (self-touching and opening up physical and metaphysical borders), and related to her plural and ‘perverse’ images of anatomy:

Whereas in the self-touching of the/a woman, a whole [tout] touches itself because it is in-finite/unfinished, unable or unwilling to close up or to swell definitively to the extension of an infinite. This (self-)touching giving woman a form which is in(de)finitely transformed without closing up on her appropriation. Metamorphoses where no whole [ensemble] ever consists, where the systematicity of the One never insists. Transformations, always unpredictable. (2000, 59)

Embodying (re)inscriptions of Lilith<sup>10</sup>, the self-touching ‘witch’ “lives with her body in the past”, the past referred to by Cixous as a spectacle of “forgotten roles: the *ambiguous*, the *subversive* and the *conservative*” (1986, 12). She is *subversive*, “because the symptoms - the attacks - revolt and shake up the public,” (the phallic gaze of the others to whom they are exhibited). She is *conservative*, “because every sorceress ends up being destroyed, and nothing is registered of her but mythical traces.” Her *ambiguity* is “expressed in an escape that marks the histories of sorceress and hysteric with the suspense of ellipses” (1986, 5). The *herstorical* sabbath is thus a rite of the past, an apotheosis of the emancipated body. It is also a repressed desire for the imaginary space prior to gender, the forbidden *maternal zone*,

and a fantasy of fragmentation as well as of union: "Perhaps it is a question of a particular phase which, later, one could call 'transitivism', some sort of phase of excessive identification" with the other being (always on both sides, double). In the end the sabbath, like a hysterical attack, "provides a return to regular rhythm" (Clément and Cixous 1986, 19), reiterating as well as subverting a pattern. During her performance, the witch-woman "is open to being 'possessed,' which is to say, dispossessed of herself" (1986, 42). Like the carnivalesque structure discussed by Bakhtin, she is "composed of distances... analogies and non-exclusive oppositions... essentially dialogical" (Kristeva 1986, 48). Out of the dialogue established between her possession and her dispossession the "dyads of carnival" appear: "high and low, birth and agony, food and excrement, praise and curses, laughter and tears" (1986, 48).

Enveloped in de Beauvoir's and Irigaray's metaphors of *the sex which is not one*, these conceptualizations of the 'witch' provide, as Butler argues, "point[s] of departure for criticism of hegemonic Western representation of the metaphysics of substance that structures the very notion of the subject" (1990, 10)<sup>11</sup>. As a *herstorical/ hysterical fantasmatic*, the feminist witch strategically represents both the historical abject figure subjected to torture and death, and a radical fantasy of renewal in the form of a female figure who desires (and articulates) a cultural transformation "that has not happened yet," and also the one who already marks that transformation. As Purkiss suggests,

the herbalist-witch represents a fantasy ... in which domestic skills are valued in the community as if they were professional skills. There is more than a passing resemblance between the witch-herbalist and the fantasy superwoman heroine of the 1980s and 90s, professional women who have beautiful country gardens, bake their own bread, make their own quilts, and demonstrate sexuality at every turn. (1996, 21)

Thus, the feminist witch succeeds in subverting her own (abject) identity by converting it into a political fantasy; nevertheless the "category of women for merely 'strategic'



purposes,” (Butler 1990, 4), as represented by the ‘witch,’ remains problematic. To continue with Purkiss,

Witches can only represent all oppressed women if we know very little about them. The more witch-history the myth of the Burning Times attempts, the more damage it does to its own mythic status... (1996, 13)

This *herstorical* blindness to the witch’s (woman’s) actual difference is characteristic of all the narratives discussed in this chapter. Their witch remains entrapped within the dilemma of a/the cultural transgressor (and negotiator) that in history became a convenient scapegoat (the stereotypical frightening witch-woman to be eliminated), and in *herstory* becomes a utopian projection of female power.

#### CONSTRUCTING THE BODY AS A LOCUS OF FEAR: MARY DALY’S *GYN/ECOLOGY* AND ANDREA DWORKIN’S *WOMAN-HATING*

We heard slogans about the return of witches, the moon, the tides, matriarchy, the primal. There was blood in the air and slaughter on the horizon. (Clément 2001, 71)

The feminist ‘we’ is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent. (Butler 1990, 142)

“Mary, please don’t pun-ish us any more” (1996)<sup>12</sup>, writes Luise F. Pusch, alluding to Mary Daly’s elaborations on the mythic “Craft of the Wise”.<sup>13</sup> Daly’s troublesome, deliberately ambiguous wording would still be digestible, Pusch argues, if used within reasonable limits. However, with Daly, the opposite is the case. Since the intricacies of her language increase from one work to the next, questions arise as to why she does this (to us): what are her reasons, and what are the results?<sup>14</sup> Daly seems “to have so much fun with re-inventing words,” that

she does it, so to speak, above all, out of pure pleasure. To engage in word games can truly become a pleasurable pursuit, especially if resulting in such flourishing creations

as stag-nation, the-rapist, bore-ocracy, Hexicon or Mister-ek-tomy, which have since become part of the classical feminist vocabulary. (Pusch 1996)<sup>15</sup>

Questioning Daly's self-absorption with verbal discoveries that leave no space for an analytical perspective<sup>16</sup>, Pusch disapproves of her "impossible postulates of the new, true, deep structures," apparently referring to the etymological origin of words, the "original word craft"<sup>17</sup>:

Mary Daly has drawn our attention to many pathologies of language. She is, as I said, an impossibly sharp-witted critic censoring not only the patriarchy, but also its language. Nevertheless, she should dispose of her etymological dictionaries which should all end up in storage, section: patriarchal curiosities. (Pusch 1996)<sup>18</sup>

Not only Daly's *Gyn/ecology* (1978), but also Andrea Dworkin's *Woman-Hating* (1974) could be categorized as hysterical and fanatical means to resist an equally hysterical and fanatical misogyny.<sup>19</sup> Their strategies consistently draws on the historical victimization of women accused of witchcraft<sup>20</sup>, and particularly on the exhibition and torture of the female body. In the process of constructing a 'universal' feminist story, personal fears, hatred and solidarity are evoked on purpose, and their complexities, such as the conflation of fiction with academic research, are often difficult to analyze. In *Woman-Hating* she writes,

The magic of witches was an imposing catalogue of medical skills concerning reproductive and psychological processes, a sophisticated knowledge of telepathy, auto- and hetero-suggestion... [Witches] developed the science of organic medicine, using vegetation, before there was any notion of the profession of medicine. (Dworkin 1974, 148)

Both Daly's and Dworkin's radical theses posit the 'witch' simultaneously as a female source of authority and as a patriarchal scapegoat, equating patriarchy with the relentless persecution of women by (physical) torture. Accused, in history, of stealing male fertility (or even dismembering the male body), the all-devouring, death-dealing hag returns in Daly's *herstory* to represent the protective (maternal) instincts of an archaic character. The witch-crone, Daly's most prominent 'archetype' of female powers, turns into a guardian of birth-

giving as well as of virginity and homosexuality unstained by patriarchal semen. Her rewriting of *hagiography* as *Hag-ography* modulates the *hag*, making her the very embodiment of feminist sisterhood:

our foresisters were the Great Hags whom the institutionally powerful but privately impotent patriarchs found too threatening for coexistence ... For women who are on the journey of radical be-ing, the lives of the witches, of the Great Hags of hidden history are deeply intertwined with our own process. As we write/live in our own story, we are uncovering their history. (Daly 1978, 14)

Their story is hence *our* story, while *we* become crones (the survivors of the witchcraze), “as a result of having dis-covered depths of courage, strength and wisdom” (1978, 16) in *ourselves*. Daly’s mode of speaking in the name of all of *us* is disturbingly dogmatic, raising acute questions about “who has the right to speak about what on behalf of whom,” or else “who can possibly be fit to listen” (Purkiss 1996, 17). This ‘we’, as Kathy Davis argues in “Feminist body/politic as world traveller,” unites

different women living under highly disparate circumstances into the same feminist family. At the same time, however, it denies the historical specificity of women as sometimes subordinate or marginal, but sometimes powerful or central, depending upon their social location and local power networks. Women are not a unified powerless group, nor are they powerless in the same way. (2002, 227)

However, Daly’s strategy serves its purpose, since “[at] this point, it becomes clear that [her] narrative account of the Burning Times is less a presentation of external events than the story of an internal voyage, a metaphorical journey into the heart of patriarchal darkness” (Purkiss 1996, 13).

In a particular mode of resistance to women’s ‘cultural castration’ both Daly and Dworkin identify themselves with and as witches. If Daly’s *herstory* of witchcraft is a religious experience, a form of self-actualizing suffering, Dworkin’s is an experience of bodily victimization, a type of masochism, through which she replies to the ‘gynocide’, “a term which at once covers over and gestures at what it replaces” (Purkiss 1996, 17).

Dworkin “uses both the image of the demonised witch-stepmother of fairy tales and the figure of the persecuted witch-victim of the Burning Times as figures for the suffering woman-victim of pornography and rape” (1996, 15). Her narratives are manifestos of female powerlessness and simultaneously, somehow disruptively, they celebrate the survivor-figure who lives to tell the tale. Particularly valid, in this double context, is Purkiss’s observation that radical feminists equate themselves with witches in order to ensure “that anyone who disagrees with [them] can be cast as an inquisitor” (1996, 16). Daly’s “notorious intolerance of women not classed as Hags – often stigmatised by her as ‘fembots’ (female robots) – ironically reduplicates a rigid structure of ‘acceptable’ behaviour for women” (1996, 16). Moreover, Daly’s firm conviction that *what happened to Hags once is happening to them again*, perpetuates the vicious circle of gynophobia and is no longer effectual in the light of more recent feminist readings. Similarly, Dworkin’s conscious preoccupation with the very linguistic structure she uses (she writes “with a broken tool, a language which is sexist and discriminatory to its core” (Dworkin 1974, 26)) reflects, above all, her own failure to invent vocabulary and articulate her pain. Instead, she appropriates a sometimes coarse and angry style, as if trying to break through ‘the symbolic’, through the theory, into something that constitutes the “actual” subversive discourse, into “life,” as she says.<sup>21</sup>

In thus refusing emotional detachment as a necessity of critical evaluation, these radical feminist voices maintain a highly personal character. To follow Daly, defending a witch equals declaring oneself a witch, a symbolic ‘Holocaust’-survivor from the past and the cult figure of the present. Thus, as Purkiss suggests,

Pogroms, lynchings and above all the Holocaust do make it more difficult (though *not* impossible) to deny the very existence of racism and ethnocentrism. The Burning Times myth offers to play the same role in women’s history, to authorise the need for struggle and authenticate the forms that struggle takes. (1996, 15)<sup>22</sup>

Despite a detailed analysis of the torture inflicted on witches, Daly and Dworkin are reluctant to mention (historical) names of witches or to describe particular cases of witch trials. According to Purkiss, "male historians never tire of observing that radical feminist histories of witchcraft use almost no early modern texts as a source for views about witchcraft except the *Malleus Maleficarum*" (1996, 11). Both Daly's and Dworkin's major historical reference is indeed the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*, published in 1486, in the early period of the witch-craze, and known in English as *The Witch's Hammer*.<sup>23</sup> This "comprehensive witch-hunter's handbook, by far the most important treatise on persecuting witches to come out of the witch hysteria of the Middle Ages and Renaissance ... was written by two Dominican inquisitors, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger" (Guiley 1989, 221-2).<sup>24</sup> The Latin genitive *Maleficarum* translates literally as 'of female evil-doers', and, as cited by Dworkin, the questions analyzed in it are such quandaries as: "'Whether Witches may work some Prestidigitatory Illusion so that the Male Organ appears to be entirely removed and separate from the Body (Answer: Yes),' [or] 'That Witches who are Midwives in Various Ways Kill the Child Conceived in the Womb, and Procure Abortion; or if they do not do this, offer New-born Children to the Devils (Answer: Yes)'" (Dworkin 1974, 128). Elaborating on the interrogational procedures described, radical feminists portray the witch-hunters as obsessed (religious) maniacs who see themselves as *purifying* the female *mystical body* of *indigestible* (to paraphrase Daly's text) elements. It is precisely these elements, in the radical feminist interpretation, that constitute female independence, a spiritual, physical, and economic sovereignty that threatens the phallocentric monopoly of power. According to Daly, references to torture and the death sentence, performed *ad infinitum* on witches in a medieval form of spectacle, do not concern the women actually accused, but their bodies or

body fragments that are rendered seductive, both fascinating and repulsive at once. As

Purkiss claims, passages

are quoted from [the *Malleus*] not for their centrality to witch-beliefs, but for their striking qualities, hence the more or less constant reiteration of the passage about the stolen *phalloi*, a belief rarely recorded elsewhere but striking as an illustration of rabid misogyny. Radical feminist historians are not deluded into thinking that the *Malleus* is central (although they do write as if it is); their criteria are those of the storyteller, in search of the most striking illustration or anecdote (1996, 11).

Furthermore, radical feminists seem to agree with the Foucauldian understanding of torture as forming part of a ritual. The radical symbolism of the inadvertently sexualized female body is extended and designed to illustrate the spectacular martyrdom of the raped pagan goddess.

The same symbolism turns the persecutor into a hysteric who applies repetitive procedures of detecting warts and moles on the stripped female body, or verifies its ability to float when tied up and thrown into the water. As Foucault observes, "from the point of view of the law that imposes it, public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph" (1977, 34). Particularly valid, in the radical feminist context, is the observation that "torture does not reconcile (even if its function is to 'purge' the crime)," it rather "traces around... the very body of the condemned" woman, leaving on the reader/spectator visible, and recognizable scars of fear, which "must not be effaced" (1977, 34). Ironical as it seems, Daly's and Dworkin's narratives express a similar (desire for) on-going torture, even after death, in elaborate descriptions of the burnt corpses, or bodies dragged on hurdles and exhibited at the roadside. If (medieval) justice "pursues the body beyond all possible pain" (Foucault 1977, 34), some radical feminist narratives seem to be absorbed with the same abject and ceremonial element: with a sanctification of the victimized body that torture invokes. This element, called by Foucault "the liturgy of

punishment,” marks the victim “either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy” (1977, 34). Daly’s and Dworkin’s narratives are problematic in that sense, because of their focus on torture and execution:

Since we all have a body, and since we all fear pain and death, torture and execution create an illusion of common identity with a witch-suspect which might be shattered if Daly were to enlarge upon her life or quote her words. (Purkiss 1996, 14)

Certainly, in the light of such commentaries as those of Pusch, Purkiss, and Butler, the myth of the “Burning Times” has lost its political usefulness, but it is important to remember that it was helpful at one stage in the feminist past. This is particularly true in the context of the eventually rejected victimization evoked by their narratives (with its radical refusal of the female body as a site of torture). In fact, these types of acute and legitimate refusal enabled a turning point in feminist theory and cannot be ignored. Today, not unlike the *Malleus* itself, these narratives can be read as abandoned, archetypal monuments, significant because of the (re-enacted) silence of the burnt (female) bodies. However, as Annis Pratt suggests, archetypes must be constantly validated; they should be “fluid and dynamic, empowering women’s personalities to grow and develop” (1981, 135): “Some feminist theoreticians, [Mary Daly, among others] take stereotype and archetype as synonymous” ignoring the “projective” and “futuristic” capacities of the archetype (1981, 135). Pratt herself offers vivid examples of *herstorical* tendencies to elaborate on “insanity and womanhating for which there can be no reparation,” and on the female martyrdom in death which “took the forms of burning at the stake, strangulation, crushing with stones, whipping, hanging, drowning, and unspeakable and vile tortures” (1981, 175). This type of acute but tactical fear of rape and subsequent victimization “helps to explain the very dangerous preoccupation with torture and execution in radical feminist narratives of witchcraft,” which all too easily turns the historical figure of the witch “into a spectacle of violation and

dismemberment” (Purkiss 1996, 15). Often difficult to control, fears evoked by radical feminist texts have universalizing tendencies that (not unlike the fear of death itself) are irreversible and impossible to cure. In the fear of rape, as Angela Carter has observed in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), there is “more than merely physical terror of hurt and humiliation – a fear of psychic disintegration, of an essential dismemberment, a fear of a loss or disruption of the self which is not confined to the victim alone” (Carter 2000, 6).

The *herstorical* witches, to conclude with Purkiss,

represent a much cleaner break with academic values than anything feminist historians have produced or have wished to produce...Perhaps [these] witches show what feminist history might be like if it *really* abandoned empiricism altogether instead of simply calling it into question from time to time (1996, 53)<sup>25</sup>.

Daly’s and Dworkin’s herstorical fantasies, strategically called feminist, are not escapist but political, taking a withdrawal into the *fantasmatic* as a tool for cultural transformation. In positing the ‘woman-witch’ as the ‘other’ that symmetrically complements the Law of the Father, they impose ‘otherness’ as a political strategy, based on the identity principle that is crucial to early radical feminist work. As Thürmer-Rohr explains in “Cross-Thinking/Counter-Questioning/Protest” (1987), they do not “merely add to the answers of existing research” but fill the (historical) gaps and omissions in the answers themselves.

*Herstory*, as a type of feminist research, is

not a previously missing addendum to current subjects of research in the form of the uncultivated female subject. It runs counter to these subjects. It is cross-thinking, counter-questioning, counter-seeing, contradiction, protest. It is thus also indifferent to the reproach of one-sidedness. As long as it does not reduce itself or allow itself to be reduced to what is “female-specific,” it is not one-sided or half-true. It seeks to uncover the standardized systems, understandings, and lies of the androcentric worldview. (2001, 164)



Finally, I would suggest that the restorative power of radical feminist narratives consists in a dialectical relationship between the text and the reader, and as such has a therapeutic function, as can be observed in the two narratives (novels) to follow.

DANCING THROUGH THE MINEFIELD<sup>26</sup>: SALLY MILLER GEARHART'S *THE WANDERGROUND*  
AND ALICE WALKER'S *THE TEMPLE OF MY FAMILIAR*

A woman has nothing to laugh about when the symbolic order collapses. She can take pleasure in it, if by identifying with the mother, the vaginal body, she imagines she is the sublime, repressed forces which return through the fissures of the order. But she can just as easily die from this upheaval... if she has been deprived of a successful maternal identification and has found in the symbolic paternal order her one superficial, belated and easily severed link with life. (Kristeva 1986, 150)

Drawing on identification with the mother/ nature as a persistently reoccurring theme in early feminist fiction, I will now compare two American (U.S.) narratives, Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1984) and Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), as contributing to a Kristevian "taking pleasure" in the collapse of 'the symbolic'. Although deriving from different cultural backgrounds (Gearhart being of Anglo/German ethnicity, and Walker Afro-American), both stories are *herstorical* fantasies similarly inspired by 'rediscoveries' of the repressed, 'forgotten' origin, with leading metaphors of the sovereign queen /witch and the healing mother /nature. In blending mythic, historical, and fantastic motifs, they are constructed as order-less, as synthesizing rather than analyzing radical feminist stances, as speaking the body/nature rather than as self-conscious writing literature, as articulating rather than evaluating desire. The 'witch', as she appears in these narratives, belongs to the newly valorized sphere of speech: she speaks about herself, about her presence, and about her 'origin'. Her voice, charismatic, seductive, convincing, and 'cool', often acoustically mirrors the figure of a fortune-teller whose predictions turn into an

intrinsic model of her narrative, a metaphoric/ metonymic picture of her own therapeutic methodology.

Commenting on such feminist preoccupations with 'origin', Butler sees them as "a strategic tactic within a narrative that, by telling a single, authoritative account about an irrecoverable past, makes the constitution of the law appear as a historical inevitability" (1990, 36). Yet can the 'forgotten origin' actually provide a form of feasible therapy? Troublesome and risky, as Carter and Purkiss believe, these "rediscoveries" operate with "mythic versions of women," often attacked as "consolatory nonsenses" (Carter 2000, 5), "disabling rather than enabling for women" (Purkiss 1996, 43). Indeed, imagining a post-patriarchal future, Gearhart offers an eco-feminist construction of "Womanpower" which intentionally deploys the binary of witchcraft (feminine nature) as opposed to reason (masculine technology).<sup>27</sup> *The Wanderground. Stories of the Hill Women* (1978) is a radical separatist lesbian manifesto addressing women's incompatibility with masculinist society and technology. Gearhart's Hill Women live in the near future, developing magical relationships with nature, reproducing by ovular merging, learning to fly at an early age, as well as struggling to live by the non-competitive values and sensibilities which they assume to be unique to a female homosexual economy. This condition reminds us of Irigaray's challenges to the order of sexual indifference:

given that the first body [women] have any dealing with is a woman's body, that the first love they share is mother love, it is important to remember that women always stand in an archaic and primal relationship with what is known as homosexuality. For their part, men always stand in an archaic relationship with heterosexuality, since the first object of their love and desire is a woman. (2000, 44)

Moreover, as Kolodny notices, what was at stake in the seventies, when Gearhart's narrative was written, was "not so much literature or criticism as such, but the historical, social, and ethical consequences of women's participation in, or exclusion from, either enterprise"

(1997, 171). Invented as a counterstatement to these enterprises, Gearhart's Hill Women are harmoniously synchronized, telepathic witches, involved in highly developed give-and-take processes with the organic world, and further contrasted with an apocalyptic, collapsing (male) civilization.

'Earthsister,' [Athea] said aloud to the water, I want to join you. The word seemed to come from all around her, Join. A simple response... With only tactic awareness now of her swimming, she shortstretched to the companions who swam with her. A whole school responded as if one fish. 'You are in trouble?' 'Yes,' she sent back. 'I need air and light.' 'Not far away,' assured the fish. 'A few more of your strokes'. (Gearhart 1985, 11)

The 'Wanderground' (the witches' geographical location), represents a "Gaian ecosystem," envisioned by Rosemary Ruther as one that regards every creature "as something like a cell in our bodies, each species as something like an organ" (1992, 118)<sup>28</sup>. However, in Gearhart's story, men are still excluded from this harmonious "coevolution": "Love man? The idea did not fit. It was uncomfortable and backwards in her mind. She tried it from every angle but it would not adjust" (Gearhart 1985, 2).<sup>29</sup> The dystopian atmosphere of the male-dominated City, of the New Witch Trials, the compulsory marriages, polygamy, male escorts, sexual harassment, and institutionalized prostitution from which they have escaped, still haunts the memories of the Hill Women. These memories, stored telepathically, serve as historical lessons for the youngest of the Hill Women, born parthenogenetically in the 'Wanderground'.

In concert with Cixous's and Irigaray's theories, Gearhart draws on a female biological predisposition, perhaps something like a natural "difference," affirming the possibility of collective solidarity, and enabling women to rebel against the politics of heterosexuality in the City. As if 'borrowed' from Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, her "rebels" are witch-Amazons<sup>30</sup>, warriors riding bare-breasted under a brilliant helm of crescent horns, at the point in history when

there was one rape too many... the earth finally said 'no'. There was no storm, no earthquake, no tidal wave or volcanic eruption, no specific moment to mark its happening. It only became apparent that it happened, and that it happened everywhere. (Gearhart 1985, 171)

The narrative, unlike Wittig's however, offers no way out of the polarized feminine-masculine paradigm unless a mutual understanding and acceptance of the autonomy of the 'other' is granted.<sup>31</sup> In order to preserve its independent status, the 'other', for Gearhart, needs to remain the *other*. The *other*, representing the "feminine" or semiotic pleasure, is not bothered to know by whom or what it has been named. *It* neither reads books nor produces culture. *It* refuses to recognize a linear advancement (progress) as transforming the *natural* into the artificial. Gearhart's *other* is simply "suspended between two poles of desire, deadlocked between contrary forces," and "hence polar or dichotomous rather than dialectical" (Pratt 1981, 177-6)<sup>32</sup>. Envisioned as matriarchy, the *other* stands for a positive sovereignty and incompatibility with phallocentric culture, and in this particularly "sovereign" context, Gearhart's account connects with Alice Walker's Afro-American narrative. As employed by Walker, the matriarchal structure refers to the mothers "untouched" by the symbolic order:

We lived at the edge of an immense woods, in the kinds of houses, made of straw, that people built; insubstantial, really flimsy little things, somewhat fanciful, like an anthill or a spider's web, thrown up in an hour against the sun. My mother was queen of our group; a small group or tribe we were. Never more than a couple of hundred of us, sometimes fewer. But she was not 'queen' in the way people think of queens today. No, that would have been *incomprehensible* to her, *horrid*. I suppose she was what queens were originally, though: A wise woman, a healer, a woman of experience and vision, a woman superbly trained by her mother (1990 392, my italics).

Matriarchy, as imagined by Gearhart and Walker, has no link with "the symbolic paternal order" (Kristeva 1986, 150); it "takes place" seasonally in cyclical occurrence; it never precedes or follows patriarchal mechanisms, being incongruent, unrelated, but also abstract. Acclaimed by Walker as the era of the mother goddess,<sup>33</sup> matriarchy develops into a positive and powerful

concept of female prehistory. Both Gearhart's and Walker's notion(s) of a utopian future and reinvented prehistory radically expand Western concepts of the female presence over time, as broadly analyzed by Carol Christ in the *Rebirth of the Goddess*<sup>34</sup>. In Gearhart's particularly utopian projection of matriarchy, the lack of compatibility suggests no interference and no future cooperation. Perceived in this matriarchal dimension, the cult of the "Earth Herself and the healing of Her ten-thousand-year-long-rape," has a symbolic, even religious quality that connects with the (patriarchal) fear of the archaic mother. This link becomes evident in the imbedded (*her*)story of eleven warriors (wonderwomen) emerging from the forest to fight against demoralized manhood. The mother (nature) opposes militant technology which is connected with numerous evils such as "rape, genocide, and imperialism, with starvation and homelessness, the poisoning of the environment" (1985, 126); Gearhart's list is long). As a radical feminist re-inscription of an archetype, the narrative offers a "static vision of the witch" (Purkiss 1996, 10)<sup>35</sup> that identifies culturally victimized (castrated) women with untamed nature and links the feminine with mystical powers acting as vital elements in their favor. Influenced by Merchant's eco-feminist affiliation of women to nature, Gearhart's witches act in the plural, act *now*, and finally act for themselves.<sup>36</sup> The depiction of nature as untamed, and hence culturally unpredictable and "feminine," also echoes Ynestra King's claims to a "renewed understanding of [*our*] relationship to nature, of [*our own*] bodily nature and nonhuman nature around us" (1983, 120)<sup>37</sup>. For Gearhart and King alike, "the earth, like a lover, like herself, is a 'sister' who has suffered, yet with great intelligence, has survived," to quote from King's "Toward an Ecological Feminism and Feminist Ecology" (1983, 19).

Furthermore, in Gearhart's narrative, the witch turns from being a carnivalesque figure into a figure of ritual. The Hill Women live and survive thanks to a complex ceremonial sharing: they sleep, eat, work and love in constant communication with nature. Their awareness is no longer that

of a self, it has a plural, ritualistic and to some extent “sacred” character, and converges with ecofeminist aims at revealing the complex interconnectedness of living organisms. Re-inscribing the culturally abject menstrual blood into a sacred ritual, Gearhart introduces the image of the Deep Cella, a monstrous generative womb, “crowded with women, sitting on the upward spiralling path, naked and gleaming bodies moving rhythmically to and fro to the sound of their own humming... never ceasing steady vocal rumbling” (1985, 55). This image serves as a metaphorical appropriation of the semiotic chora, and a return to its repressed forces. Consequently, in *The Wanderground*, it is only the maternal ‘feminine’ that is communal, holistic and intuitive and that offers a viable choice for survival. In contrast, the ‘masculine’ powers are destructive and fundamentally evil, allowing no cooperation, perhaps with the exception of “gentle” homosexual men who try to contact the witches in order to learn from them but have so far been rejected. Gearhart’s separatist position is particularly important in the context of feminist rethinking of the ‘feminine’. It shows, as Kolodny argues,

an acute attentiveness to the ways in which certain power relations – usually those in which males wield various forms of influence over females – are inscribed in the texts (both literary and critical), that we have inherited, not merely as subject matters, but as the unquestioned, often unacknowledged *given* of the culture. (1997, 173)

However, as employed in Gearhart’s narrative, the ‘feminine’ indicates a belief in woman’s inherent ‘femaleness’, a blend of female biology and spirituality, and precisely for this reason becomes problematic. As an “unacknowledged *given* of the culture” (Carter 2000, 5) on one hand, aimed persistently at women’s subjugation, the ‘feminine’ cannot possibly define female spirituality other than by confining it to the same phallogentric structure it derives from. Understood as a conceptual deconstruction, on the other hand, “the feminine,” as Carter argues, cannot be limited to an inherently “female” mythic spirituality that “gives women emotional satisfaction... at the price of obscuring the real conditions of

life" (2000, 5). In supplying the 'feminine' with all the 'unfeminine', and therefore 'unnatural' characteristics that phallogentric oppression attempted to avoid (woman as a masculine warrior, a self-sufficient provider for the family, an active political body), Gearhart attempts but fails to deconstruct the 'feminine'. She seems to ignore the fact that "one isn't born a woman, but "becomes one," as de Beauvoir put it, and that it "is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused" (Moi 1986, 123). Her eco-feminist search for a natural female origin works, paradoxically, against feminist deconstructive theories of no return<sup>38</sup> and against the disruption of binaries. As Butler claims,

[t]he return to biology as the ground of a specific feminine sexuality or meaning seems to defeat the feminist premise that biology is not destiny. But whether feminine sexuality is articulated here through a discourse of biology for purely strategic reasons, or whether it is, in fact, a feminist return to biological essentialism, the characterization of female sexuality as radically distinct from a phallic organization of sexuality remains problematic. (1990, 30)

In imposing a culturally (symbolically) enhanced opposition between male and female, Gearhart's witches ignore the actual, acute differences between wo/men and wo/men, witches and witches, culture and culture.<sup>39</sup> The witches, and Gearhart herself as a radical feminist, are to some extent aware of the fact that their politics and philosophy of sexual difference are far too simplistic, but their mistrust and wariness are stronger than reason, especially since reasoning, entangled in a paternal tradition, is based on technology and (Western, supposedly male) logical development of thought.

Having no alternative discourse to propose, a "woman theoretician is already an exile," for "she speaks a paternal language," but, as Showalter observes, a non-white female theoretician is a double exile, for she speaks a white paternal language (1997, 214-215).

Gearhart's fantasmatic returns to nature, as if balancing the women's exile, are thus

developed in Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* into a specific "Afra"-American terminology<sup>40</sup>, which demonstrates its own linguistic consciousness, distinct from the "white" feminist field. Walker proposes a mixture of conscious and subconscious uses of language, interweaving her autobiography with history and myth that move beyond the Western tradition.<sup>41</sup> She uses the term "womanist" in distinction to "feminist" to provoke the emergence of an understanding of a much wider spectrum of Black womanhood. "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender (1983, xxii)," she writes in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, and calls for a return to a mythical African spirituality which survives in Afro-American women's culture.<sup>42</sup> Charting and analyzing culturally distinct mythical pasts, Walker simply invents her own mythology. Also, rather than imagining the future, she 'returns' to the pre-patriarchy, a process she calls spirituality.

In *The Temple of My Familiar*, the responsibility for the *revision* of the past is attributed to women artists, weavers and musicians, rather than to academic thinkers. Walker describes spirituality as a move "away from sociology, away from the writing of explanations and statistics and further into mystery, into poetry and into prophecy" (1990, 8). The female characters, frequently depicted as spiritually richer and much more powerful than their male counterparts, are not the victim-figures repeatedly found in white feminist criticism of the same period.<sup>43</sup> Their polyphonic stories, proverbs and gospel open the door of the pre-ancient pasts, a gesture, as Walker frequently reminds us, leading away from analysis towards meditation upon cultural differences. Eleonora, one of the characters in *The Temple*, observes in her diary:

There is a little serpent here [she writes in 1922] that is exactly the color of coral. It lives only in certain trees and comes out of its hole, far up the tree, near dusk. It lives on the tree spiders and bugs, and is known to sing. The natives tell me that it sings. They claim they have heard it sing millions of times, and act as if this is entirely ordinary.



Furthermore, they ask why I have not heard it and why it should be so strange. Everything sings, they say" (1990, 239).

According to Walker, if "the past is *closed* ... our very flesh is blind and dumb and cannot truly feel itself. Intuition is given little validation, instinct is feared" (1990, 390). In contrast, her mythic constructions provide the "missing links" to the reinterpreted (open) past and to the present. A key role is therefore assigned to the "forgotten" crone figure, the third figure in the triad often perceived as the virgin, the devouring mother and the wicked witch. The crone maintains the narrative pattern of the (*her*-)story, who, as Miss Lissie, moves consciously from one life into the next, retelling the cosmologies of various religions and people. Her story unfolds like the intrigue of gossip<sup>44</sup> - she is the myth-maker, the fortune-teller and the archaic mother of mankind. By transferring her messages from one era and culture to another, Walker's heroine emphasizes her need to go beyond (Western) culture, and, apparently, to recover the "pre-ancestral heritage" as a form of women's unconscious. Her voice travels in time in order to reach and "open a very important door against memory, against pain" (Walker 1990, 389). Miss Lissie is a fully mature female character, ultimately representing all three aspects of the triad (virgin, mother and crone), and bringing any one of them into play at any time. She is "universal", fantastic, *fantasmatic*, a pre-symbolic virgin-whore, and a wise mother who let her children go at the right moment, an act that if precipitous or delayed can lead the maternal element to become destructive. Like Gearhart's witches, Walker's crone is a living memory; her mind has the capacity to dream, and "just as the memory exists at a deeper level of consciousness than thinking, so the dream world of the memory is at a deeper level still" (Walker 1990, 99):

I lied when I told you I have always been a black woman, and that I can only remember as far as a few thousand years... In addition to being a man, and white, which I was many times ... I was also, at least once, myself a lion. This is one of those dream

memories so frayed around the edges that it is like an old, moth-eaten shawl (1990, 391-402).

As a narrative figure representing the semiotic chora, Walker's crone offers a *fantasmatic* pre-past as a therapeutic tool, a remedy against the universal exclusion of nature.

Thus Walker's Miss Lissie, like Gearhart's Atheca, one of the highly skilled witches in *The Wanderground*, presents a visionary projection of women reunited with nature. These images could be directly contrasted with de Beauvoir's theory of a 'woman' who willingly abandons her "disquieting plantlike mystery"<sup>45</sup> as well as Irigaray's suggestion that women's masks or decorations cover a void, that is, the absence of their self-love, of the 'I' in discourse, and of their desire. Both de Beauvoir and Irigaray refer to the "significance of woman's attire", that is her "decoration... and to be decorated means to be offered" (de Beauvoir 1993, 444); but adornment has a diametrically different implication in Walker's text, where woman is, "entirely used to herself, while man [is] still infatuated with his relative newness. Woman [is] already into adornment... She [is] more like playing with herself" (1990, 61). Like de Beauvoir's woman, she uses "feathers, shells, stones, flowers," but she does it narcissistically, entirely for her own pleasure: "For days she and her sisters hung over the edge of the reflecting pools in the jungle, trying this or that" (1990, 62). The blend of female/feminine pleasures, in Gearhart's and Walker's texts alike, has a religiously utopian character; it is an unconscious, semiotic pleasure of co-existing with nature. Its strategically religious aspect, however, becomes evident only if confronted with the phallocentric and symbolic function:

Our mothers taught us that in the old, old days, when they were the grandmothers and their grandmothers were old... only women had been priests. But really in the beginning they were not priests to themselves; it was the men who made them so. Well, what happened is that in the beginning... there was also a woman, and in the process of life and change she produced a being somewhat different unlike herself... The rest of the time they spent gathering food. Occasionally they were host to a man, whom they

played with, especially sexually, until they tired of him. But it was these abandoned men who, over time,... spread the word among the other men who lacked their experience... one of the men told of the birth among the women... Immediately they imagined a *mujer muy grande*, larger than a sky, producing, somehow, the earth. A goddess. (Walker, 1990 61-62)

While Gearhart postulates a radical difference, Walker's narrative proposes an ultimate refusal of difference, striving toward an androgynous ideal<sup>46</sup>, that is, towards "the ultimate lack of mastery over the one" as "related to the lack of mastery over the other" (Weil 1992, 36). Their utopian enterprises are both marked by a naiveté that produces powerful celebrations of womanhood at the cost of ignoring their own disruptive potential, underscored by Gearhart's ethnocentricity and Walker's all-inclusive, globalizing projects. Their fantasies of goddesses, warriors and healers belong to the type categorized by Nicole Loraux in "What is a Goddess?" as "a powerful fantasy with an astonishing capacity to resist criticism" that "unites militant proponents of matriarchy with worshippers of a prehistoric goddess with great powers of consolation" (1992, 36). At the same time, however, as criticized by Kristeva, Carter or Purkiss, these mythic reconstructions tend to elevate a "lost matriarchy," and often "relegate female power in politics or religion to a lost past," (Purkiss 1996, 43), or in Gearhart's case, to an unattainable future.<sup>47</sup> They do not deal with the danger that "to associate [female power] with the absence of civilisation, technology and modernity, is to write women out of the picture" (1996, 43).

These radical mythologies, with their hysterical (and) *herstorical* inconsistencies, function as proposals for alternative forms of female mimesis. They do not, however, escape the stereotype of sexual desire/ pollution ascribed to and inscribed on the female body. Dancing thus through the minefield, Gearhart's 'posthistoric' future and Walker's prehistory have no place in 'the symbolic'; the 'post-' and the 'pre-' expel them to the other, the

unconscious, the unknown, to the primitive spaces associated with the 'naturalness' of the female condition. In one of the childbirth scenes described by Walker, Lissie, immediately after delivering her baby, "started looking for a knife to cut the cord," and by the time her horror-struck partner was able to find one, "Lissie had bitten through the cord with her teeth" (1990, 127). He describes the scene:

'God, it's like rubber,' she said, making a face and spitting into the rag. And I looked at Lissie sitting up now with the naked baby next to her naked body, and I thought to myself how primitive it was.

When the afterbirth came – a lump of bloody, liverish-looking stuff that made me feel even woozier than I was – she wrapped it in newspaper and gave it to me to bury at the corner of the house for luck, so that we could have a houseful of babies. When she wasn't looking though, I threw it into the fire. It wouldn't burn. It put the fire out. (1990, 127-8)

As if in a psychoanalytical transference, both Gearhart's and Walker's women have been conceptualized as *different* on purpose, and connect with a supposedly specifically feminine pleasure 'outside' of culture. Their stories or prophecies about a different form of life transform women's oppression into a fantasy that restores both the appealing and the appalling powers of the archaic womb. They certainly do not intend to remove women from the entrapment of otherness, and have perhaps "nothing to laugh about when the symbolic order collapses" (Kristeva 1986, 150). However, in their disassociation from 'the symbolic', they constitute a new type of feminine pleasure as a therapeutic space, evoked by Lissie's type of birth-giving pleasure which connects with Irigaray's self-touching and self-exploring. Considering both the problematic and therapeutic aspects of their narrative methodologies, Gearhart's and Walker's notions of the future or of prehistory must be taken into account as powerful feminist *theologies*. They cleverly demonstrate the feminist need for a different mythology, a therapy in which the opposition becomes pointless between theoretical, cultural and sublime discourses on one side, and creative, semiotic and vulgar

ones on the other. And as Kolodny suggests, they can “help us learn to negotiate the minefield, if not with grace, then with at least a clearer comprehension of its underlying patterns” (1997, 175). While the attitude and techniques of these authors are associated with a certain current of second-wave feminism in North America, they provoked echoes of similar standpoints in Europe.

WOMEN ARE FLYING WHEN MEN ARE NOT LOOKING: IRMTRAUD MORGNER'S *AMANDA*.  
*EIN HEXENROMAN*<sup>48</sup>

‘I can’t,’ I repeated so that I could feel my voice which was miserable, but better than no voice at all. ‘Then learn it,’ said the serpent. ‘From whom?’ I asked, confused. ‘From yourself,’ said the serpent. (Morgner 1983)<sup>49</sup>

To break up, to touch the masculine integrity of the body image, is to return to a stage ... endowed with a destructive power: these bits of body attack, burn, shred. An entire fantastic world, made up of bits and pieces, opens up beyond the limit, as soon as the line is crossed. (Clément and Cixous 1986, 33)

To enlarge the cultural framework of the *herstorical* tradition of witches, I have selected *Amanda. Ein Hexenroman* (Amanda. A Witch Novel) (1983)<sup>50</sup>, written by an East German writer, Irmtraud Morgner, with a far more ironical and detached type of feminist engagement.<sup>51</sup> Although Morgner herself is little known outside German-speaking countries, the author of an extensive study of her work, Alison Lewis, claims that “her experiments with forms of the fantastic offer one of the most comprehensive and extensive examples of a feminist critique of the history of patriarchal institutions and practices to emerge out of second wave feminist movements” (Lewis 1995, 1)<sup>52</sup>. Morgner’s philosophical position seems to fall somewhere between de Beauvoir’s envisaging of a socially transformed society, in which women would have equal rights to education, employment, and public life, and Irigaray’s positioning of woman “as an ‘other’” that

would not simply be the 'other of the same', but a self-defined woman who would not be satisfied with sameness, but whose otherness and difference would be given social and symbolic representation. (Whitford 2000, 24)

Thus, although Morgner is not opposed to women's struggles for equal rights, she does not believe that equality can be achieved as long as women are objects of exchange within a masculine sexual imaginary, clearly sharing Irigaray's standpoint, which she expressed in her major work, *The life and adventures of Trobadora Beatrice as chronicled by her minstrel Laura* (1974).

*Amanda*, the work selected for analysis here, appeared in 1983 as a continuation of the intricate story of Laura Salman who, inspired by Beatrice, initiates a cultural revolution against masculinist centrisms. Intended as a "training work to recall the forgotten Sirens' voice" (Morgner 1983, 657), this novel re-writes the concept of "heresy" as a means of preserving "the possible of the day after tomorrow" (1983, 246), and as an allusion to the "impossibility" of the present. Referring to the seventies and early eighties in East Berlin, the present embodies a blend of communist reality and *herstorical* fantasy, employing a heterogeneous mixture of female characters, from mythical women and witches to Greek goddesses, Sirens and legendary medieval characters. The 'real' in this novel is to be understood as a historically determined system of dominant philosophical assumptions upheld as "reality," that is a homogeneous, one-dimensional, and therefore oppressive entity. In contrast, the female fantasy that coexists within the phallogentric 'real' is far from unified, and has an anarchical potential, but its plurality denotes fragmentation. In supplementing 'reality' with surrealistic, dispersed female elements, Morgner focuses on the illusionary character of the 'real,' as suspended in a rigid binary opposition between the phallogentric (both realistic and mythic) world and the dispersed subversive and fantasmatic women. For example, when Laura is visited as a child by the daughter of Frau Holle (the

fairy-tale witch), “her playmate, Gerhard, appears not to notice anything at all unusual and remains unaware of the exchange taking place between the two women” (Lewis 1995, 36). The borders separating the real/historical and the fantastic/grotesque are sometimes abandoned altogether, but the fusion does not necessarily indicate that choices are available or that plurality is favoured. It serves rather as a disguise for the conflictual power relations, political paradoxes and gender imbalances permeating, according to Morgner, every aspect of women’s lives.<sup>53</sup>

At every turn, like Walker in *The Temple of My Familiar*, Morgner re-invents and re-feminizes mythology. In her version of the myth of Pandora, she rejects the classical depiction of Pandora as a dashingly beautiful but calamitous woman sent to earth by vengeful Gods who planned to destroy mankind’s happiness. According to Hesiod’s account (as summarized by Morgner), when Epimetheus, against the will of his brother, offers shelter to Pandora, she opens her box and all the evil elements in it are distributed over the earth. Only hope remains inside the hastily covered container (Morgner 1983)<sup>54</sup>. Morgner, however, introduces a correction to the story by depicting her Pandora as a source of knowledge about ‘woman’, that is, as an “Allgiver” (1983, 87), and as a womb that, depending on the speaker, dispenses “all the good or all the evil things” (Morgner 1983)<sup>55</sup>. Again, a parallel association with Irigaray’s work can be drawn. In *Speculum*, Irigaray refers to the dominant fantasy of the mother, a “receptacle for the (re)production of sameness,” and analyzes the phallogentric need “to represent her as a closed volume, a container”:

his desire is to immobilize her, keep her under his control, in his possession, even in his house [Carter’s *Scarlet House*]. He needs to believe that the container belongs to him. The fear is of the ‘open container,’ the ‘incontournable volume’, that is to say, the volume without contours. (Whitford 2000, 28)

The model for her Pandora, as Lewis explains, was provided by Goethe's fragment, 'Pandora's Return' (*Pandoras Wiederkunft*)<sup>56</sup>, which refers to Pandora's box as a container of the "figures of the imagination and goods with wings: images of the future" (Morgner 1983, 82).

Whereas the figure of Pandora functions in Hesiod's epics as an aetiological myth, introduced to explain the necessity for men to work for their livelihoods and the existence of such social evils as hunger and illness, Morgner uses the same mythological figure to explain the loss of human qualities that have traditionally been associated with the feminine. (Lewis 1995, 237)

In Morgner's narrative, it is Epimetheus who opens the box, against Pandora's will. All the attributes cultivated by women over the ages, and capitalized by Morgner (Love of the Earth, a sense of Harmony and Nurturing, the ability to Compromise and to make Peace) fly out, and only Hope remains (Morgner 1983, 83). Pandora realises that in order to preserve her only remaining gift to humanity she must abandon the phallogentric space in which she lives; she must flee, like the Zoharic Lilith<sup>57</sup>. The concept of hope, in *Amanda*, "is entirely stripped of the negative connotations it has in Hesiod's account and becomes – instead of a synonym for delusions – the key to the salvation of the human race and to maintaining faith in [the] future" (Lewis 1995, 237).

Although phallogentric space is conceptualised in *Amanda* in direct opposition to what Lewis denotes as "the feminine," Morgner's concept of the 'feminine' is not as straightforward as it might seem: it is neither a phallogentric construct nor a deconstructive projection.<sup>58</sup> The feminine image is simultaneously "unreal," "unrealistic", and "irresponsible," forcing women like Laura to "continue to be content with private responsibility and delegate public responsibility to specialists" (Lewis's translation 1995, 222). Therefore, Morgner proposes her own specialists (Arke, the serpent daughter of Gaja, and Beatriz, the Siren) who stand for the "monstrous" rather than the feminine and border on,



rather than represent, female gender:

Beatriz, as the only siren already awakened, has the difficult task of coordinating or overseeing the various activities to bring the planet back from the edge of destruction. Sirens, by virtue of their name, have the ability to alarm and warn of pending danger and yet they are not prophets of salvation... Their song must seduce Prometheus so that he will be diverted from his self-destructive path. He will then recognize his work as fragmentary and without future and recall Pandora and her one remaining gift to humankind. (Lewis 1995, 239)<sup>59</sup>

Beatriz is depicted as an alienated creature living on the borderline between suffering and freedom, since "all creative jobs require a high measure of loneliness. A woman who devotes herself to writing and similar activities, has to put up with loneliness" (Morgner 1983).<sup>60</sup> The awakened Siren finds out, among other things, that although she has claws, she is mute. Her lack of a tongue is disabling and depressing, especially since "singing was the Sirens' mother tongue" (1983).<sup>61</sup> Moreover, her voiceless status (as explained by Arke) is nothing new, for "the sirens had already been silent during Odysseus' life time. Proof: the earplugs. Such a ridiculous means of defence against the song of the sirens discredited the legend" (Lewis's translation 1995, 246). "For the first time," Arke continues, "I have seen the Sirens at the navel of the world... In the old days all wise women lived their second lives in the form of Sirens. There were many Sirens then" (1983).<sup>62</sup> "But later the warlike men usurped power and introduced what people today call history" (Lewis's translation 1995, 243). The navel serves here as a metaphor of centrality in the sea-abyss, the "strange lands beset by powerful females" – Cirke, Calypso, the Sirens, Scylla (Brilliant 1995, 167), and of a lost connection with the archaic maternal body associated with the ocean.

In wartime the creatures fell silent. Then they remembered and regained their voice. However, when the periods of time between the wars grew shorter and shorter the sirens no longer had any time to remember. Wise women also became rarer and rarer. (Lewis's translation 1995, 244)

Arke's own situation is even less encouraging: "Her wings were scratched. She was missing some of her scales. Scabrous face, mysteriously smiling as usual. A sad sight" (Morgner 1983)<sup>63</sup>. Her task is to persuade Beatriz to exercise her voice, nevertheless, since it will be needed, and to write, that is, like Arachne, to weave her/story on paper if she cannot sing. "Not infrequently," Arke explains, "it is a matter of avoiding the most immediate things because we do not know how to deal with them" (Lewis's translation 1995, 225). "Hurry up!" – "Where to?" [the Siren] asked. – "Into yourself," said the serpent. "Learn through unlearning. Exercise!" (Morgner 1983)<sup>64</sup>. In an increasingly bizarre development of events, Arke remains consistent in fulfilling her goal to mobilize and unite women. She does not give up, even when Beatriz, imprisoned in a zoo cage, and classified as a "strix sirensis" (1983, 479), has to put up with frequent visitors admiring her as "a rare type of a bird living on paper, but no newspaper – blank paper, an article in shortage" (1983, 435)<sup>65</sup>. The "naked sign," attached to her cage but providing no translation or information on the creature's origin, attracts many and disturbs Beatriz in writing her project" (Morgner 1983)<sup>66</sup>. Moreover, "in the middle of September two men in blue uniforms" remove the sign entirely. They do not bring any new sign, but simply "a new assumption. Whispering. Under the seal of silence" (1983, 542). Beatriz is now believed to be "a woman, admittedly a peculiarly small specimen" (1983, 543). Later on, Arke herself places a sign (on Beatriz's cage), saying "Natrix pandorensis" (1983, 598), and the Siren, kidnapped by the witches, undergoes a tongue operation (she can now speak), and will be installed as Pandora. From now on she is to act "in woman-hating cultures" against a particular type of masculine desire ("the desire for the forbidden" (1983, 52)), and to spread the mythology of the wise women all over the globe. This job is, however, a long term investment since, as Morgner explains in an interview with Karin Huffzky (1997),

[c]ustoms that have evolved over thousands of years cannot be changed in decades. This is an unpleasant realisation, because our lives are so short. Impatience is understandable, but unfortunately not appropriate to great historical moments. (2001, 272)

In the meantime, the myth of the witches meeting with the devil on the Brocken mountain, known in Berlin as *Brockengesichte*, is perpetuated in variations and fractions of witches, wise-, mad- and superwomen, all entangled in “true” (logical, realistic, real) and imaginary nightmares. Laura accidentally discovers a secret meeting place of one of such fractions, and is immediately invited to take part in their ‘sabbath’:

Would you like a laugh-juice, a courage-juice, or a power-juice, asked the speaker, as if Laura were known to everybody [in the Huggentottendom] and belonged to the group. Laura declined. The speaker filled a glass, forced Laura to drink and toasted her. The whole assembly toasted back. Laura drank. The juice *truly* hardened the inside of her mouth, flew sharply through her larynx and warmed her stomach. The warmth was *real*. The glass. The hand that held it. A nightmare? (Morgner 1983, my italics)<sup>67</sup>

Thus, in concert with *herstorical* politics, Morgner’s fantasy offers a form of estrangement, enabling women to remove their “feminine” bodies from their entrapment in “a masculine economy of desire”, and to un-domesticate a desire that has “only permitted passion in love” (Lewis’s translation 1995, 253). Here, Morgner’s argument that women not only live in patriarchy, but the patriarchy lives through them (1983)<sup>68</sup>, connects with Cixous’s concept of an “imaginary zone” that is to be found in every patriarchy: “somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today” (Cixous and Clément 1986, 6). In Morgner’s text, this “zone,” as a phallogentric exclusion, is assigned to the “magic mountains”:

Within an orderly society the possible of today and tomorrow is conceivable. The impossible, that is, the possible of the day after tomorrow is properly experienced as lack of order and is only conceivable on magic mountains. And the visitors [to] such mountains are called heretics and witches today and tomorrow, and sages the day after tomorrow. (Lewis’s translation 1995, 213)

As a result of womb envy (“for how should a man compete with someone who can give birth?” (Lewis’s translation 1995, 257)), Laura, like many other ‘real’ women, has been split into two halves by Kolbuk, the “major devil” who, as we find out later, simply follows the divine example. Laura, the smaller and thicker half, remains as the ‘real’ single working mother in the city, at a time when “the much-propagated double burden was beginning to peak: Hold down a job on the side and at the same time be the perfect housewife, good mother, smooth lover” (Schwarzer 2001, 221). The other half, the tall and slim Amanda, has been kidnapped by Kolbuk and imprisoned in Horselberg, the mythical underworld of East Germany’s magic mountain, which in recent times (in the novel) doubles as a brothel (Morgner 1983)<sup>69</sup>.

To a large extent, Morgner’s Amanda functions in the story as a Lilith figure, providing a symbolic image of the female beyond the maternal, and conveying her ‘dark’ (uncontrollable and threatening) attributes.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, drawing on the Zoharic legend of Lilith, Morgner re-writes her with radical feminist values in a conversation between the archangel and the devil:

The people who were created by Mother Earth continued to live in peace. But the first human pair that was created by your God could not stop quarrelling. Because Lilith did not agree to succumb to Adam’s will. She said: “You are just like me. We are both created from earth. When Adam did not accept it, Lilith uttered a magic word and flew away. But your God, in response to Adam’s complaint, sent out three angels who found Lilith in the Red Sea. They couldn’t convince the woman to come back. So God was annoyed and divided her into two halves. The bottom part was presented to Adam as his second wife Eve, the top part was thrown out into the underworld which is ruled by my master, Satan. It retained the name Lilith, but it was you and the other archangels who were ordered to murder unborn children, while they spread the belief that it was Lilith. Division was God’s invention. (Morgner 1983)<sup>71</sup>

Representing the potentially rebellious part of Laura, Amanda-Lilith is paralysed, suspended, and isolated in the “zone” of the imaginary, the only proper place for heretics and witches. Linked with sexual promiscuity and lasciviousness, Amanda falls outside ‘the symbolic’ and the social order, and can be further associated with Michelet’s witch, who, as Clément argues,

“will be arrested when she has finally become beautiful – in insolently good health, too comfortable in her own body, not sickly enough” (Clément and Kristeva 2001, 130). As Lewis observes, Morgner’s strategy of reclaiming the power of sexuality is similar in many respects to Western feminist theories of “a pre-social state of female sexuality,” although her belief in “the transformative power of female eroticism...is tempered with a good deal of scepticism” (1995, 177) According to Lewis, to “be banished to the margins means that the heretics and dissidents in fact occupy an intermediary position, a space in the interstices between East and West, between antagonistic systems. At the same time this is also the military space of No Man’s Land, off limits and out of bounds to the ‘real’ women” (1995, 214), such as Laura, whose voices/bodies are disciplined by phallogentric interference.

Following Lewis’s argument, Morgner’s belief in the reunification of women’s two halves is “linked to the survival of wishful thinking” (Morgner 1983, 284), because of the never closing gap between feminist theory and practice. In fact, Laura’s bodily deformity and spiritual weakness result in a fear that “could be defeated by Amanda only,” but it will not happen “by means of violent speeches and argumentation alone. The words mean little against the devil’s prohibition” (Morgner 1983)<sup>72</sup>. Although Amanda and Laura alike want to find out what is the “mother of all things” (1983, 141), the first is a visionary full of hope and optimism, the other a sceptic who “bears the [double] burden alone”:

We have abolished God, well and good. But we cannot do away with the things that religion deals with. Death, illness, chance, fortune, ill-fortune – how can the inexorable vicissitudes of life be handled on one’s own? Whoever lives without God cannot delegate responsibility, and must bear this burden alone. (Lewis’s translation 1995, 263)

Earlier, in her interview with Karin Huffzky (1975), Morgner expresses a similar opinion, and asserts that,

[a]fter all equal rights are of no use to women if they still have double duties. These laws thus do not simply guarantee rights, they also stir up dissatisfaction on the part of women and, in fact, encourage it. (2001, 276)

When Laura, disgusted and tired as usual, attempts to leave the Huggentottendom's assembly, "a certain Barbara held her back. 'Pleased to meet you,' Barbara greeted her. 'I am not pleased,' hissed Laura. 'That will change,' Barbara answered, relaxed, and sat Laura down next to her at the table." Further on, Laura witnesses

sharp sexual and political jokes, cacophonous singing, partly sung with full mouths, since the women not only drank, but ate without restraint. They ate the richest food, high in calories: Hungarian salami, pickled pork knuckles, whipping cream, sweets. Were they not personally responsible for their figure, or socially responsible for keeping their workers' bodies in healthy condition? And what was really amazing: were they never tired at all? Laura was dog-tired. Did this type of women make it through the nights by sleeping all day? Laura suspected there were housewives around her. Naturally, not the real ones who had to serve the household, the husband and children - but women with housekeepers. (Morgner 1983)<sup>73</sup>

However, Laura soon finds out that these "housewives" are far from being privileged. When the Sabbath night is over, they hurry home on their broomsticks. There, fully involved in all sorts of private and public activities, they are

'...preparing breakfast, sending their kids to school, gently waking up their husbands and leaving for their places'. 'What places?', asked Laura. 'University, conveyor belt... music school, editors' office, marriage fraud office, academy, poets' society etc'. (1983)<sup>74</sup>

These housewives are Morgner's ironic versions of 'superwomen,' alluding to communist achievements in women's mobilization and entry into the labor force: supporting their legal and economic independence, providing affordable childcare, and increasing participation in education and politics, as well as adopting a more critical stand toward the West. However, they conceptually connect with a Western feminist thinker's hesitation as to whether to refer to the superwoman as a syndrome or as a necessity:

All I can tell you is that I believe it's a lot easier to write books while bringing up kids than to bring up kids while working nine to five plus housekeeping... Talk about

superwomen, those are the superwomen. Those are the mothers up against the wall. Those are the marginal women, without either privacy or publicity; and it's because of them more than anyone else that the woman artist has a responsibility to 'try to change the life in which she is also immersed'. (le Guin 1989, 235)

Most of them, and this connects them with Laura, enjoy their "kitchen" as a *herstorical* place of inconsistency and subversion. Morgner's "kitchen" is a central metaphor for the fantasmatic place of female alchemists' experiments (1983)<sup>75</sup>. Both sovereign and "safe", it is the place of witches' cauldrons, potions and brews. Laura's former husband, now married to her best friend, Vilma, never enters a kitchen,

'Because he is not allowed to?' asked Laura. 'Because he doesn't want to,' said Vilma. 'Never?' 'Never, I believe.' 'And what if he did one day...' 'Oh my God,' Vilma cried out, 'if we were discovered, I would be lost.' Laura couldn't understand why Vilma suddenly spoke loudly if she did not want to be discovered, and did not pay attention even to the most primitive rules of conspiracy. 'The most safe of all places is under the detective's desk,' said Vilma in her low, back to normal, voice. (1983)<sup>76</sup>

Morgner's belief in the power of places, miracles, and fantasy can be read, according to Lewis, as a survival strategy, as "a means of staving off the threat of stagnation and imposed immobility; it encourages faith in the possibility of social change and therefore in the improvement of existing conditions for women" (1995, 17). Her use of matriarchy and prehistory, like Gearhart's or Walker's, is "more utopian in character than archaeological." She is not at all interested in a chronology "ascertaining the historical and social conditions that gave rise to matriarchy" (1995, 231)<sup>77</sup>. Subverting the usual representations of the socialist patriarchal 'reality', Morgner's return to the imaginary marks the return of the values repressed by this 'reality' (Lewis 1995, 2). Engaging in a Bakhtinian dialogical discourse, her fantasy simultaneously reinforces and undermines the "real". Echoes of Bakhtin's medieval laughter in Morgner's narrative signal "a victory over fear of authority and absolutes," a victory "over fear of the holy and forbidden, of the power of God and the Devil, and of the power of people, of authoritarian rules and bans, of death and retaliation in the afterworld, and

above all of Hell which is even more terrifying than earth” (Lewis’s translation 1995, 203). However, the Blocksberg, the site of witches’ rites, is far from “the most liberal of all systems” (Lewis’s translation 1995, 204). Its authority tolerates and actually enhances rehearsals of a revolt against it, because these rehearsals, including the witches’ orgasmic laughter, are faked. After the performance, the witches’ leader, along with the devils’ leader and his omnipresent raven, reverse the upside down universe back into the norm. The section from Bakhtin quoted by Morgner in *Amanda*,

concludes with the remark that these carnivalistic safety valves in the Middle Ages, like feminist demonstrations, were not an expression of the increasing liberalism of a repressive absolutist regime, but a measure of the degree of oppression of the feudal order, a mark of “a surfeit of oppression” (Morgner 510), which made the need for officially sanctioned outlets all the more necessary. (Lewis 1995, 203)

The fantasmatic carnival of bodies actually has a “critical rather than celebratory” character, since it is meant to “trivialize the tyranny of a particular regime in an exhibitionist display of pluralism” (Lewis 1995, 204). Ultimately “reported to replicate patriarchal relations of exploitation,” the Blocksberg is therefore highly ambivalent in status. It is a “place of double standards” (Morgner 1983, 548), oscillating between fascination and terror, depending on the participant’s gender. Calling to mind Carter’s phallogocentric constructions of female sacrifice and “annihilation” (1996, 421) (which I analyze in Chapter 2), of female entrapment rather than sovereignty, the Blocksberg is a place where women can experiment with the “mimetic mode of appropriating the world” (Morgner 1983, 461):

Just as witchcraft practices, pagan rites, and the medical practices of healers and midwives became equated with heresy and heterodoxy during the religious struggles of the Reformation, the witchcraft practices of Laura and Vilma, their “sleep-substitute” brews and conjuring tricks, make them guilty too of heresy and therefore subject to persecution and surveillance by the state. They are saved, however, by the fact that the state and its citizens would least expect to encounter political heresy in the form of witchcraft. (Lewis 1995, 212)



Vilma, for instance, explains proudly that she has swallowed her “unruly half”, which is now safely stored in a place (the womb), where her “body speeches” are. The invention of body-speak allows her and many other women “to satisfy their need to communicate [among] themselves” (Lewis’s translation 1995, 294), especially since she has realised that most of the energy she requires for living had to be spent on conforming to the system.

Gender roles are not necessarily simply divided between the feminine and the masculine, but the division here ironically echoes the communist assumptions of gender and class equality. The subversive gender, primarily represented by the women-witches, is modelled as a “third” (alternative) gender, and works against the traditional demonization of the female sex. Morgner’s task is to normalize this third gender, in other words, to “rationalize the phenomenon of the witch on a broom” (1983, 36) as a future representative of the entire female sex/ gender. Therefore, as Lewis postulates, “Laura’s final proposal of an alliance with men is essentially not an endorsement of heterosexuality but a necessary political manoeuvre to ensure the success of the emancipation of both sexes” (1995, 185). The witch, as a gender deviation from the existing female/ male binary, has a political character and transforms the monologue (monopoly) of power into a dialogue. Thus, the responsibility for Laura’s split is assigned to women themselves, and in particular to those who are “blind,” nourished with patriarchal dogmas, generations of grandmothers and mothers who urgently need to be informed. It is not a “biological difference, but its ideological consequences” that, as Schwarzer postulated in 1975, “must be categorically eliminated” from women’s lives:

Biology is not destiny. Masculinity and femininity are not nature but culture. In every generation they represent a renewed, forced identification with dominance and subjection. Penises and vaginas don’t make us men and women, but power and powerlessness do. (2001, 223)

The witch thus becomes a mediator between the women's 'forgotten' knowledge and their future im/possibilities. In the image of the witch, as Bovenschen writes, "elements of the past and of myth oscillate, but along with them, elements of a real and present dilemma as well" (2001, 231).

What shall we name the beautiful Amanda?, asked [the woman with the broom]... Amanda Laura, answered Selma and Olga approvingly. And just before they had agreed to name her Laura Waltraut. The woman straightened up, put a paper crown on her head, raised her hands and spoke: "Sejela-mur". The woman introduced herself as Isebel. Then she moved smilingly towards Olga's childbed, sympathized with the fragile mother and her complicated foetus, and entrusted her with a phial. With an order to apply a drop of the phial's elixir to the child daily, morning, noon and evening. And to store the rest securely. Until Amanda is 12 years old. Then she should be entrusted with the phial. Amanda should carry this tiny receptacle with her till the end of her life. (Morgner 1983)<sup>78</sup>

Isebel, and later Amanda, are messengers from the imaginary realm on their way to forge alliances with the other working halves in the GDR and to unite the divisions, splits and fractions among witches. Amanda herself represents the avant-garde of the witches' movement (Morgner 1983, 298), with her increasing awareness of the difficulties in establishing a satisfactory working relationship between lived experience and fantasy. Amanda's mother (Olga) and grandmother (Selma) represent suffocating mothers in direct opposition to Isebel's subversive freedom, and do not trust the woman on the broomstick. They relinquish "Laura's right to call upon the assistance of her severed demonic other half" (Lewis 1995, 161) by throwing away the "irreplaceable" magic potion; "It is left up to Amanda to initiate and maintain contact with Laura, her witch-half in this world" (1995, 161)<sup>79</sup>, while Isebel believes that if not wasted, the potion would have prevented Laura's split altogether (Morgner 1983)<sup>80</sup>. The discrepancy between the ignorant women nourished with patriarchal dogmas for too long and Isebel, the 'enlightened' witch, is furthermore expanded in the following passage-dialogue between Selma and Isebel:

'Poor child!' [said Isebel.] 'Why poor?', Selma protested. 'If I am not wrong, she will be a beauty.' 'Precisely,' said Isebel. 'Why precisely?' protested Selma. 'Men will be fighting to get her.' 'Definitely not,' said Isebel. 'Why not, definitely?', protested Selma. Because she is neither beautiful and stupid, nor ugly and stupid, nor ugly and wise, but beautiful and wise. This combination is the worst of all by which a woman can be defeated.' (Morgner 1983)<sup>81</sup>

Representing the imaginary semiotic dimension, Amanda needs Laura in order to speak and act in 'the symbolic', and dismisses Laura's desire to combat tiredness with alchemy as a "piecemeal solution" (Morgner 1983)<sup>82</sup>, one "that fails to address the underlying problem of the fragmentation of East German women" (Lewis 1995, 177). The very pragmatic Laura, however, continually resists Amanda's efforts "to co-opt her into the struggle for reunification of the two severed female halves" (1995, 177). Laura rejects Amanda as an eccentric witch, and the very word "witch" in connection with herself.<sup>83</sup> She is convinced that she can do without theory and 'lofty ideas', "a cry not unfamiliar to feminists in the West – to solve her immediate practical problems of sleep deficiency" (Lewis 1995, 184). Moreover, Morgner herself clearly privileges Laura's particular form of pragmatic, down-to-earth feminism, "satirizing the type of radical militant feminist opposition represented in the figure of Isebel" (1995, 184). Nevertheless, Amanda's presence in Laura's life will be inadvertently restored through Laura's own "clumsy and naïve use of magic potions and herbal brews" (1995, 215). In search of a sleeping potion, Laura "has unwittingly remembered the traditional knowledge of her historical predecessors" (1995, 215), and manages to create an elixir that "was not a new invention but a repetition of an old one" (Morgner 1983)<sup>84</sup>. Amanda reappears immediately: "I congratulate you and I am proud of you that you can no longer bear the division. The rebellion that will bring us reunion can begin" (Morgner 1983)<sup>85</sup>.

It is amazing, again, what you have managed with your reduced powers. But you too have to finally realise that no original inventions can be expected from divided creatures. It is not a pleasure to realise it, I know. Or do you perhaps believe I have not tried myself to break through the wall? (1983)<sup>86</sup>

Laura, still reluctant to cooperate with Amanda's plan to challenge the Blocksberg, recognizes it finally as an essential strategy in the witches' overall project to reintegrate and unite, since their fragmentation serves patriarchal interests. The "break through the wall" is a clear reference to Germany as a divided country, and the envisioned collapse of the Berlin's Wall alludes to German feminisms divided along the same political axis.

Realizing "that even practical short-term goals cannot be achieved without Amanda's theoretical guidance," Laura overcomes her scepticism towards the witches' feminism<sup>87</sup>. The latter draws on Morgner's political position, as clearly stated the interview with Huffzky: "It is not a question of continuing the war between the sexes that's gone on for who knows how long; it's a question of finally ending this war" (2001, 272). Therefore, as Lewis suggests, Morgner's narrative "can be seen as giving shape to the once hidden and censored text of a female 'political unconscious' that earlier narratives dealing with women's inroads into male-dominated professions and the emancipatory effects of work had suppressed" (1995, 9). The Blocksberg, however, "remains the ground of a still to be realized utopia, a concrete type of utopia no longer the home of the visionaries of the past and not yet the home of the visionaries of the future" (Lewis 1995, 217).

*Amanda* played a relevant role in building the political consciousness of East German women, and in fact, became a well-known feminist manifesto republished in West Germany and influencing other German speaking countries. However, as presented by the next generation of German 'feminist'-witch stories (written, one might say, by Morgner's or Irigaray's 'daughters'), the "political unconscious," although given shape, is still only

a 'reservoir of a yet-to-come,' a creative and regenerative source, a possible female imaginary in which women would be nomads (but no longer in exile), mobile, dancing, taking their own 'house with them'. (Whitford 2000, 73)

BECAUSE IT'S ALL DONE IN PRIVATE: SABINE KORTE'S "HEXENHOCHZEIT" AND IRIS VON FINCKENSTEIN'S "W.I.T.C.H"

In search of a photogenic Women's Lib at home, the magazine *Brigitte* complained coquettishly as late as Spring of 1971: 'German women do not burn bras and wedding dresses, do not storm any beauty contests and anti-emancipation editorial boards, do not advocate getting rid of marriage, and do not compose manifestos for eradicating men. There are no witches, daughters of Lilith, like in the United States, not even Dolle Minas with a sense of humor like in Holland, there are no aggressive magazines. No anger'. (Schwarzer 2001, 221)

The two short stories for analysis here, Sabine Korte's "Hexenhochzeit" (Witch's wedding) and Iris von Finckenstein's "w.i.t.c.h.", have been published recently in Munich in a collection entitled *Walpurgistänze. Verhexte Geschichten* (Walpurgis Dances. Bewitched Stories) (2000)<sup>88</sup>. Despite their aggressive, violent and, yes, angry reaction against female passivity, to suggest that they have finally challenged the phallocentric assumptions of many *Brigitte*s, (as Schwarzer hoped in 1981), would not be quite correct. Published twenty years later than the magazine mentioned above, they still reveal an astonishing complicity with the phallocentric thinking denounced by Morgner (as well as Schwarzer), and further complicate *herstory* as related to the concept of a 'universal' female writing-as-desire. In these stories, female desire continues to represent a place of hysterical inconsistency, despite the feminist theories/therapies in process. Has patriarchal discourse adjusted to the specificities of female needs, or has the "newly born woman" returned to the worship of the phallus, to heterosexuality as a type of biological binary that, as Schwarzer claims, "has crippled us and created a rift which is seemingly impossible to overcome" (2001, 223)? And do we have to agree with Irigaray that so-called 'sexual liberation' has done absolutely nothing for women?<sup>89</sup> Both Sabine Korte<sup>90</sup> and Iris von Finckenstein<sup>91</sup> emancipate their 'witches' financially, abandon the privacy of 'traditional' witches' locations, and disrupt the patriarchal binary of private-versus-public. Like many contemporary women in Germany,

the protagonists have their own income that enables them to travel and explore various opportunities. Yet their sovereignty is fake, enclosed within a persistent phallogocentric discourse that reduces them to miming and “taking pleasure” in the privileges of men and as their accomplices. Korte’s witch is madly in love with her (male) lover and obsessively focused on his masculinity, a daring subject from a radical feminist viewpoint. Disrupting the secrecy of witchcraft, Finckenstein’s story installs the witch as a business-woman immersed in the commercial, money-making aspects of life. In analyzing this phenomenon, I will link these narratives to a much earlier (and in a way far more didactic) configuration of an ‘active witch’, found in Colette’s short story “Rainy Moon” (1958) which was selected by Carter for her anthology of stories, *Wayward Girls & Wicked Women*. The stories included are “reflections in some kind of squinting, oblique, penetrating vision” of women who are “prepared to plot and scheme; to snatch; to battle; to burrow away from within, in order to get their hands on that little bit extra, be it of love, or money, or vengeance, or pleasure, or respect” (Carter 1986, xii).

In Colette’s story, introduced here as a prelude to a discussion of Korte’s and Finckenstein’s narratives, a hysterical and “altogether mad” Délia makes use of witchcraft in order to kill her husband, Eugène. Eugène, although already separated from her, repeatedly comes to see her because she has “cast a spell on him” (Colette 1986, 121), or “convoked” him: “Convoking, do you know what that is? ... Convoking is summoning a person by force” (1986, 122), asserts Rosita, Délia’s sister, in a dialogue with the surprised narrator who does not believe in things like “doing evil” (1986, 123):

Listen, Rosita, we’re not living in the Middle Ages now... Think calmly for a moment... But I am thinking calmly, Madame. I’ve never done anything else! This thing she’s doing, she’s not the only one who’s doing it. It’s quite common. Mark you, I don’t say it succeeds every time. Didn’t you know anything about it? (1986, 122)

Colette's text, underscored with irony, introduces magic as a popular and not exclusively female affair, a secret yet conventional means of getting rid of one's spouse and achieving the liberty of widow(er)hood:

Because it's all done in private, it's a family affair. Nine times out of ten, no one gets arrested. It's talked about a little in the neighbourhood. But just you see if you can find any traces! Fire-arms, poisons, that's all out-of-date stuff. My sister knows that all right. What about the woman who keeps the sweet-shop just below us, whatever's she done with her husband? And the milkman at Number 57, rather queer isn't it that he's gone and lost his second wife, too. (1986, 128)

Depicting Délia as one of those knowledgeable in the art of black magic, Colette draws on the power of superstitious belief, as well as on a linkage of sexual bonds with possession: "Possession gives you the power to summon, to convoke, as they say" (1986, 130). Eugène is lost, according to Rosita, since his body once "belonged" to Délia, but he could be saved if he bonded with another. Unfortunately, Rosita continues, "Eugène has never even thought of wanting me... If he had wanted me, even just once, I'd be in a position to fight against her, you understand." But Colette/ the narrator does not understand, she has everything to learn. "Do you really attribute so much importance to the fact of having... having belonged to a man (sic!)?" 'And you! Do you really attribute so little to it?' I decided to laugh" (1986, 130). Rosita, however, proceeds to elucidate the convoking procedure:

'You say a name, nothing but the name, the name of the particular person, a hundred times, a thousand times. No matter how far away they are, they will hear you in the end. Without eating or drinking, as long as you can possibly keep it up, you say the name, nothing else but the name. Don't you remember the day, when Délia nearly fainted?' (1986, 131)

All that the narrator expects now from her "detailed informant" is the "one final picture" of Délia,

arriving at the cross-roads where, amidst the vaporous clouds produced by each one's illusion, the female slaves of the cloven-footed one meet for the Sabbath.' Yes, indeed. And where does the devil come in, Rosita?' (1986, 133)

And here comes Colette's astonishing (and, I would argue, *herstorical*) reply, in the form of an innocent but persistently political dialogue:

'What devil, Madame?' 'Why the devil pure and simple, I presume. Does your sister give him a special name?' An honest amazement was depicted on Rosita's face and her eyebrows flew up to the top of her high forehead. 'But Madame, whatever trail are you on now. The devil, that's just for imbeciles. The devil, just imagine...' She shrugged her shoulders, and, behind her glasses, threw a withering glance at discredited Satan. (1986, 133)

Délia does not need any form of complicity with phallic figures; she is perfectly self-sufficient in her work with "pointed things, scissors, pins," as Colette assures her readers in the final image of Délia strolling along the aisles of a flea-market as a widow. If anything, she must compete with her sister.

Two useful ideas are suggested by Colette's text: first, that witchcraft is a private (secret) but popular affair, and, second, that it is a serious, competitive undertaking. Irony and detachment discarded, these ideas continue to be drawn upon in Korte's and Finckenstein's stories, both fascinated with convoking procedures. The central theme of Korte's "Hexenhochzeit" is inscribed, however, with the female castration complex and her subsequent seduction by the phallus, ironically reflecting Lacanian theory of the 'feminine' that substitutes 'phallus' for 'lack'. As referred to by Kristeva,

[f]rom the organ to the body as a whole, the passion of the Phallus seduces, still and forever. Why does the male organ lend itself to that troubling ceremony of hide-and-seek? Because it is visible, apparent proof of jouissance and fertility? No doubt. But also because it detaches itself, no mistake about it. It is detachable, likely to appear/disappear, to be present/absent, and, as a result, to inscribe opposition, the minimal condition for meaning, on the surface of the body itself. (2001, 59)

Like Rosita, Korte's narrator attributes great importance to the fact of having belonged to a man (Colette 1986), but assuming her "natural" in-born castration, she desires an adequate tool that would balance her lack, her desire. The knife is what she dreams about: "the witch's knife for the blood wedding" (Korte 2000, 266), that is, a fetish, a temporary



substitute for the erotic catharsis and a narcissistic identification (in a Freudian sense) with the phallus. Traveling in Africa, from one country to another, she succumbs to a nomadic condition that should surprise and challenge her lover:

You don't know your witch well enough. I have used all my magic to escape the city. Not with husband and child. Not as a married couple. But alone, enchantingly free, perfectly close to myself and as far away as possible. (Korte 2000)<sup>92</sup>

She joins various expeditions to remote places, from which she writes letters to her lover, likewise on a journey, but somewhere else and with someone else. Her writing draws on a form of convocation, including repetitive patterns of magic formulae, but she never addresses or names the man otherwise than as her "lover," the object of her desire.

The narrator's 'cultural castration' intermingles in this (*her*-)story with a culturally abject violent desire to become a castrator figure, to steal the 'phallus', to penetrate with the witch's knife. Yet simultaneously, because of her culturally reinforced submissiveness to the powerful organ which she strives to possess, she is in a struggle against her own sex, and specifically against her lover's wife, a woman in competition with her. Her own husband is excluded from this erotic performance as he stays at home (in Germany); most probably he does not know anything, possibly he 'tolerates' her unruly libido, since it continues to cultivate the phallic function. He could be also altogether disinterested in his wife's 'second' life; however, Korte's text suggests that he is simply unaware of it. On her journey, the narrator resembles Cixous's sorceress, suspended between her salient suffering in a particular culture (Germany, home, family obligations) and her orgasmic freedom (Africa, journey, erotic desire). The ambiguous in/visibility of her own desire, articulated in a hysterical attack, reflects the narrator's alienated ("lacking") sexual identification, and feeds her eccentric perception of the African landscape as an erect phallic construction. She, the conqueror (she never reveals her name) has given her lover an ultimate choice, but he has

asked for time to reflect: "Four weeks in the Philippines. With [his] wife. But the fight is not decided, not yet, lover. Perhaps, you will burn me, your Satan's woman, at the stake of lost chances" (Korte 2000)<sup>93</sup>. Or, perhaps, "you will take me as your wife. In a black mass, at a white altar, the elbows bound, the arms thrown over the head, the legs so wide open that the thighs chant, united" (2000)<sup>94</sup>.

The narrator's vision of the witch's wedding initiates her black-and-white, yes-or-no journey which becomes a metaphorical convergence of a quest for the knife and a fight for her lover. This type of 'echoing' of the phallogentric voyages of the male hero on his way to self-realisation resonates with Irigaray's (and later Moi's) references to mimesis as a mime of the dominant discourse, with transgressive potential. As Irigaray believes,

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself – inasmuch as she is on the side of the 'perceptible,' of 'mater' – to 'ideas', in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible', by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain 'invisible': the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in the language. It also means 'to unveil' the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere: another case of the persistence of 'matter', but also of 'sexual pleasure'. (2000, 124-5)

Miming, which for Irigaray suggests breaking from within, deconstructing and opening up, implies maintaining a very difficult position of internalized oppositions, of being in-between, sentenced to a permanent compromise. Irigaray's mimesis is difficult to achieve since it borders on a mimicry (a concept often used by Moi) that fakes power, that manifests possession when there is dispossession, and denies gender difference in order to deny gender imbalance. I mention these two types of miming, since "Hexenhochzeit" demonstrates how easily one falls into the other. The story shows, perhaps subconsciously, how mimesis turns into mimicry, and how it becomes entangled with a discourse in which a woman cannot

articulate her difference, her body, her *jouissance*, but mirrors that of the first and universal gender. As Irigaray writes in "This Sex which is not One" (1985),

[n]ot knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. Thus she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants. (1997, 364)

Although speaking, writing, and acting, Korte's narrator is becoming symbolically mute. Imagining that she is 'after' the object of her desire, she eventually becomes that very object, enacting a role of "the beautiful object of contemplation" (1997, 364), of a hysterical woman who, more than anything, desires herself without being able to internalize her desire. On her journey to the various countries of Africa she becomes a cultural transvestite, playfully projecting herself as a white fe/male Other. Both revealing and ignoring her own ethnocentricity, she wonders narcissistically who might be afraid of the white woman, who might be fascinated. Who will be seduced by her body of an apparently fake color (Korte 2000)<sup>95</sup>, so distinct from the blackness of an African woman, a blackness projected by her as plural, indistinct? Her playful as-if identity easily affords the rejection of one subject position in exchange for another. It also denies the always already constructed identity bound to its own subjectivization. Consequently, "the Africa" she encounters, to quote Alice Walker, "had already been raped of much of its sustenance... made an uninhabited region, except for its population of wild and exotic animals" (1990, 168-9), and other objects of European desire. Korte's narrator never 'deals' with the black woman, does not approach her, but curiously observes her 'exotic' body: the breast full of mother's milk, the child carried proudly in a wrap on her hip like a heavy jewel that accentuates her femininity (Korte 2000)<sup>96</sup>. The black female body, an actual repressed Other in her story, is a silent witness to "all the action"; the Other does not play, and is not aware of its 'authenticity.'

Falling into the Levinasian category of incommensurability, the Other passively constitutes the narrator's private *speculum*, where she enjoys her own displayed, 'colorless' body as an object of ridicule and fascination. Like Irigaray's woman, "she exposes, exhibits the possibility of *nothing to see*" (1997, 431), and this *nothing* entertains her, excites her 'lacking' (in-between) sexuality. Moreover, she is proud of being allowed to transgress her gender as a white foreign wo/man, as an eccentric free-lance witch.

A group of French tourists, men in perfectly polished shoes, burst into laughter, when I crossed the hotel lobby and asked for a room. The soles were detached from my shoes and flapped at each step. I wore a wrap from Ghazi, utterly dirty by that time, over a long T-shirt-skirt, the only thing to wear that I have not given away. (Korte 2000)<sup>97</sup>

The narrator's embarrassingly colonizing and clearly privileged perspective of a white "tourist" draws on a postmodern model of boundary-crossing (everything is allowed if you have the choice). The fact that she "is allowed" to do "certain things," to transgress the taboos, is never disturbing as such, because in fact her exceptional position (white European, eccentric) liberates her from her 'universal' female indisposition. Tolerated and even respected as a stranger, she is not an intruder but a credit card holder, a freak at the worst (Korte 2000)<sup>98</sup>. For this very reason, she is 'allowed' to forge alliances with (black) men, to negotiate with them, to meet the fetish-man: "They showed me many beautiful knives, but the price they demanded was so high that it would take all of my remaining money" (2000)<sup>99</sup>. As a (black) woman she should/would not be there, in the place she assumes, but as a transvestite /freak she is excluded from the order, and transgresses into the cultural sphere of the male. She can afford this transgression, since she has some money and her credit card. She can afford to pursue her desire to detach the phallic organ that does not belong to her yet. Unlike Colette's Délia, who is entirely, *eccentrically* on her own in pursuing the goal of disposing of her husband, Korte's witch assumes that she "has to look

for the black magic” that will secure for her the man’s love/death (Korte 2000)<sup>100</sup>. She ‘signs a pact with the devil’, since she does not know how to be on her own, in a state defined by Irigaray as “within the intimacy” (1997, 367) of the female body. The fetish man, representing the very same devil discredited by Rosita in Colette’s tale, is thus appreciated, believed indispensable and even longed for. That devil, the archaic father, will have to teach her how to seduce; his eyes are abysmal, his mouth open as if he wanted to talk with her, the tent is flooded with the presence of his goat-body (Korte 2000, 261):

The fetish man squatted on his heels closely to my body and gently opened my legs. I could smell him. He smelled of black skin and male sweat, spicy, intense and strange. My legs trembled under the weight of the stone. The mouldy scent of the menstruation blood flowed from my womb. (2000)<sup>101</sup>

The fetish bathed in the chicken’s blood. It soaked my skirt, wet my slip and mixed with my own blood.

The blood of the fetish turned into a dark brown crust. But he is still waiting. It is as if we waited for me to enter into a dialogue with him: ‘Why do you awake me, carry me off, out of the earth, what do you want?’ – ‘I want the man who I love to leave his wife.’ ‘Aren’t you married yourself? Don’t you have a child?’ ‘Yes. That is why I make the sacrifice. My love is against any reason. It has eaten away my brain. I am obsessed.’ (2000)<sup>102</sup>

And so, in mimicry, she gives herself away, balancing her desire for the man with an obsessive objectification of her own body. Her body, seen through the man’s eyes, excites her, because the phallic gaze has eroticised it. Desiring thus herself, as a man would desire her, she parodies her self-desire, just as the herstorical witch, unable to speak, returns to the language of the archaic mother. This schizophrenic status of the woman, as encoded in the Western philosophy of masculine sameness and its social practices, imposes duality on Korte’s figure: she is an object in the language, and her body offers, as Irigaray notes, the linguistic home-place inviting masculine desire. Her own desire is induced and focused on imagining her own erotic (eroticised) body, rather than a male body as object of her own desire, hence her masochistic fantasies and obsessions with rape (Irigaray 2000, 90-92).

When, after weeks, I looked at myself in the mirror of the hotel's room, I sank deep into my eyes. I am beautiful, lover – you will see.

My eyes are as clear as those of a wo/man who has fasted for a long time. My lips are so dried out that you can no longer bite them to blood. My body is so surfeited with swellings, bites and blue marks that you can no longer lie down on me. There is yet a spirit of the desert shining in me like a sparkle. (Korte 2000, 271-2)<sup>103</sup>

Proud of what she has accomplished (in cooperation with the men), she shows her bag which is heavy with what it contains – the fetish and the knife: “Alal, the head of the family, has given her the knife. He would never have sold it to her. Many newly produced Tuareg weapons were made to look old for the tourists. But she is indeed in possession of the old weapon” (2000)<sup>104</sup>. She has deserved it, having been initiated into the men's world. The story ends with a question directed to her lover, “don't you believe me?” (2000, 272), a warning, should he disbelieve her mimic potential. And until the end, she remains anonymous; she does not sign her letters, but represents the nameless *monstrous feminine*, one of the many Walpurgisnacht's witches invited by the Devil to dig up and consummate fresh corpses/penises. Colette, in her story, wants monstrosity to belong to Délia (a problematic issue in itself), to be her private affair, and evokes the devil's centrality on Walpurgisnacht only to deny it. Korte's witch prefers to warn her lover: “It is dangerous to leave a woman devoted to magic to her own devices” (2000)<sup>105</sup>. It is better to take her home, domesticate her desires, and let her worship the phallus. Or, as Butler puts it, let her “be” the Phallus, “reflect the power of the Phallus,” and “supply the site to which it penetrates” (1990, 44).

The second (*her-*)story to be analyzed here, Finckenstein's “w.i.t.c.h.,” attempts to relate to the True Craft of the Wise, the one launched by Rosita as a serious business. The secrecy and fear resulting from the witches' persecution (propagated by Dworkin and Pratt<sup>106</sup>), has been successfully “removed” in Finckenstein's story and exchanged for strict

business relations. The “true craft,” advertised on an internet site ([www/http.w.i.t.c.h.com](http://www.w.i.t.c.h.com)), is accessible to everybody who joins the workshops organized by w.i.t.c.h.

Good morning. You are connected with w.i.t.c.h. What can I do for you? ...Our workshops begin on the 7<sup>th</sup> of each month and last seven days. The next available workshop begins next Monday. If you wish to register... the workshop’s fee is 7000 DM. An amount ‘not too high,’ if you consider what you can learn at our place. (Finckenstein 2000)<sup>107</sup>

Suggesting that the “forgotten wisdom” can now be bought in a variety of packages, according to personal choice, Finckenstein’s narrative draws on the growing popularity of esoteric studies offering introductions to magic crafts, psychological archetypes à la Jung, and Tarot readings. As a fully recognized business, The True Craft of the Wise ironically reinscribes Dworkin’s figures of the witch-herbalist and midwife, standing “both for agriculture and for untamed nature” with their “unchanging identity ... in an unchanging world” (Purkiss 1996, 21). The witch in Finckenstein’s text is an active, competitive, and public authority. She takes over the role of the wise old woman, the hag of Daly’s (re)creation, as Lu, a grown-up Lolita, the witch-psychoanalyst, and simply the boss: “You will receive your own broom and a new name. She made a dutiful break. Emily admired the obviousness with which Lu spoke about such things” (Finckenstein 2000)<sup>108</sup>. There is no metaphysics in the foundations of Lu’s power, there are no fundamentally magic phenomena in her witchcraft. As she promises in the folder with the course outline, relations are reciprocal, and she points out “the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another” as if borrowing from Foucault<sup>109</sup>.

But can this transition from being a phallocentric victim to becoming a cool businesswoman be so simple? As Purkiss argues, the feminist healer-witch in the seventies owes much to Romantic notions of the simple life. Yet more recently, the healers’ lifestyle

is increasingly subject to commercialisation, not only through the heritage industry itself, but also through the vast array of goods presented as traditional, antique, natural, or rural... Such figurations are problematic because they substitute often unattainable fantasy for the resolution of women's problems. (1996, 21)

The fantasy of Lu, the (post)modern witch, is problematic precisely because of the surrealistic status she claims to have achieved. As Emily observes, "an outsider would have taken her for a totally crazy person" (Finckenstein 2000, 33). Before she joins Lu's workshop, Emily in fact is an "outsider" leading an unexciting life as a secretary. For a long time now she has been looking for something "original," "thoughtful" and "different" (2000, 28). She has tried out many exotic remedies, such as Ayurvedian massage, ritual Eskimo chanting, or Indian sand painting, "but nothing was right" (2000, 28). While surfing on the Internet, she eventually realizes that "the right thing might be nearer than she thought" and might even be "rooted in European culture" (2000)<sup>110</sup>. Emily calls the institute, and is immediately informed that in the coming workshop there is only one place left, and that "it depends entirely on her whether she herself feels worth it [the 7000 DM] or not" (2000, 29).

It was a short but violent emotional struggle. Then Emily made another phone call and registered for the workshop.

The night before the workshop she had really bad dreams. Wild dreams about witches with green pointed nails and yellow bloodshot eyes. They wanted her purse where she kept the check for 7000 DM. She managed to escape, but when she opened her purse, she found an ugly slippery toad instead of her money. (2000)<sup>111</sup>

In fact, the institute of witchcraft, with its main location in California, has long since discarded the witches' history, along with their bad reputation and "European character" (2000, 32). Portraying another case of mimesis/ mimicry, Finckenstein's institute follows the current fashions for a professional enterprise:

The entrance of w.i.t.c.h. resembled the lobby of a financial institution (U.S. style) rather than a witch's kitchen. Glass, stainless steel, immaculate white walls, a light leather sofa with matching armchairs, the name of the institute in sleek golden letters above the bright glass-topped reception desk. Behind the desk a woman, an elegant, dark haired middle-aged woman, a friendly smile on a carefully made-up face. (2000)<sup>112</sup>



Is the workshop a masquerade, hiding what is really a Sabbath, a form of initiation into a different womanhood, as suggested by Lu in her welcome speech?

Indeed, explained Lu in an arrogant tone, she used to feel the same as Emily, but that was seven years ago before she joined w.i.t.c.h. Since then, life is for her a pure adventure. And yes, she is as old as she feels she is... and totally free in terms of relationships. Which doesn't mean, she added in a silky voice, that she does not treat herself to a man from time to time. It sounded as if she was talking about a tasty but calorie-laden morsel. (2000 35)<sup>113</sup>

Is the story a modern fairy-tale for lonely secretaries and bored nobody-loves-me<sup>114</sup> housewives, since all the "participants" introduce themselves as such? Is it a parody of the True Craft, since the narrative ending suggests that Emily meets the man-of-her-dreams by accident, rather than due to her newly attained convoking practices? The slogans of w.i.t.c.h., such as "join us, the workshop will change your life," ironically echo radical feminist "healing methods," working with images of midwife-herbalists and female professionals who represent a "spectacular collage of everything which feminist historians and others see as the opposite of medieval patriarchy" (Purkiss 1996, 21)<sup>115</sup>. In a similar vein, Finckenstein's story offers a bit of everything; and it could be read both as an ironic warning against fraudulent institutes and as a proof of witchcraft addressed to skeptical unbelievers. With witches you can never be sure.

The workshop does, in effect, change Emily's life; the w.i.t.c.h. stands proudly for "Where I Take Chances." Emily's major goal, to find the right man and get rid of her "loneliness," is achieved. However, everything that happens seems to have also been possible without the workshop. Finckenstein seems to be aware of irony as an important mimetic enterprise. Participating in the re-writing of the witch's historical characteristics, her story shows that a contemporary witch is seen as both a humorous and an arbitrary figure. Her 'nature' is fully adjusted to the phallogentric demands of the late twenty-century.

Enveloped in the needs, desires and fantasies of men, her masquerade, as Irigaray has suggested, offers a protective skin in the absence of a language specific to her body and her own desire. But her triumph is that of the complicitous woman; she acts and speaks in the language which invariably articulates her 'lack' of autonomy. Most probably, rather than 'escaping from her loneliness,' Emily abandons her (wasted) independence, and ends up denying her own hysterical status/ body, while accepting the pleasurable aspects of phallogentric rather than *eccentric* desires.

Although showing witches as an "active" type of women, both narratives speak from the perspective of phallogentric fantasy and can be interpreted as subconscious returns to the female position of castrata (Baym 1997, 280).<sup>116</sup> Their masquerade has to be understood

as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain 'on the market' in spite of everything. But they are there as objects for sexual enjoyment, not as those who enjoy. (Irigaray 2000, 136)

Breaking through the privacy of the witches' kitchen to the public spheres (the journey, or institution), the heroines are forced into various forms of tokenism. The transgressive potential of privacy/secretcy, recognized in earlier *herstorical* narratives as enabling the mimetic to break out from within, are discarded. In abandoning the privacy of witches' former locations, the authors have neglected to create new spaces for witches, spaces that are crucial to any form of communal life, to any exercise of power (Foucault 1993). Or would perhaps these spaces be another type of fantasy? In any case, little is left without them: no wisdom, no universal wise woman's truth, no *fantasmatic* illusion, but a "woman" who attempts to speak and appropriate the symbolic order. She no longer does it in private, but her body is still entrapped in hysteria, in a phallogentric "vacuum," (Irigaray 2000, 54) where autonomous *herstory* has not yet taken place.

## RECAPITULATION: FUNCTIONS AND RISKS OF HERSTORICAL/HYSTERICAL WITCHES

In the overall argument so far, I have repeatedly evoked the fact that although these *herstorical* methods are not completely successful, they initiate necessary revisions of such cultural constructs as femininity, spirituality and the female body (as a twofold locus of abjection and fascination). I have analyzed these narratives as forms of feminist mythology posited as alternatives to the established Western canon, and inherently divided between the methodical (logical, reasonable) and the hysterical that is out of the phallogocentric control. As such, they prove extremely effective in removing some of the unnecessary distinctions between fiction and history, licensing, to follow Purkiss's argument, the use of both in terms of 'what is needed' rather than 'what is true'. Daly's *Gyn/ecology* and Dworkin's *Woman-Hating* are examples of such *herstorical* ventures formulated, in my analysis, as a theoretical (and narrative) hysteria, as a textual incongruence between the *history* from which they attempt to disassociate themselves and a *herstorical* determination to identify the origins of oppression. Similarly, Walker's and Gearhart's novels are inspired by 'rediscoveries' of the repressed, and 'forgotten' origins of female 'power', although, as Purkiss correctly argues, there is no hard evidence to suggest that the majority of those accused of witchcraft were either healers or midwives. They have been selected here as examples of matriarchal narratives subverting the course of patriarchal history, and indebted to the identity principle that is crucial to much early feminist work. In blending myth, history, and fantasy, Gearhart's radical ecofeminist and Walker's Afro-American 'witch' figures set out to deconstruct the phallogocentric philosophy of sameness by identifying with what has been repressed, and mis- or underrepresented. Resonating with these American feminist recuperations of the traditionally negative figure of the witch, Morgner's *herstorical* fantasies in *Amanda* are equally strategic and political, using a withdrawal into the

'fantasmatic' as a tool for cultural transformation, a therapeutic way out of a female cultural vacuum. However, the two short stories analyzed in the final section of this chapter, which are to some extent representative of the new wave of popular women's literature in contemporary Germany, provide an explicit example of conceptual simplifications of women's (witches') independence, rebellion, and authority, ending up as an appropriation rather than a deconstruction of sameness. My analysis of this appropriation, which confirms the 'cultural castration' of women, draws on Irigaray's "mimetic appropriation" of the hegemonic discourse, which is "still the most terrible thing of all because it is practiced without any feminine ideality or model" (2000, 110). Korte's and Finckenstein's stories, and to varying degrees all of the texts in this chapter, demonstrate that the re-inscribed 'woman's (witch's) identity is still entrapped in a masculine sameness and phallus envy, while the common experience evoked by the feminist "we" prevents women from seeing how certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination. One of the risks to be negotiated by these radical feminist projects is that of merging, intentionally or not, with the patriarchal definitions of women that Beauvoir struggled to contest, confining women to the mysterious and not quite human other, as a muse incapable of taking responsible actions in the 'symbolic'.

Although significant as radically positive and empowering rewritings of the historical 'witch' into a therapeutic narrative figure, the narratives analyzed here demonstrate how difficult and sometimes risky it is to work against the phallogentric structure, especially once we start to diversify feminist *herstories* across race, class, and political systems. The stigma of the female body, evoked by the radical feminist "we" and projected as the commonness of female experience, proves to be constructive only in a limited way, since the concepts of femininity, bodily empowerments and spirituality have different implications in Walker's

Afro-American proposal of an androgynous ideal, Gearhart's eco-feminist separatism, or Morgner's East-European socialist feminism. Can "speaking as a woman" be seen, following Felman's argument, as "a fact determined by some biological *condition* or by a strategic, theoretical position, by anatomy or by culture" (1997, 9)? What if "speaking as a woman" were not a "natural" given, "could not be taken for granted?" (1997, 9) What if we started to examine the split between mothers and daughters (as one between women themselves rather than between women and men), to follow Irigaray's example? Employing a feminist psychoanalytical awareness, the narratives considered in the next chapter offer an important expansion of the 'witch' as an archaic figure who does not fit the model of 'symbolical castration'. While disclosing their own versions of women's entrapment in ensnaring maternal territories and their own hysterical erasures, these texts posit the 'witch' both as a phallic mother (establishing the paternal law at the level of the semiotic) and an *om-phalic* (symbolically inarticulate) one.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction to Kristeva's *Desire in Language*, Roudiez notes: "Place (*lieu*). The word "place" has been preferred [in feminist psychoanalysis, especially with reference to Kristeva] over the more mathematical "locus" (*lieu géométrique*), for it does not convey the latter's precise localization. Kristeva's *lieu* is a hypothetical place, even though constrained by actual forces or presences" (Kristeva 1980, 17).

<sup>2</sup> For Irigaray for example, according to Butler, "it is the recognition of castration that initiates the young girl into 'a loss'," and results in melancholia: "Melancholia is thus a psychoanalytic norm for women, one that rests upon her ostensible desire to have the penis, a desire which, conveniently, can no longer be felt or known" (1990, 69).

<sup>3</sup> The pagan movements, Wicca among others, disassociate themselves from feminist stances, and claim universal and 'natural' balances between sexes, as noted by Purkiss in her work on *The Witch in History*.

<sup>4</sup> I refer to the work of Joanne Russ, "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" (*Images of Women*, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1973). The narrative fantasies of Elana Nachman in *Riverfinger Women*, Bertha Harris in *Lover*, or Sally Miller Gearhart in *The Wanderground* (discussed in this chapter), present communities of strong, witch-like women, drawing on myths of Amazons and prehistorical matriarchies.

<sup>5</sup> In *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), Creed writes: "Theories about the womb have also linked it to another discourse related to the monstrous - the occurrence of hysteria in women. The earliest known medical reference

to hysteria comes from Egypt and dates from about 1900 BC. It was believed that the womb could wander around the woman's body, thus leading to certain illnesses. The Greeks believed that the womb began to travel around the body if the woman was sexually frustrated; deprivation caused her bodily fluids to dry up and this caused the womb to move around seeking moisture" (1993, 56).

<sup>6</sup> According to Barbara Walker in *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom and Ritual* (1985), the Scandinavian word *saga* "has been translated out of its original meaning, 'She-Who-Speaks,' that is, an oracular priestess, such as were formerly associated with sacred poetry. The literal meaning of *saga* was 'female sage'... The written sagas of Scandinavia were originally sacred histories kept by female sagas or sayers, who knew how to write them in runic script. Among northern tribes, men were usually illiterate. Writing and reading the runes were female occupations. Consequently, runes were associated with witchcraft by medieval Christian authorities, who distrusted all women's lore. To them, *saga* became a synonym for Witch" (1985, 52).

<sup>7</sup> In reference to Irigaray's texts, Whitford explains that "it is not a question of biology determining speech, but of identity assumed in language within a particular symbolic system known as patriarchy, and described by Lacan, in which the only possible subject-position is masculine. Within this system, the only feminine identity available to women is that of 'defective' or 'castrated' men; women are not symbolically self-defined" (2000, 3).

<sup>8</sup> As referred to by Abel in her analysis of Morrison's short story "Recitatif," "the floating signifier" emphasizes the ambiguity and/or interchangeability of roles (Twyla – Roberta) that "discloses the operations of race in the feminine" (1997, 102). "The floating signifier," however, could be understood in a Kristevan sense, as a "senseless flow that produces its own significance... [t]hus impersonal, in short, speaking (in) the name of no one" (Kristeva 1980, 190).

<sup>9</sup> As Whitford notes, "[w]hether one recognizes the sources or not depends on one's familiarity with the philosopher, since inverted commas are seldom used. Sometimes, the quotations are obvious: the classical Greek in *Speculum*, for example. But sometimes there are no indications, and in cases where Irigaray is using a French translation, and the English translator reproduces the citations without recognizing their source, they become unidentifiable, couched in a different form of words so far from the familiar English version that we know, that they evoke no answering echo... As a result, although Irigaray's debt to psychoanalysis is well-known, her position in relation to the history of philosophy has hardly been studied or documented at all" (2000, 9).

<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Siegmund Hurwitz's work, *Lilith – the First Eve. A Study of the Dark Aspects of the Feminine*, Lilith occurs mostly outside canonical literature: in apocryphal and pseudoepigraphic works, in the Aramaic magic texts of Nippur, Gnostic and Mandaean literature, Jewish Mysticism and tales of superstition (1992, 87). Although it is difficult to force all depictions into one character, according to Raphael Patai (in *The Hebrew Goddess*) in both Talmudic-Rabbinic and Graeco-Byzantine traditions Lilith's career is similar. She is born as "a lowly she-demon, whose activities [are] confined to the nether realms of existence... associated with impure nocturnal animals [Eve and serpent], and who [pulls] man down to her base level" (1990, 251). While the Hebrew scripture is "lacking in references to comparable demonic female creatures" and "the single reference to Lilith, that of Isaiah 34:14, mentions her only in passing" (Lassner, 1993, 33), the rabbinic folklore assigns her the role of the demonic queen. She is the archaic mother of all demons and has power over darkness (Tishby 1989, 529-532).

<sup>11</sup> In the context of the *metaphysics of substance*, Butler follows Michel Haar "critique of the very notion of the psychological person as a substantive thing" (Butler 1990, 20): "The subject, the self, the individual, are just so many false concepts, since they transform into substances fictitious unities having at the start only a linguistic reality" (Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David Allison, New York: Delta, 1977, 17-18).

<sup>12</sup> In *Das Deutsche als Männersprache* (German as male language) (1996), Pusch suggests that Daly's word puns can be seen as linguistic weaknesses, tangible especially if read in a translation.

<sup>13</sup> Born in Schenectady, New York, Daly studied at the College of St. Rose, and taught philosophy and theology since 1952 in the USA, and at Fribourg University, Switzerland (1959-66). During the years at Fribourg she also obtained her doctorate in philosophy and theology (1965). For many years she taught at Boston College, a Jesuit institution in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. Daly's writing presents a radical feminist

perspective on patriarchal religions and on religions in contemporary society. She evokes a matriarchal past and advocates the rejection of contemporary religious expression in a search for new spiritual patterns. Regarded as an influential feminist theorist, she is the author of *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), re-issued with *A New Feminist Post-Christian Introduction* (1975), *Beyond God the Father* (1973), *Gyn/ecology* (1978), and *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (1984), (Uglow, Jennifer and Hinton 1999).

<sup>14</sup> "Die Problematik der unübersetzbaren Wortspiele ließe sich verkraften, wenn Mary Daly mit diesem Stilmittel sparsam umginge. Gerade das tut sie aber nicht, vielmehr nimmt ihr Hang zum Wortspiel von Werk zu Werk zu... Die Frage ist, warum tut Mary Daly (uns) das (an), was bezweckt sie damit? Und: Erreicht sie das, was sie bezweckt?" (Pusch 1996, 106-107).

<sup>15</sup> "Erstens macht Mary Daly das Spiel mit Wörtern einfach Spaß, sie tut es sozusagen aus Reiner Lust. Jede, die sich einmal auf dieser unerschöpflichen Spielwiese betätigt hat, weißt, dass das Spielen mit Wörtern wirklich eine sehr lustvolle Beschäftigung ist, besonders wenn einer dann solche "treffenden" Kostbarkeiten gelingen... die im Wortschatz von Feministinnen inzwischen Klassikerinnen sein durften" (Pusch 1996, 107).

<sup>16</sup> "tiefliegende, ursprüngliche Sinnzusammenhänge zu postulieren. Ich habe den Eindruck, dass sie von ihren jeweiligen Entdeckungen selbst so fasziniert ist, dass sie (überrumpelt?) die grundsätzliche Begrenztheit dieser "Beweismethode" übersieht" (Pusch 1996, 108).

<sup>17</sup> "Nein – es gibt keine 'Urworte', auch keine 'ursprüngliche Kraft der Worte' (Pusch 1996, 109).

<sup>18</sup> "Mary Daly hat uns auf viele Sprachpathologien aufmerksam gemacht. Sie ist, wie gesagt, eine ungeheuer scharfsinnige Kritikerin nicht nur des Patriarchats, sondern auch seiner Sprache. Aber ihre etymologischen Wörterbücher sollte sie mal vom Schreibtisch in die Rumpelkammer verfrachten, Abteilung patriarchalische Kuriosa" (Pusch 1996, 110-111).

<sup>19</sup> Born in Camden, New Jersey, Dworkin was educated at Bennington College, Vermont. Before joining the women's movement and starting to write on feminist issues, she had a variety of jobs, including those of waitress, receptionist, and factory worker. In her writings, Dworkin presents a darkly pessimistic view of modern society based on pornography, abuse and violence against women. Among her early works are *Woman-Hating* (1974); *Out Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (1976), a collection of essays; and *The New Woman's Broken Heart* (1980), a book of short stories. Dworkin joined the feminist writer Catherine MacKinnon in a campaign against pornography which they regarded as one of the major causes of sexism and a violation of equal rights. They eventually took their battle to the courts, hoping to have all forms of pornography made illegal, but lost their case. Dworkin set out her feelings on this issue in *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography* (1980) and *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1980). Her more recent works include *Letters from a War Zone 1976-1987* (1989) and the novels *Ice and Fire* (1986) and *Mercy* (1990) (*The Penguin Biographical Dictionary of Women* 1998).

<sup>20</sup> According to Andrew Sanders, medieval and post-medieval accusations of witchcraft were "aimed at particular categories of persons. These are usually persons who display certain patterns of behaviour, occupy particular positions in the social structure, or have certain kinds of personal relationship with the accuser or the alleged victim. They have access to suspect knowledge, or are believed to harbour feelings of malevolence, hostility, or envy towards the victims or their kinsmen and associates." In his examination of witchcraft in England, Sanders concludes that the majority of the victims of the Great Witch-Craze were elderly, and often poor widowed women of low status (1995, 118).

<sup>21</sup> "Books are commercial ventures... [p]eople write them to make money, to become famous, to build or augment other careers. Most Americans [Americans] do not read books – they prefer television. Academics lock books in a tangled web of mindfuck and abstraction. The notion is that somewhere here are ideas... then somewhere else, unrelated, life" (Dworkin 1974, 24).

<sup>22</sup> Daly's model of genocide, unreflectively drawing on the paradigm of Holocaust, clearly serves the purpose of a symbolic shock-value, and has been critically addressed by Purkiss as a strategic attempt "to inflate the number of women who died in witch-persecutions into the millions". Worryingly, "since there is little actual evidence for such figures", Daly's estimate "goes two million better than the Holocaust, as if a competition is afoot, and at times there does seem to be a race on to prove that women have suffered more than victims of racism or genocide (as though women have not been *among* the victims of racism and genocide). Finally, the

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very stress on burning itself seems to allude to the crematoria, although it may also point to Dresden and Hiroshima" (Purkiss 1996, 17).

<sup>23</sup> One of the most famous passages in the *Malleus Maleficarum* reads as follows: "As for the first question, why a greater number of witches is found in the fragile feminine sex than among men... the first reason is, that they are more credulous, and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them... the second reason is, that women are naturally more impressionable, and ... the third reason is that they have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know... But the natural reason is that [a woman] is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from the bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives... And this is indicated by the etymology of the word; for Femina comes from Fe and Minus, since she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith... All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable". *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) by Kramer und Sprenger translated and edited by Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters in *Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700* (1972).

<sup>24</sup> In *Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, Rosemary Ellen Guiley informs us further that the *Malleus Maleficarum* "had a profound impact on witch trials on the Continent for about 200 years. Montag Summers [an English author who wrote extensively on witchcraft and demonology at the beginning of the twentieth century] called it 'among the most important, wisest, and weightiest books in the world.' It was second only to the Bible in sales until John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* published in 1678" (1989, 221-222). Whether Guiley's encyclopaedia represents an unbiased and reliable academic source is subject to debate. Published in 1989, her work certainly follows and belongs to the herstorical representations of the witches' history.

<sup>25</sup> "[E]rroneous though they are," Purkiss recognizes the importance of the radical feminist (hi)stories because they "remind us of things we might otherwise forget: the excitement of recognising the strangeness and otherness of the past, the willingness to ask questions that academics cannot answer (for example, the origin of witch-beliefs), the political engagements with history, the attempt to rethink the relations between body and identity... the sense of fun, the reminder that the witch was in the first place the construction of popular history. Most of all, modern witches offer a new way to see history from below, history as a space that can be colonised and occupied by people who are not part of academic institutions" (Purkiss 1996, 52).

<sup>26</sup> I refer to the title of Kolodny's article "Dancing Through the Minefield. Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism" (1980).

<sup>27</sup> In "Small town girl gets bigger", her homepage on the Internet, Gearhart writes about herself: "Until 1970 I spent my life in academia, either as a student or teaching speech and drama at Christian colleges and state universities in the midwest and in Texas. Then, when San Francisco State University tenured me as an open lesbian, I spent the next two decades not only in the classroom but in the streets, fighting for progressive causes and writing articles and stories that reflected only a few – but, to be fair, certainly some – of the values that had been such a formidable part of my upbringing and early professional years... I'm proud of helping to design and implement one of the four radical Women's Studies Programs in the country at San Francisco State University, and of the political work I've done on behalf of non-human animals. I'm proud of helping to plant seven thousand trees on a bare hill in Nicaragua for the Sandinista Revolution. I'm proud to have been a part of the movement that secured greater visibility for society's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people".

<sup>28</sup> Building on the Gaia hypothesis of scientists Lynn Margulis, James Lovelock, and Sahtouris, Ruether refers to "the intelligence that guides evolution" that "is not outside nature, but embodied in it as the 'body wisdom' of the earth. The 'great Gaia being knew itself in the same sense as our bodies know themselves, having the body wisdom to take care of itself and keep on evolving'" (1992, 118).

<sup>29</sup> Gearhart's idea can be linked with de Beauvoir's analysis of the female condition: "one can say that all women are naturally homosexual. The lesbian, in fact, is distinguished by her refusal of the male and her liking for feminine flesh; but every adolescent female fears penetration and masculine domination, and she feels a certain repulsion for the male body; on the other hand, the female body is for her, as for the male, an object of desire" (de Beauvoir 1993, 428). "Never in the presence of husband or lover," as de Beauvoir concludes, "can she feel wholly herself; but with her woman friend she need not be on parade, need not pretend: they are too much of a kind not to show themselves frankly as they are" (1993, 442).



<sup>30</sup> As Showalter observes, the "initial identification with the Amazon [not only in Gearhart's narrative but also in the work of Monique Wittig and Ti-Grace Atkinson] as a figure of female autonomy and creativity... and with lesbian separatism as the correct political form for feminist commitment, was both too radical and too narrow for a broadly based critical movement" (1997, 225).

<sup>31</sup> In *Les Guérillères*, Wittig differentiates between lesbians and women. As observed by Susan R. Suleiman in *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-garde*, her female warriors offer "the most radical kind of binarization and the most radical elimination of 'the other'" (1990, 131).

<sup>32</sup> Pratt does not refer to Gearhart's text in her *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* but to similar tendencies she traces in such narratives as Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*.

<sup>33</sup> The hypothesis of the mother goddess is present in a number of nowadays much debated archeological figurine analyses, such as Marija Gimbutas's *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 7000-3500 B.C.* (1982), James Mellaart's *The Neolithic of the Near East* (1975), or socio- and psychological analyses of prehistorical archetypes, such as Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother. An Analysis of the Archetype* (1955), Merlin Stone's *When God was a Woman* (1976), or Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade. Our History, our Future* (1988).

<sup>34</sup> With reference to the "historical time", Carol P. Christ observes that the pre-Abrahamic "is usually discussed within the framework provided by Samuel Noah Kramer's book *History Begins at Sumer*. The Babylonian creation epic, the *Enuma Elish*, which depicts the slaying of the primordial Mother Tiamat, and the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which the hero curses the Goddess Ishtar and refuses her gifts, may be mentioned as providing evidence about the origins of religion in the Near East. Frequently, even this material is presented primarily as backdrop to the 'distinctive and superior' contributions of Hebrew religion". However, "the naming we give to time is not a trivial matter, as Christian rulers recognized when they took control of the calendar. It will be difficult for us to grasp fully the most ancient history as long as we are rooted in the Christian naming of time... Those who study non-Christian religions, including Judaism, rapidly become aware that the Christian naming of time as 'before' and 'after Christ' makes it difficult to conceptualize the scope of history and to grasp the relationships of historical periods. There was in fact no major break in history at the time of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity did not become the dominant religion of the Roman Empire until the time of Constantine and Theodosius 'the Great' in the fourth century C.E." (1997, 76-77).

<sup>35</sup> "Gesturing away from its own immediate past and towards the stories it narrates, the radical feminist history of witches often appears to offer a static, finished vision of the witch. However, feminist histories of witchcraft are not finished artefacts, but stages in a complicated, conflictual series of processes within the public sphere, processes which involve both the writing of women's past and the rewriting of their present and future" (Purkiss 1996, 10).

<sup>36</sup> I am drawing on Carolyn Merchant's study of the technological exploitation of nature understood as a feminine principle/ metaphor, "Mining the earth's womb" (1983). Certainly, both "the nurturing and domination metaphors have existed in [Western] philosophy, religion, and literature – the idea of dominion over the earth in Greek philosophy and Christian religion; that of the nurturing earth, in Greek and other pagan philosophies. But, as the economy became modernized and the Scientific Revolution proceeded, the dominion metaphor spread beyond the religious sphere and assumed ascendancy in the social and political spheres as well" (1983, 100).

<sup>37</sup> In "Toward an Ecological Feminism and Feminist Ecology," Ynestra King claims, for example, that "life on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy" (1983, 19).

<sup>38</sup> Relying on deconstructive implications that any returns to the origin are illusory, Kolodny reminds us that in fact "[s]hort of time machines or miraculous resurrections, there is simply no way to know, precisely or surely, what 'really was', what Homer intended when he sang... What we have really come to mean when we speak of competence in reading historical texts, therefore, is the ability to recognize literary conventions which have survived through time – so as to remain operational in the mind of the reader – and, where these are lacking, the ability to translate (or perhaps to transform?) the text's ciphers into more current and recognizable shapes. But we never really reconstruct the past in its own terms" (1997, 177-8).

<sup>39</sup> With reference to the "idea of a common women's culture" as propagated by second-wave feminism, Showalter continues that "the essentialism of the universal female subject and the female imagination was open

to charges of racism, especially since black women's texts were rarely cited as examples. As black women and others within the women's movement protested against the inattention to racial and class differences between women, the idea of a common women's culture had to be re-examined" (1997, 225).

<sup>40</sup> According to Maggie Humm, "Afro-American criticism" began in 1974 with two events: the publication of a special issue of *Black World* with a cover photograph of Zora Neale Hurston and essays by June Jordan and Mary Helen Washington, and the publication of Alice Walker's critical work, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* in *MS* magazine (Humm 1994, 172): 'Afro-American' feminist criticism is preoccupied by two closely related questions: first, what is the relationship between Black feminist criticism and (post)structuralism, and second, how should it proceed with the recovery of African myths and with translating their symbols? Both of these questions refer to issues of essentialism and difference, demonstrating an attempt to widen the discipline of literary criticism by describing it as an open process. Myths are thus interpreted in terms of textual openings that create space for the actual voice of the differentiated.

<sup>41</sup> Alice Walker (born in 1944) went to a college for black women in Atlanta, Georgia, and then transferred to Sarah Lawrence College in New York where she received her Bachelor of Arts. During her junior year she traveled to Africa as an exchange student, and later lived for a short time in New York, then from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, she lived in Tougaloo, Mississippi, during which time she had a daughter, Rebecca, in 1969. Alice Walker was active in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, and in the 1990's she is still an involved activist. She has spoken for the women's movement, the anti-apartheid movement, and the anti-nuclear movement, and against female genital mutilation. She has received numerous awards, among others the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for *The Color Purple*. *The Temple of My Familiar*, discussed here, was first published in 1989.

<sup>42</sup> Referring to Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Showalter refers to Walker as both a story-teller and a philosopher, who describes her position as a mediator between contemporary culture and mythologized African belief systems, "tracing the suppressed creativity of black women under slavery and poverty to non-verbal art forms" (1997, 226).

<sup>43</sup> Pratt, for example, "seems always to find that women in fiction are cut off from autonomy, from self-actualization and ethical capacity. In her view, women are victim figures either succumbing to madness or marriage or frequently to both" (Humm 1994, 69-70).

<sup>44</sup> I am drawing on Anna Sobolewska's work on popular mystics, *Mistyka dnia powszedniego* (Everyday's mystique) (1992) further employed in the analysis of Tokarczuk's work.

<sup>45</sup> "Woman becomes plant, panther, diamond, mother-of-pearl, by blending flowers, furs, jewels, shells, feathers with her body; she perfumes herself to spread the aroma of the lily and the rose. But feathers, silk, pearls, and perfumes serve also to hide the animal crudity of her flesh, her odor. She paints her mouth and her cheeks to give them the solid fixity of a mask; her glance she imprisons deep in kohl and mascara, it is no more than the iridescent ornaments of her eyes; her hair, braided, curled, shaped, loses its disquieting plantlike mystery" (de Beauvoir 1993, 167).

<sup>46</sup> Bringing together the writings of Friedrich Schlegel and Roland Barthes, Kari Weil analyses "androgyny" (the paradoxical body) as a personal and social ideal of 'completed humanity' (Schlegel's *vollendete Menschheit*), which links with Walker's concept of androgyny as a "completed," united wo/manhood" (1992, 36-39).

<sup>47</sup> According to Purkiss, "even the most ancient myths become caught up in contemporaneity, just as they were for their original inventors." Thus, reviving "Goddess-worship is not automatically a simple step forward for feminism," for how far can anyone be sure that the modern religious depictions of the Goddess are actually not disguised borrowings of male religious imaginary, perpetuating ever present patriarchal fantasies? Sometimes, unfortunately, "the Goddess has been embraced by women who are attracted to some of her most problematic features" (1996, 32). Also, as Carter comments, "[m]other goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place" (2000, 5).

<sup>48</sup> This title echoes the title of Maitland's collection of short stories *Women Fly When Men Aren't Watching* (1988). Two stories from this collection are analyzed in Chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup>“Kann nicht’, wiederholte ich, um mich der Stimme zu versichern, die erbärmlich war, aber besser als stumm. // ‘Dann lern es,’ sagte die Schlange. // ‘Von wem,’ fragte ich verstört. // ‘Von dir,’ sagte die Schlange” (Morgner 1983, 13).

<sup>50</sup> Selected translations are provided by Lewis in her study *Subverting Patriarchy. Feminism and Fantasy in the Works of Irmtraud Morgner* (1995).

<sup>51</sup> Morgner, born in Chemnitz in 1933, studied German Literature at Leipzig University, worked as an editor for *Neue deutsche Literatur* in Berlin, and later lived as an independent writer. Her first social-realistic narrative, “Notturmo. Erzählung” appeared in 1964, but, as Morgner claimed in her later years, should not be mistaken for a literary work. As she believes, her first novel to be taken seriously is *Hochzeit in Konstantinopel* (Wedding in Constantinople), published in 1968 in East Germany, and a year later by Hanser-Verlag in Munich. In the following years, Morgner was (exceptionally) granted trips to Paris, the Soviet Union and the USA, and (carefully) celebrated as a talented feminist. Her following novel, *Die wundersamen Reisen Gustavs des Weltfahrers* (The Weird and Wonderful Travels of Gustav, the World-Traveler), a West German publication, draws on her family life in Chemnitz, however, its central theme, according to Morgner, is ‘woman entering history’. In 1974, Morgner published her major work, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (The Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice as Chronicled by Her Minstrel Laura) in East Berlin, although with difficulties, due to its ‘unacceptably’ elaborate title as well as to its strict feminist position, shocking irony and double-dealing fantastic elements, which offered an alternative not only to socialistically defined feminism, but also to patriarchally defined socialist Germany. In 1976, after being rejected by a Western publisher, her *Trobadora Beatriz* became a bestseller for Luchterhand Verlag, Darmstadt/Neuwied, and Morgner was acclaimed as the major feminist of the DDR. In 1987-88, she worked as a guest-researcher at the German Department of the University of Zurich, however, she became seriously ill and died two years later.

<sup>52</sup> As Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel observes in “Feminist Theology” (1985), “in German society there has long been mistrust of the term feminism. In contrast to the United States, for us the word feminism is fraught with a fear of aggression, anarchy, misandry. Hitherto it was almost completely unknown, and in our first women’s movement it played only a marginal role” (2001, 241). With specific reference to an East-German dilemma, Lewis writes moreover that “[t]he term feminist is somewhat problematic when applied to Morgner since she herself repeatedly rejected the label in interviews. She maintained that as a communist she did not need to be a feminist as well since the sweeping social changes brought about by the socialist revolution automatically envisaged the abolition of all forms of exploitation, including those based on gender” (Lewis 1995, 1).

<sup>53</sup> As Frigga Haug observes in “The End of Socialism in Europe: A New Challenge for Socialist Feminism?” (1992), the “former socialist model did not eliminate women’s oppression, in fact, the situation of women was not even relevant to the dominant theory, which saw feminism as a bourgeois deviation. Nevertheless, it is above all women in movements in the former socialist countries who appear to be ready to think about an improved model of socialism” (2001, 167). Morgner herself explicitly draws on the difference between the West and East European representations of gender roles in her 1975 interview with Karin Huffzky: “But you’ll find, for instance, differences in the way things are advertised in your country and ours. Advertising that flatters people by saying what they want to hear always states things very directly. Here advertising for laundry detergent shows men doing the laundry, and in store ads, there are men doing the shopping. It’s not something we even notice, except in contrast to advertising in your country, where women are expected to have a guilty conscience if their laundry isn’t fluffy enough” (2001, 276).

<sup>54</sup> “die vor allem von den Dichtern Hesiod und Platon geprägte Fassung war mir bisher als verbindlich erschienen. Sie beschreibt Pandora als das mit trügerischer Schönheit ausgestattete Unheilsweib, das die rächenden Götter zur Erde sandten, um den von Prometheus geschaffenen Gluckszustand der Menschheit zu zerstören. Epimetheus nimmt die Götterbottin gegen den Willen seines Bruders auf. Da öffnet Pandora das mitgebrachte Gefäß, und alle Übel verbreiten sich über die Erde. Nur die Hoffnung bleibt unter dem schnell geschlossenen Deckel der Lade” (Morgner 1983, 99).

<sup>55</sup> “Der Pandora-Mythos ist zunächst ein Stoff über die Frau. Ihr Bild hat seit Urzeiten zwei Gesichter. Es bringt ein Gefäß, dessen Bauch letztlich kein anderer ist als der weibliche; und dem Gefäß entquellen, je nach der Meinung, die von der Frau gehegt wird, alle Gaben oder alle Übel” (Morgner 1983, 267).

<sup>56</sup> "Although Goethe was never to complete the last section of the play in which Pandora returns to save humanity, his portrayal of the figure is significantly at variance with the Greek sources and subsequent versions of the myth. Goethe recasts his Pandora with the classical grace and beauty of her box, which was once the source of 'all the Spites that might plague mankind' but now contains 'figures of the imagination' and 'happiness in love'" (Lewis 1995, 237).

<sup>57</sup> The first medieval source of the narrative of disobedience was the lost Midrash Abkir (ca. 10th century), followed by the Zohar which is thoroughly examined by Patai in *The Hebrew Goddess*. Lilith appears here as Adam's first wife (first Eve). "However, Adam and Lilith could find no happiness together, not even understanding." When Adam wished "to lie with her", Lilith asked: 'Why should I lie beneath you, when I am your equal, since both of us were created from dust?' And seeing Adam's determination to suppress her wishes, she utters the magic name of God, rises into the air, and flies away to the Red Sea, a place of ill-repute, full of lascivious demons.' She settles down in Egypt, 'the seat of witchcraft'" (1990, 223).

<sup>58</sup> As Lewis suggests, "[i]n the figures of the witch and Pandora, Morgner offers oppositional female images in contrast to the heroes of the "performance principle" – Prometheus, Faust, and Don Juan. The witch and Pandora, like Marcuse's positive images of Orpheus and Narcissus, stand for alternative modes of social interaction and peaceful, non-aggressive forms of knowledge" (1995, 219).

<sup>59</sup> "The future, according to Beatriz and Arke, resides in a reconciliation between Prometheus and Pandora, between the destructive and creative tendencies in human nature" (Lewis 1995, 237).

<sup>60</sup> "Alle schöpferischen Berufe verlangen ein hohes Maß an Einsamkeit. Eine Frau, die dichtet oder dergleichen, muss mit gnadenloser Einsamkeit rechnen" (Morgner 1983, 40).

<sup>61</sup> "Denn Singen wäre die Muttersprache der Sirenen" (Morgner 1983, 14). Classically depicted as bird-or-fish-like bodies with women's heads, the Sirens belong to the earliest and the most ostentatious embodiments of feminine-/ized strangeness. According to Buitron-Oliver and Cohen's study, the Sirens as "human-headed birds initially appeared during the late eight century B.C. as creatures employed in decorative, non-narrative contexts, and they continued to have ornamental functions for hundreds of years. The first indication that these popular composite avian monsters were equated with Homer's Sirens comes from depictions on Corinthian pottery of the first half of the sixth century B.C. in which Odysseus' ship is shown passing the Sirens in the specific manner advised by Kirke – with sails stowed and Odysseus bound to the mast so that he can listen to the Sirens' seductive song" (1995, 31).

<sup>62</sup> "Ich habe am Nabel der Welt zum ersten Mal Sirenen gesehen... In alten Zeiten lebten alle weisen Frauen ein zweites Leben in Sirenengestalt. Damals gab es viele Sirenen" (Morgner 1983, 15-16).

<sup>63</sup> "Arke sah auch nicht gut aus. Ihre Flügel waren zerkratzt. Am Leib fehlten Schuppen. Verschorftes Gesicht, rätselhaft lächelnd wie immer. Trüber Blick" (Morgner 1983, 35).

<sup>64</sup> "Eile! 'Wohin,' fragte ich. 'In dich,' sagte die Schlange. 'Lerne durch Verlernen. Trainiere!'" (Morgner 1983, 17).

<sup>65</sup> Blank paper, for the purpose of printing, writing, copying, etc, was very difficult to obtain in the official communist market, not only in East Germany, but in other Eastern European countries, like Poland, as well.

<sup>66</sup> "Seitdem das Schild an der Voliere hing, war meine Ruhe gestört. Es zog Besucher an. Sie palaverten. Unangenehm und angenehm erregt. Der Name fiel sofort unangenehm auf. Weil er nackt dastand. Ohne Übersetzung. 'Strix sirensis' stand nackt da... Nichts stand da zu lesen über Vorkommen, Eigenschaften und Fortpflanzungsart des Exponats, gar nichts über seine Bedeutung" (Morgner 1983, 498-9).

<sup>67</sup> "Willst du Lachsft, Mutsft oder Kraftsaft", fragte die Rednerin, als ob Laura allseits bekannt wäre und zu Truppe gehörte. Laura lehnte ab. Die Rednerin füllte ein Glas, drängte Laura auf und prostete ihr zu. Die Runde prostete mit. Laura trank. Der Saft gerbte wirklich ihre Mundhöhle, lief scharf durch den Schlund, wärmte den Magen. Die Wärme war wirklich. Das Glas. Die Hand, die es hielt. Ein Alptraum?" (Morgner 1983, 323).

<sup>68</sup> In Morgner's text, Arke speaks to Beatriz: "Die Frauen leben nicht nur im Patriarchat; es lebt auch in ihnen" (1983, 94).

<sup>69</sup> Morgner writes: "The castle Blocksberg, earlier called the Brocken, and the brothel Horselberg are connected through an underground train. The first station is called the temple of reason, the other is called the temple of desire." ("Schloss Blocksberg und Puff Horselberg sind durch einen unterirdischen Gang miteinander verbunden. Durch einen unterirdischen Gang mit Tunnelbahn... Die eine Endstation – früher Brocken, heute Blocksberg – heißt 'Vernunfttempel' und ist auch entsprechend ausgemalt; die andere heißt 'Lusttempel'" (1983, 300)).

<sup>70</sup> Drawing on such works as Frymer-Kensky's *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, Hurwitz's *Lilith, the First Eve*, Koltuv Black's *The Book of Lilith*, as well as Jo Milgrom's "Some Second Thoughts About Adam's First Wife" (1988), Near Eastern and Judeo-Christian figurations depict Lilith as a female demon (the polluting other), her body as a grotesque construction fluctuating between femaleness and animality, accentuating the connection between evil and femaleness as a specific reinforcement of gender difference. Her lack of encumbrances, violence, and unrestrained sexuality can be seen as early manifestations of the Western witch-figure, a mouth-dominated female creature in a double understanding of the female *labia*, the dangerous lips of the speaking female mouth and the uncontrolled lips of the vulva, usually in the form of the vagina dentata. Her body has an indefinable status, and hence it is depicted in different, often contradictory forms which convey her status as a variable, ambiguous container of divergences, deviations and deferrals.

<sup>71</sup> "Die Menschen, die Mutter Erde geschaffen hatte, lebten ruhig hin. Aber zwischen dem ersten Menschenpaar, das dein Herr Gott dann herstellte, gab ständig Streit. Weil sich Lilith Adam nicht unterordnen wollte. Sie sprach: 'Du bist nur meinesgleichen. Beide sind wir aus Erde gemacht.' Als Adam sich damit nicht abfand, sprach Lilith ein Zauberwort und flog davon. Dein Herr Gott aber sandte auf Adams Beschwerde drei Engel Aus, die Lilith im Roten Meer fanden. Sie konnten die Frau nicht zu Rückkehr bewegen. Da geriet Gott in Wut und hieb die in zwei Stücke. Das Unterteil führte er Adam als zweites Eheweib Eva zu, das Oberteil schob er ab in die Unterwelt, die mein Herr Satan regiert. Es behielt den Namen Lilith, aber du und die anderen Oberengel mordeten auf Befehl seinen Ruf, indem sie die Verleumdung, Lilith tote ungeborene Kinder, zur Glaubensdoktrin erhoben. Das Teilen war Gottes Erfindung" (Morgner 1983, 471).

<sup>72</sup> "Nur Amanda konnte Lauras Angst besiegen. Nicht allein mit Redegewalt und Argumenten. Denn Worte wiegen wenig angesichts eines teuflischen Verbots" (Morgner 1983, 153).

<sup>73</sup> "Eine gewisse Barbara holte sie ein und zurück. 'Ich freue mich', sagte Barbara zur Begrüßung. 'Ich freue mich nicht', zischte Laura. 'Das wird sich ändern', erwiderte Barbara gelassen, passte Laura ein in die Tafelrunde und nahm als Nachbarin Platz. Zunächst änderte sich jedoch gar nichts. Im Gegenteil. Die Zecherei wurde immer zügelloser. ... Scharfe sexuelle und politische Witze, kakophonische Gesänge, teils mit vollen Mündern gesungen, denn die Frauen tranken ja nicht nur hemmungslos, sie aßen ja auch so. Lauter Kalorienschwergewichte aßen sie: ungarische Salami, Eisbein, Schlagsahne, Konfekt. Fühlten sie denn keine persönliche Verantwortung für ihre Figur, keine gesellschaftliche Verantwortung für die Gesunderhaltung ihrer Arbeitskraft? Und was das Erstaunlichste war: Wurden diese Frauen denn gar nicht müde? Laura war hundemüde. Machten diese Typen die Nächte durch, weil sie tagsüber schliefen? Laura vermutete Hausfrauen um sich. Keine echten natürlich, die Haushalt, Mann und Kinder zu bedienen hatten - nominelle mit Haushälterin" (Morgner 1983, 323-324).

<sup>74</sup> "'Zu Hause Frühstück machen, Kinder in die Schule schicken, Männer aus dem Bett schmeicheln und so weiter, manche werden auch schon unterwegs sein zu ihren Orten.' 'Welche Orte?', fragte Laura. 'Universität, Fliessband, Charité, Büro, Musikhochschule, Redaktion, Heiratsschwindelbude, Akademie, Dichterstube und so weiter'" (Morgner 1983, 325).

<sup>75</sup> "Alchemisten, die geglaubt hatten, ihr arcanum gefunden zu haben, hatten sich Adepten genannt. Alchemistinnen, die glaubten, ihr arcanum gefunden zu haben, wurden Hexen genannt" (Morgner 1983, 144).

<sup>76</sup> "'Konrad betritt keine Küche', sagte Vilma. 'Weil er nicht darf?', fragte Laura. 'Weil er nicht will', antwortete Vilma. 'Nie?' 'Ich glaube nie.' 'Und wenn er doch eines Tages...' 'Umgotteswillen', rief Vilma nach außen, 'wenn wir entdeckt würden, wäre ich verloren.' Laura konnte sich nicht erklären, weshalb Vilma, die nicht entdeckt werden wollte, plötzlich nach außen schrie und selbst die primitivsten Grundsätze der Konspiration missachtete. 'Unterm Schreibtisch des Detektivs sitzt der Täter am sichersten', entgegnete Vilma leise wie gewöhnlich" (Morgner 1983, 204).

<sup>77</sup> As Lewis comments, "Laura's rather naïve interest in matriarchy and what constitutes prehistory stems from the perceived need to subvert teleological accounts of history that posit a radical caesura between prehistory and history. She implicitly questions the need to construct an a priori historical period dominated by chaotic natural phenomena, the belief in superstitions, and the general 'immaturity' of the human subject... In Enlightenment discourses prehistory has generally functioned as a means of distinguishing reason from its other, a way of differentiating the history of the Enlightenment from the irrational, barbaric phase of the history of humanity it is thought to supersede" (1995, 233).

<sup>78</sup> "Wie soll die schöne Amanda denn heißen?" fragte sie [die Frau mit dem Besen] ... 'Amanda Laura', antworteten Selma und Olga unwillkürlich. Und sie hatten sich doch eben noch auf die Namen Laura Waltraut geeinigt. Die Frau richtete sich gerade, setzte eine Papierkrone auf ihren Kopf, hob beide Hände und sprach: 'Sejlamur' ... Die Frau stellte sich als Isebel vor. Dann trat sie lachend an Olgas Wochenbett, gratulierte der zierlichen Mutter zur schweren Leibesfrucht und übergab Selma eine Phiole zu treuen Händen. Mit dem Befehl, dem Säugling in seiner dritten Lebenswoche täglich früh, mittags und abends einen Tropfen des in der Phiole enthaltenen Elixiers zum Anfuttern zu verabfolgen. Den Rest musste Olga sicher verwahren. Bis Amanda zwölf Jahre alt wäre. Dann sollte dem Mädchen die Phiole übergeben werden. Und Amanda musste das winzige Gefäß bei sich tragen bis ans Ende ihrer Tage" (Morgner 1983, 45).

<sup>79</sup> "However, when Laura, in sheer desperation at her inability to cope with the demands of being a single working parent, tries to distill a fatal potion for herself and her son, she manages instead to conjure up her other witch-half from the next world. Amanda, thus summoned, leaves the Horselberg where she is currently "stationed" to lodge the right of veto that every woman's banished witch-half can exercise in matters of life and death" (Lewis 1995, 161).

<sup>80</sup> "Isebel behauptet heute, dass der Beistand, den so ein Elixier herbeischaffen kann, vielleicht sogar Luras Teilung verhindert hatte. Mit etwas Glück" (Morgner 1983, 104).

<sup>81</sup> "'Armes Kind!' 'Wieso arm?' Protestierte Selma. 'Wenn nicht alles täuscht, wird ein schönes Mädchen draus.' 'Eben', sagte Isebel. 'Wieso eben?' Protestierte Selma. 'Um das Mädchen werden sich die Männer reißen.' 'Eben nicht', sagte Isebel. 'Wieso eben nicht?' protestierte Selma. 'Weil sie weder schön und dumm ist noch hässlich und dumm, aber auch nicht hässlich und klug – sondern schön und klug. Diese Variante ist die schlimmste, mit der eine Frau geschlagen sein kann'" (Morgner 1983, 47).

<sup>82</sup> "Ein spezielles Schlafersatzelixier ist alchemistisch nicht mischbar. Es wäre auch Flickerei. Die Müdigkeit hat nämlich in der Teilung ihren Grund. Logischerweise, weil ein halber Mensch nicht über so viele Kräfte verfügt wie ein ganzer. Erst wenn du die Ganzheit wiedergewinnst, bist du deiner Konditionssorgen ledig" (Morgner 1983, 284).

<sup>83</sup> "Laura verbat sich den Namen Hexe" (Morgner 1983, 238).

<sup>84</sup> "Luras Phonixelixier war ebenso wie das Hexenbeschwörungselixier keine neue Erfindung, sondern nur Wiederholung einer alten" (Morgner 1983, 283).

<sup>85</sup> "Ich gratuliere dir und bin stolz auf dich, dass auch du die Teilung nicht langer hinnehmen willst. Der Aufstand, der uns die Wiedervereinigung bringen wird, kann beginnen" (Morgner 1983, 168).

<sup>86</sup> "Was du mit deinen reduzierten Kräften geleistet hast, ist auch diesmal wieder bewunderwert. Aber auch du musst endlich begreifen, dass von halbierten Wesen keine originären Erfindungen zu erwarten sind. Kein Vergnügen, das erkennen zu müssen: ich weiß. Oder glaubst du etwa, ich hatte nicht versucht, mit dem Kopf irgendwie durch die Wand zu kommen?" (Morgner 1983, 284).

<sup>87</sup> "Laura knew from long forbidden experience that she could not get by without complementation. Since she had to forego the optimal complementation in Amanda, she pondered how she could achieve another" (Lewis's translation 1995, 216).

<sup>88</sup> As "promised" on the back cover, these stories reflect "mystic dances, magic convocations, refined trophies, enchanting and poisonous at once, never harmless." All translations are mine, the original is provided in the endnote. Unless otherwise stated, all italics are the author's and all ellipses, mine.

<sup>89</sup> Irigaray answers this question in "Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order": "Precisely. And they lay traps for us. Not that I think we should hold it against individual men. But all the same, they do lay traps for us. The superegoization of sexual excess: you aren't a liberated woman if..." (Whitford 2000, 49).

<sup>90</sup> Sabine Korte (born in 1958 in the Dortmund area) studied political science, drama, and German literature, worked for numerous women's magazines, and more recently embarked on a career as a spiritual advisor, offering spectacular courses and lectures on "how to become self-aware, and discover new energy and true beauty." She has written several novels, among them an account of the three years of her life since she has moved to a small village with her children (to live close to her spiritual master), published under the peculiar title *Der Christus-Meister oder der Himmel in meinem Herzen* (The Christ-Master or Heaven in my Heart). It was followed by a collection of stories, *Happy Birthday, Aphrodite! - zu den Quellen von Selbstbewußtsein, Ausstrahlung und wahrer Schönheit* (-About the Sources of Self-awareness, Energy, and True Beauty, 2001), where Korte introduces the reader to her therapeutic methods and healing practices such as meditating, rejoicing in dance, singing, and love-making.

<sup>91</sup> Iris von Finckenstein (born in 1953 in Mainz) studied German literature and folklore in Munich, and, similarly to Korte, worked (and still does) as a free-lanced journalist for newspapers, magazines, and television. She has published several short stories, among other, for children.

<sup>92</sup> "Du kennst Deine Hexe schlecht. Ich habe all meinen Zauber benutzt, um wegzukommen aus der Stadt. Nicht mit Mann und Kind. Nicht als Ehepaar. Sondern allein, hinreißend frei, ganz dicht bei mir selbst und so weit weg wie möglich" (Korte 2000, 257).

<sup>93</sup> "Ich habe Dir ein Ultimatum gestellt. Du hast Dir eine letzte Bedenkzeit auserbeten. Vier Wochen auf den Philippinen. Mit Ehefrau. Aber der Kampf ist noch nicht entschieden, Geliebter. Möglich, das Du mich, Dein Satansweib, auf den Scheiterhaufen verpasster Möglichkeiten wirfst. Eine stichflammender Leidenschaft, und die große Liebe ist abgefackelt. Du stocherst noch ein wenig in der Glut und fragst Dich, wie die schonen Gefühle so schnell verrauchen können" (Korte 2000, 266).

<sup>94</sup> "Es sei denn, Du nimmst mich zur Frau. In einer schwarzen Messe, auf einem weißen Altar, die Ellenbogen gefesselt, die Arme über den Kopf gestreckt, die Beine so weit gespreizt, dass die Sehnen einen klaren Ton singen" (Korte 2000, 266).

<sup>95</sup> "Wer hat Angst vor der weißen Frau?" Fasst sich erst einer ein Herz und berührt die gespensterblasse Hand, die – verblüffend! – nicht einmal abfärbt, ist der Zauber gebrochen" (Korte 2000, 258).

<sup>96</sup> "Mit welch anmutiger Lässigkeit sie das bunte Tuch beiseite schieben und eine milchpralle Brust entbloßen. Stolz tragen sie ihre Kinder in Tüchern auf der Hüfte oder auf dem Rücken wie schweren Schmuck, der ihre Weiblichkeit betont" (Korte 2000, 258).

<sup>97</sup> "Eine Gruppe französischer Touristen, die Männer in makellos gepflegten Bommelschuhen, platzte fast vor Lachen, als ich durch die Hotelhalle ging, um nach einem Zimmer zu fragen. Die Sohlen haben sich von meinen Schuhen gelöst und klappen bei jedem Schritt auf. Über einem langen T-shirt-Rock – das einzige Kleidungsstück, dass ich nicht verschenkt habe, trage ich einen inzwischen vollkommen verschmutzten Überwurf von Ghazi" (Korte 2000, 271).

<sup>98</sup> "Als Ausländerin genieße ich hier Narrenfreiheit, und es ist mir erlaubt, mich zu den Männern ans Feuer zu setzen. Dort lausche ich wie hypnotisiert der fremden Sprache, diesen kratzenden Lauten, die sich der Tiefe ihrer Kehle entwinden" (Korte 2000, 268).

<sup>99</sup> "Sie haben mir schon viele schöne Messer gezeigt, aber der Preis, den sie verlangen, ist so hoch, dass ich fast mein ganzes restliches Geld dafür aufwenden müsste" (Korte 2000, 269).

<sup>100</sup> "Hier muss ich ihn suchen, hier werde ich ihn finden, den schwarzen Zauber, der mir Deine Liebe sichern soll" (Korte 2000, 260).

<sup>101</sup> "Der Fetischeur hockte sich dicht vor mir auf die Fersen und spreizte vorsichtig meine Schenkel. Ich konnte ihn riechen. Er roch nach schwarzer Haut und Männerschweiß, scharf, intensiv und fremd. Meine Beine zitterten unter der Last des Steins. Der modrige Duft von Menstruationsblut strömte aus meinem Schoss auf" (Korte 2000, 262).

<sup>102</sup> "Der Fetisch badete im Hühnerblut. Es durchtränkte meinen Rock, nässte meinen Slip und vermengte sich mit meinem eigenen. ...Das Blut des Fetisch ist zu einer dunkelbraunen Kruste eingetrocknet. Aber er wartet immer noch. Es ist, als verlänge er, dass ich einen Dialog mit ihm beginne: ,Warum weckst du mich, verschleppst mich aus meiner Erde, was verlangst du? – 'Ich will, dass der Mann, den ich liebe, seine Frau verlässt.' 'Bist du nicht auch verheiratet? Hast du nicht ein Kind?' 'Doch. Deshalb habe ich dir geopfert. Meine Liebe ist gegen jede Vernunft. Sie hat meinen Verstand zerfressen. Ich bin besessen'" (Korte 2000, 263).

<sup>103</sup> "Als ich an der Wand des Hotelzimmers zum ersten Mal seit Wochen in einen Spiegel blickte, sank ich bis auf den Grund meiner Augen. Ich bin schön, Geliebter – Du wirst sehen. // Meine Augen sind so klar wie die eines Menschen, der lange gefastet hat. Meine Lippen sind so zerschunden, dass Du sie nicht mehr blutig beißen kannst. Mein Körper ist so übersat mit Beulen und Stichen und blauen Flecken, dass Du dich nicht mehr auf mich legen kannst. In mir aber leuchtet wie eine funkelnde Essenz der Geist der Wüste" (Korte 2000, 271-2).

<sup>104</sup> "in meiner Tasche wiegen schwer die Dinge – der Fetisch und das Messer. Alal, das Familienoberhaupt, hat mir das alte Messer geschenkt. Er hatte es mir niemals verkauft, behauptet Ghazi. Viele neugefertigte Tuareg-Waffen wurden für Touristen auf alt geschliffen. Aber ich sei nun tatsächlich im Besitz einer alten Waffe" (Korte 2000, 272).

<sup>105</sup> "Es ist gefährlich, mein abtrünniger Halbgott, eine Frau allein zu lassen, die sich der Magie verschrieben hat" (Korte 2000, 259).

<sup>106</sup> To quote Pratt, "secrecy and fear of discovery necessarily wiped out the open scholarship of the ancient matriarchal colleges and sacred islands. . . . Those who were herbalists let their gardens go to seed. Those who kept the ancient matrifocal law did so within the confines of their homes, but publicly joined the throngs of enslaved female chattels and swaggering masters. Contemporary witches and scholars of witchcraft have suggested that the testimonies exacted under torture reflect less of the witch cult itself than the phallogocentric and rabidly gynophobic imagination of the 'witch doctors' and judges. The true Craft of the Wise, meanwhile, was passed down orally through the generations to the present" (1981, 176).

<sup>107</sup> "Guten Tag. Sie sind mit W.I.T.C.H. verbunden. Was kann ich für sie tun?... Unsere Workshops beginnen am siebten jeden Monats und dauern sieben Tage. Der nächste fängt am kommenden Montag an. Wenn Sie sich anmelden wollen... Der Workshop kostet 7000 DM... Ein Preis, der nicht zu hoch ist, wenn man (sic!) bedenkt, was Sie bei uns lernen können" (Finckenstein 2000, 28).

<sup>108</sup> "Ihr bekommt euren eigenen Besen und einen neuen Namen. Sie machte eine andächtige Pause. Emily bewunderte die Selbstverständlichkeit, mit welcher Lu über derartige Dinge sprach. Ein Außenstehender hätte sie wahrscheinlich für total verrückt gehalten" (Finckenstein 2000, 33).

<sup>109</sup> In "Space, Power and Knowledge" Foucault claims: "Nothing is fundamental. That is what is interesting in the analysis of society. That is why nothing irritates me as much as these enquiries – which are by definition metaphysical – on the foundation of power in a society or the self-institution of a society, etc. These are not fundamental phenomena. There are only reciprocal relations, and the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another" (1993, 164).

<sup>110</sup> "Sie hatte es mit ayurvedischer Massage versucht, mit den rituellen Gesängen der Eskimos, mit indianischer Sandmalerei und mit balinesischem Gamelan-Unterricht, doch nichts von alledem war das Richtige gewesen ... dass es vielleicht doch näherliegender war, sich auf die Wurzeln der europäischen Kultur zu besinnen, statt sich in fremdartigen Künsten zu versuchen. Und was, bitte sehr, war so sehr in der europäischen Kultur verwurzelt wie die Hexenkunst?" (Finckenstein 2000, 28).

<sup>111</sup> "Es war ein kurzer, aber heftiger innerer Kampf. Danach griff Emily erneut zum Telefon und meldete sich an... In der Nacht vor dem Workshop hatte sie ausgesprochen schlecht geträumt. Wilde Träume von Hexen mit grünen, spitzen Fingernägeln und gelben, blutunterlaufenden Augen. Sie hatten es auf ihre Handtasche abgesehen, in der sich ein Scheck über 7000 Mark befand. Es war Emily gelungen zu fliehen, doch als sie ihre Handtasche öffnete, enthielt sie statt des Schecks nur eine hässliche, glitschige Kröte" (Finckenstein 2000, 29).

<sup>112</sup> "Die Eingangshalle von W.I.T.C.H. glich eher dem Foyer eines amerikanischen Großkonzerns als einer Hexenküche. Glas, Edelstahl, makellos weisse Wände, eine helle Ledercouch mit dazugehörigen bequemen



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Sesseln, über dem ausladenden gläsernen Schreibtisch der Name des Instituts in schlichten goldenen Lettern. Hinter dem Schreibtisch eine Frau, eine elegante, dunkelhaarige Frau in mittleren Jahren, ein freundliches Lächeln auf dem sorgfältig geschminkten Gesicht" (Finckenstein 2000, 30).

<sup>113</sup>“Doch, erklärte Lu dann etwas von oben herab, auch sie habe einmal ähnlich empfunden wie Emily, allerdings bevor sie vor sieben Jahren bei W.I.T.C.H. angefangen hatte. Seither sei das Leben für sie ein einziges Abenteuer. Ach ja, und sie sei so alt, wie sie sich fühle... und vollkommen ungebunden in jeder Beziehung. Was nicht hieße, fügte sie noch in seidigem Ton hinzu, dass sie sich nicht ab und zu einen Mann genehmige. Es klang, als spreche sie von einem schmackhaften, aber kalorienreichen Leckerbissen" (Finckenstein 2000, 35).

<sup>114</sup> The reference here is to Doris Dörrie's film *Nobody Loves Me* (*Keiner liebt mich*), 1995.

<sup>115</sup> To quote Barbara Walker, "the old *med-wyf* was especially important in matters pertaining to women's mysteries, sex-uality and reproduction, which ... male doctors - usually avoided out of age-old superstitious fear... 'No one does more harm to the Catholic Faith than midwives'" (Walker 1987, 128).

<sup>116</sup> Feminist theories offer in themselves heterogeneous and often far from congruent perspectives. According to Nina Baym, in the light of recent gender and cultural studies, definitions of feminism are indeed diverse, some of them "more concerned to be theoretical than to be feminist", and some speaking from "the position of the castrata" (1997, 280).

## CHAPTER 2: THE WITCH AS ARCHAIC MOTHER

### THE ARCHAIC MOTHER AND THE SEMIOTIC CHORA

... the discovery that the mother does not have the phallus means that the subject can never return to the womb. Somehow the fact that the mother is not phallic means that the mother as mother is lost forever, that the mother as womb, homeland, source, and grounding for the subject is irretrievably past. The subject is hence in a foreign land, alienated (Gallop 1985, 148)

A language, a subject within language, seeks itself – it seeks one that might enunciate this turning point, this whirlwind, this reversal, this confrontation of the old within the new. (Kristeva 1980, 160)

Introducing movement and plurality into the cultural identity of the ‘witch’, the narratives selected for analysis in this chapter relate to feminist theories of “the vulnerability of the symbolic” (Bronfen 1998, xiii), and in particular of the mother within and beyond ‘the symbolic’, as proposed by Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous, and more recently by Creed, Mitchell, Butler and Bronfen.<sup>1</sup> These texts written by Carter, Maitland, Atwood, Saramonowicz, and Tokarczuk introduce the psychoanalytical idea of inherent narrative breaks (hysterical discharges) that complement a text/ therapy, here in the form of herstorical–therapeutical narratives, as discussed in Chapter 1. For Kristeva, following Lacan, ‘the symbolic’ “is a domain of position and judgement,” and, as Léon S. Roudiez comments, “it comes into being later than the semiotic, at the time of the mirror stage; it involves the thetic phase, the identification of the subject and its distinction from objects, and the establishment of a sign system” (Kristeva 1986, 19). The instabilities of ‘the symbolic’ are rooted in “the prohibition placed on the maternal body” which constitutes a pre-linguistic space, “a chora, a receptacle” (1986, 14)<sup>2</sup>, or, as Irigaray describes it, an “intimate place - which does not collect itself ... in specified propositions” (2000, 56). In the narratives to be discussed here, the ‘witch’ is designated as an ‘archaic’ mother associated

with the semiotic chora, and exposed as an identification with the loss of the mother, rather than the loss of the phallus. This loss of the mother relates to Irigaray's figure of the passionate Clytemnestra, who "certainly does not obey the image of the virgin-mother that has been held up to us for centuries," and "will go as far as a *crime passionnel*: she will kill her husband" (2000, 36).

Why? ... out of jealousy, out of fear perhaps, and because she has been unsatisfied and frustrated for so long. She also kills him because he sacrificed their daughter to conflicts between men, a motive which is often forgotten by the tragedians. But the new order demands that she in her turn must be killed by her son, inspired by the oracle of Apollo, the beloved son of Zeus: God the father. Orestes kills his mother because the rule of the God-Father and his appropriation of the archaic powers of mother-earth require it. He kills his mother and goes mad as a result, as does his sister Electra. Electra, the daughter, will remain mad. The matricidal son must be saved from madness to establish the patriarchal order. (2000, 36)

For Creed, the archaic mother becomes "a monster" who, as she argues in *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), "comes to represent the mother's 'missing' phallus" (1993, 21), that is the phallic mother. In analyzing the distinction between the phallic (fetishized) and the archaic mother, I am drawing on Creed's psychoanalytical differentiation between the phallic and the castrated/castrating woman:

The phantasy of woman as castrator is as terrifying as - if not more terrifying than - that of the castrated woman. It can also be used to explain why the male might desire to create a fetish, to want to continue to believe that woman is like himself, that she has a phallus rather than a vagina. In this context, the fetish stands in for the *vagina dentata* - the castrating female organ that the male wishes to disavow. It is possible that he might hold these opposing beliefs about woman alternately or even together. The image of woman as castrator and castrated is represented repeatedly in the mythology of all patriarchal cultures. She is either the tamed, domesticated, passive woman or else the savage, destructive, aggressive woman. The phallic woman is the fetishized woman - an image designed to deny the existence of both these figures (woman as castrated/ castrating). (1993, 116)<sup>3</sup>

If the archetypes of the pre-Oedipal (phallic), and castrating/castrated mother "are quite different and should not be confused," it is because they split as well as obscure the "female body" between fetish and fantasy on one hand and abjection and horror on the other. According

to Creed, “the former ultimately represents a comforting phantasy of sexual sameness, and the latter a terrifying phantasy of sexual difference” (1993, 8). Hellenistic culture provided an important insight into that split in its distinction between the domesticated wife and mother, Penelope, and the untamed monstrous females, Scylla and Charybdis, who are devouring whirlpools. It is in the split between them that the witch can be located: in the gap between the domesticated woman, whose scar of the ‘real incision’ has been made invisible, and the castrating *vagina dentata*, the threat to masculine identity.

As an archaic mother, the witch “is somewhat different from the mother of the semiotic chora, posed by Kristeva, in that the latter is the pre-Oedipal (phallic) mother who exists in relation to the family and the symbolic order” (Creed 1993, 20). The witch, however, represents “a being who exists prior to knowledge of the phallus” (1993, 20), that is, a phallogocentric non-being, non-meaning, projected as absence and irrationality (Moi 1986, 127) that separates the witch from the phallogocentric thinking. Her maternal body has not been marked by ‘symbolic castration’ but by ‘the real incision’ evoked by the cutting of the umbilical cord, deferred and perpetuated by the presence of the scar, the navel. As a place of disconnection, of separation from the mother, the navel is a reminder of mortality and vulnerability as well as of the mutability of the body (Bronfen 1998, xiii):

Although the navel perfectly simulates an opening with a designated aim, it actually serves no purpose and leads nowhere. Functioning neither as an entrance nor an exit, it displays a hole that is nothing. As it represents the interface between an opening and a closed-off cavity, between what is internal and what is external to the body, it also delineates what is off-limits to visualization. (1998, 4)

In linking the intimacy of the semiotic chora with the intimacy of the umbilical cord, I follow Bronfen’s psychoanalytical concept of the navel as “the knotted subject,” that is “a resilient trace of bondage, vulnerability, and incision – as the persistence of a remainder” (1998, 8), a reminder of dependence on the maternal body and separation from it.<sup>4</sup>

In its anatomic sense, after all, it is a slight, round depression in the center of the abdomen, containing a bulging star where the umbilical cord, connecting the fetus with the placenta in the womb, has been attached. (1998, 4)

The “knotting occurs over a wound, both shielding and constructing a site within which are the remains of the traumatic impact” (1998, 19) of separation.

The concept of the “mother as a continuous separation” has been thoroughly explored by Kristeva, who consequently connects “a division of the very flesh” with “a division of language”:

Then there is this other abyss that opens up between the body and what had been its inside: there is the abyss between the mother and the child. What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and this internal graft and fold, which, once the umbilical cord has been severed, is an inaccessible other? (1986, 178-9)

In light of the prohibition placed on the maternal body, as described by Kristeva, identifications with the archaic mother are types of gender identification as related to the ‘real’. Posited by Butler as “a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition” (1990, 63), these identifications are the consequence of the Lacanian ‘loss’. In connecting with the abject, invisible and culturally discarded umbilical cord, the archaic mother connects thus with the obscene bodily displacement and a demarcation between the intimate womb/ placenta (Irigaray’s and Kristeva’s *chora*) and the externalized body inscribed with the name of the Father. As a trace of abjection and horror, the archaic mother collapses into Creed’s figure of the *monstrous-feminine*, that is, into “the pre-symbolic or dyadic mother, the mother who is thought to possess a phallus” (Creed 1993, 21). In the symbolic order, in history, the archaic mother has been silenced (somewhat comparable with the Lacanian ‘real’ to which there is no access in language), and, as indicated by Whitford (in reference to Irigaray’s standpoint), it is this silence that

perpetuates the most atrocious and primitive phantasies – woman as devouring monster threatening madness and death – that are an indication of unanalyzed hatred from which women as a group suffer culturally, bound into archaic projections which belong to the male imaginary; thus they may be more likely to be incarcerated in mental hospitals than men. (2000, 26)

As a trace of the archaic mother, the witch is positioned on the border between the comforting maternal dream and the fear and horror of the castrated/ing female body; she is neither a Penelope nor a Charybdis, even though she comes close to representing the latter as the *monstrous-feminine*, a figure that provides an important connection between monstrosity and femaleness that is usually omitted in phallogentric discourse. As Creed observes,

Freud refers to the archaic mother as a 'shadowy' figure ('Female sexuality') and Lacan refers to her as the 'abyss of the female organ from which all life comes forth' (quoted in Heath, 1978, 54). They make no clear attempt to distinguish this aspect of the maternal figure from what they see as the protective/suffocating mother of the pre-Oedipal, or the mother as object of sexual jealousy and desire as she is represented in the Oedipal configuration. Kristeva extends the notion of the Freudian Oedipal mother to include two other faces of the mother: the fecund mother and the phantasmatic mother who constitutes the abyss which is so crucial in the formation of subjectivity. (1993, 25)

The witch as an 'archaic mother' connects therefore most clearly with the phallic, pre-Oedipal mother that, according to Madelon Sprengnether in *The Spectral Mother* (1990), emerges, "in Freud's unsystematic treatments of her, as a figure of subversion, a threat to masculine identity as well as to patriarchal culture":

Never a major figure in Freud's theory, which revolves around the drama of the father-son relationship, she has a ghostlike function, creating a presence out of absence. Like the spirit of the mournful and unmourned Jocasta, she haunts the house of Oedipus. (1990, 5)

This effect, which Sprengnether calls "spectral"<sup>5</sup>, can be linked to the concept of the *ghost* as defined by Derrida, representing what "can no longer be distinguished, with the same assurance, from truth, reality, living flesh, etc." (Derrida 1991, 130):

In English a specter is a ghost, a phantom, any object of fear or dread. Freud's representations of the preoedipal mother evoke all of these associations. She is the object of

his fascinated and horrified gaze, at the same time that she elicits a desire to possess and to know. In her disappearing act, she evades and frustrates his attempts at grand theory at the same time that she lures him, like a *fata morgana*, into the mists of metapsychology. (Sprengnether 1990, 5)

As employed in my analysis, the 'archaic witch' will also be brought into association with the 'temporary' madness inflicted on Orestes, as evoked by Irigaray,

in the form of a troop of enraged women who pursue him, haunt him wherever he goes, like the ghosts of his mother: the Furies. These women cry vengeance. They are women in revolt, rising up like revolutionary hysterics against the patriarchal power in the process of being established. (2000, 37)

The 'archaic witch' is thus a form of Kristevan "confrontation of the old within the new"

(Kristeva 1980, 160), both a "spectral effect" and the Derridean *ghost* of the semiotic chora haunting these narratives in the form of the Freudian *uncanny*:

Freud defines the uncanny as that which 'is undoubtedly related to what is frightening - to what arouses dread and horror' ... Throughout his discussion, Freud refers to those things which are frequently called uncanny. (Creed 1993, 54)

These are categorized by Creed as "those things which relate to the notion of a double: a cyborg; twin; Doppelgänger; a multiplied object; a ghost or spirit; an involuntary repetition of an act," "castration anxieties expressed as a fear of the female genitals," and "a feeling associated with a familiar/unfamiliar place, losing one's way, womb phantasies, a haunted house" (1993, 54). These elements, present in all the narratives selected for discussion in this section, draw on the limits of the 'woman' as 'mother', and further, as Purkiss suggests, on the "fear of slipping back into the mother, of losing our selves, which makes us fear fragmentation, fear the return of the pre-mirror-stage self" (1996, 81). At the same time, Purkiss continues,

we also passionately desire such a return, and it is the desire which frightens us. The contingency of the witch - her scattering of her self across space, the leakage of fluids across her bodily boundaries, her transgression of the norms of such leakage, which also preoccupied early modern women and enabled her magic, makes her a symbol of that lost maternal space. The more it is desired, the more it is feared. (1996, 81)

While recalling thus the phallogentric (Freudian) construct of the witch as a specific trace of the unencumbered woman and the terrible (phallic) mother, the witch evoked in this chapter will come to represent a ghost (a spectrum) of the repressed, uncanny absence of the archaic (rather than phallic) mother. It is precisely the archaic, "the non-being" (Moi 1986, 127), the absence, that links the witch with the return of what has been eliminated or repressed. The witch as the archaic figure, or as everything that comes to represent her, supplies the Freudian "protecting and suffocating mother" (Creed 1993, 25) with the uncanny, theoretically converging with Lacan's configuration of hysteria and the language of the unconscious as a signifier of "something quite other than what it says" (Lacan 1977, 155). According to Bronfen, "the hysteric strategy of self-representation and self-performance negotiates between the phallus and the omphalos, staging as it does the child's questioning whether having or not having the phallus is all that determines the subject" (1998, 11). In these narratives, the witch of the semiotic chora, a phantasmatic creature of the womb with no place in the symbolic order (and I designate her as om-phalic), provides a traumatic passage (a type of umbilical cord) to 'the symbolic'. However, 'the symbolic', attractive and indispensable because of its linguistic potentialities, "can be reached only by not trying to avoid 'the imaginary', by knowingly being *in* the imaginary" (Gallop 1982, 60). These narratives are therefore seen as re-formulations of the 'archaic' witch/mother that, as Irigaray observes, should be carefully given "new life", new form, and new interpretation:

We have to be careful about one other thing: we must not once more kill the mother who was sacrificed to the origin of our culture. We must give her new life, new life to that mother, to our mother within us and between us. We must refuse to let her desire be annihilated by the law of the father. We must give her the right to pleasure, to *jouissance*, to passion, restore her right to speech, and sometimes to cries and anger. We must also find, find anew, invent the words, the sentences that speak the most archaic and most contemporary relationship with the body of the mother... (Irigaray 2000, 43)



In Irigaray's understanding, the figure of the mother emerges from the semiotic realm of female sexuality, an unspoken sexuality that becomes a form of language. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray sees language as a sexual reflector (*speculum*) encompassing the creative and liberating aspects of the language(s) in which women can speak. According to Irigaray, to ignore the language of the body is to ignore the multiple possibilities of potential female expression still trapped in the patriarchal "vacuum".

Everything must be (re-)invented to avoid the *vacuum*... The mother may signify only a silent ground, a scarcely representable mystery, but at least she is a *plenum*. Of course you encounter opacity and resistance in her, as well as the repulsion of matter, the horror of blood, the ambivalence of milk, menacing traces of the father's phallus, and even the hole we left behind us when we came into the world. But she -at least - is not nothing. She is not that vacuum (of) woman. (2000, 54)

Tracing the concept of the semiotic mother, Cixous follows Irigaray's objective and extends the/a mother's biological ability to produce nourishment into the agency of voice. It is through the mother's own milk that she can regain her ability to speak against her own historical silence: "Voice: milk that could go on forever. Found again. The lost mother/bitter-lost. Eternity: is voice mixed with milk" (Cixous and Clément 1986, 93). In an attempt to work out a 'deconstruction' of the mother figure entangled in Western logocentrism, Cixous proclaims a 'specifically feminine' practice of writing (*écriture féminine*) which, as she declares, can be neither explained nor defined:

... defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be *theorized*, enclosed, coded, which does not mean it does not exist. But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallogocentric system; it takes place and will take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical theoretical domination. (1986, 92)<sup>6</sup>

Cixous's texts are set against (or 'in spite of') the biological opposition male/female that has been used "to construct a series of negative 'feminine' values which then are imposed on and confused with the 'female'" (Moi 1986, 125). She creates text-bodies, texts

alternating with independent female bodies on their journey of cultural rebirth.

For Cixous, who at this point is heavily indebted to Jacques Derrida's work, Western philosophy and literary thought is and has always been caught up in this endless series of hierarchical binary oppositions, which always in the end come back to the fundamental 'couple' of male/female. (Moi 1986, 125)

Her writing practice "will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, border runners never subjugated by any authority" (Cixous and Clément 1986, 91-92). Cixous's *Book of Promethea* (1983), as she explains, "is composed of first pages":

For the author that is serious.... I open my notebook, I open the window, I call, and my heroine is there, really. I am overwhelmed. / I warn her: "I am writing on you, Promethea, run away, escape, I am afraid to write you, I am going to hurt you!" / But rather than run away, she comes at a gallop. Through the window she comes, breathing hard, and alive as can be, she flings herself into the book, and there are bursts of laughter and splashes of water everywhere, on my notebook, on the table, on my hands, on our bodies. (Cixous 1994, 122-3)

However, Cixous's rebellious conflation of the semiotic and the female is as likely to lead to madness as to recovery, and emerges, in Butler's analysis of the semiotic, as an ineffective subversion of phallogocentric culture (1990). In psychoanalytical theories, in particular Kristeva's (following Lacan), the "multiple drives that characterize the semiotic constitute a prediscursive libidinal economy which occasionally makes itself known in language, but which maintains an ontological status prior to language itself" (Butler 1990, 80). The mother's entry into the Law of the Father is thus posited as an incorrect, inaccurate entry marked by the mother's lack of symbolic language. The denigration of the mother (ascribed to her reproductive functions), is furthermore "endorsed by her," since she "teaches the infant to abhor what she herself comes to represent within the signifying practices of the symbolic" (Creed 1993, 165).

Upon scrutiny of the semiotic functions in the language of these narratives, I will argue that phallogocentric discourse does not employ/enslave the witch in the same way as it

employs/ enslaves the mother who has entered 'the symbolic'. The witch, in fact, may provide a therapeutic treatment for the 'real incision' and the cultural denigration of the mother who, according to Irigaray, is "in danger of being reduced to a fiction" (2000, 107). Marking the possibility of the mother's re-birth and re-evaluation, the 'archaic witch' clearly manifests a desire to connect the semiotic chora with 'the symbolic'. Consequently, the witch comes to represent 'the imaginary' and the unconscious, in a way that the castrated mother, as frequently defined, does not.<sup>7</sup> However, conceptualizing and working with the notion(s) of the unconscious is problematic in itself, since the whereabouts of the unconscious cannot be easily mapped. As Derrida argues, "[in] order to describe traces, in order to read the traces of 'unconscious' traces (there are no 'conscious' traces), the language of presence and absence, the metaphysical discourse of phenomenology, is inadequate" (1991, 73).

Coinciding with two of the principal phenomena in psychoanalysis (the return of the repressed and transference), the unconscious, according to Gallop, whose perspective I will adopt, appears in "forms of repetition" which are "types of returns" (1982, 104). These returns are affected not so much by "the frustration of a desire but [by] the lack of recognition of a desire" (1982, 104)<sup>8</sup>. Also, in Juliet Mitchell's analysis, the repression of unrecognized desires, the ones prohibited, transferred and hence made unconscious, is never successful:

for the tabooed desires ... and their unsuccessful prohibition would inevitably return as one symptom or another. The energy of the original desire would fuel this return as a symptom which appeared in a distinct form because it contained simultaneously both the wishes and the prohibition of them. The story that is used as an emblem of these desires is the Oedipus complex – and its prohibition, which was formulated somewhat later, is the castration complex. (Mitchell 2000, 21)

Following Gallop, the "binary opposition between a plus and a minus, between a lack and a

nonlack, has resonances with sexual difference, or more specifically with a certain binary misreading of sexual difference, the opposition phallic/castrated" (1982, 124). Drawing attention to the Lacanian preference for metaphor (and his subsequent repression of metonymy), Gallop, like Irigaray, compares "the latency of metonymy" to the "hiddenness of the female genitalia," concluding that while a metaphor consists of supplanting one signifier with another, "a metonymic interpretation supplies a whole context of associations. Perhaps this metonymic interpretation might be called feminine reading" (1982, 129)<sup>9</sup>. This feminine reading (or writing) would thus be a response to sexual difference that, both in Lacan's theories and in Irigaray's post-Lacanian critique, "is not a simple binary that retains the metaphysics of substance as its foundation" (Butler 1990, 27).

The masculine 'subject' is a fictive construction produced by the law that prohibits incest and forces an infinite displacement of a heterosexualizing desire. The feminine is never a mark of the subject; the feminine could not be an 'attribute' of a gender. Rather, the feminine is the signification of lack, signified by the Symbolic, a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference. (1990, 27)

Finally, accentuating the inadequacies in psychoanalytic theories of sexual difference, Irigaray states that "women do not tell all. Even if you begged them to speak, even if he begged them, they will or would say nothing but the meaning of the 'subject' in this rape/theft [v(i)ol] of their *jouissance*" (2000, 56). In tracing the myth of the pre-symbolic mother, *l'écriture féminine* can thus be interpreted as a translation (transference) of experience from the semiotic "mystery", a pre-symbolic knowledge, into conscious processes of naming. Often the re-naming is achieved by the substitution of a heroine for the mythic hero, a "female embryo that is at the center of life... already thinking and speaking," as Cixous promises (1994, 125). We should, however, distinguish between a particular (individual) articulation of the unconscious and its applicability to general analysis. If desire is always 'particular', as Irigaray inquires, how "can you force analytic material into a

lexicon or a syntax, with schemata, graphs and mathemes which have nothing to do with this particular analysis" (2000, 84)? Evaluating the historical and psychoanalytical concepts of interpretation, Cixous, and Irigaray, as well as Wittig refer to the concept of oppression<sup>10</sup>, and argue for the importance of going beyond the opinions of 'specialists'. Addressing Lacan, and his 'blind' followers, Irigaray writes: "You refuse to admit that the unconscious – your concept of the unconscious – did not spring fully armed from Freud's head, that it was not produced ex nihilo at the end of the nineteenth century, emerging suddenly to reimpose its truth on the whole of history" (2000, 80). Irigaray rejects psychoanalytic 'science' as "the object of academic diplomas and theoretical qualifications backed by sanctions," while believing that the "singularity" of psychoanalysis "stemmed from the fact that it can never be complete," that it has to remain "interminable" (2000, 83). In fact, it "can only take place if it never subordinate[s] itself to a theory or a science" (2000, 83):

Interpretation, or merely listening, comes to mean an act which gives the analyst mastery over the analysand, an instrument in the hands of a master and his truth. The psychoanalyst himself is subordinate to it; and he reproduces his subordination. (Irigaray 2000, 84)

We are taught that the Unconscious, with perfectly good taste, structures itself upon metaphors, for example, the name-of-the-father, the Oedipus complex, castration... If the Unconscious, however, is easy to control, it is not just by anybody. Similar to mystical revelations, the apparition of symbols in the psyche demands multiple interpretations. Only specialists can accomplish the deciphering of the Unconscious. Only they, the psychoanalysts, are allowed (authorised?) to organise and interpret psychic manifestations which will show the symbol in its full meaning. (Wittig 1992, 23)

As a way out of the enslaving cultural 'vacuum,' Wittig asserts the unconscious as an alternative awareness of a pre-symbolic space activated in the literary process. In *Les Guérillères* (1969), she writes: "you say there are no words to describe it, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent" (Wittig 1985, 89)<sup>11</sup>. The 'archaic' witch represents such an invention in response to the failure of memory

(and consciousness), and as a locus of repressed female desire she becomes central to “everything” which, according to Irigaray, “must be (re-)invented to avoid the *vacuum*” (2000, 56). Simultaneously, this feminist identification with the unconscious in correlation with the culturally sanctioned ‘archaic’ mother works to consolidate women’s collective identity as one of sameness based on the commonness of their experiences.

In the texts analyzed here, the unconscious has a language (voice), and the ‘witch’ figure constitutes a significant revelation of that language. This language does not represent a position of command, but the more subjective, vulnerable position of Promethea that, for Cixous, ‘substitutes’ the name-of-the-Father for the umbilical cord. This position, in which the subject is already exiled from the *chora*, constitutes, as Gallop claims, an “unsettling confrontation” that assumes female (linguistic) castration but realizes it “not [as] a loss but a gain” (Gallop 1982, 21). In the narratives discussed here, the position adopted is no longer one of re-naming, but of reinstating and supplementing, one that involves complex attempts to speak the unconscious in the-name-of-the-mother and “to point out some effects, some elements of unconscious drives, some relations of feminine Imaginary to [Lacan’s] Real, to writing” (Cixous and Clément 1986, 92). Recognizing that the “vacuum” is not only political but is established in the very logos, in the subtle linguistic procedures through which meaning itself is shaped, the authors discussed here establish a new type of linguistic/symbolic awareness, as well as realization that phallic rape is effected not only by the father but, above all, by the fetishized and suffocating mothers deployed in ‘the symbolic’. Connecting this awareness with the trauma of the ‘real incision’, their narratives install the ‘witch’ as a variable of the hysterical (raped, displaced) archaic mother and the phallic devouring, engulfing mother-rapist. Emerging from the dialogue established between these two, the ‘witch’ figure (proposed here as a type of return to the unconscious) appears

as a new kind of analyst, a *newly born* doctor-figure in the form of a ghost (a spectrum) of the repressed om-phallic mother. But can this dialogical figure provide a successful therapeutic treatment for culturally denigrated mothers? Can she offer a new type of (self-)analysis, and further, (self-)diagnosis as a strategic political practice? In any case, who is in a position "to judge the Unconscious" (Wittig 1992, 23)? "To 'speak in the name of,' to 'speak *for*,' could ... mean, once again, to appropriate and to silence" (Felman 1997, 9). Employing a psychoanalytical awareness of textual distortions as embodiments of unconscious messages, the following narratives serve as examples of positing the 'witch' as disturbing (sick, mad, obsessed, maniacal), and through all this a figure who embarks on new processes of talking, of *answering back* (Carter 1992, 4)<sup>12</sup> to the unfitting model of the Oedipus complex, which, as Irigaray argues,

states the law of the non-return of the daughter to the mother, except in the doing like [faire comme] of motherhood. It cuts her off from her beginnings, her conception, her genesis, her birth, her childhood. (2000, 105)

These beginnings are central in the texts to be discussed now, starting with two stories by Angela Carter.

#### DEMYSTIFYING HYSTERICAL LOCATIONS: ANGELA CARTER'S "THE SCARLET HOUSE" AND "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE"

My problem is essentially the definition of the implicit systems in which we find ourselves prisoners; what I would like to grasp is the system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it; I would like to make the cultural unconscious apparent. (Foucault 1996)

Angela Carter, seen as both representative of and distinct from other feminist writers, has often been criticized for her reactionary style and a language trapped in "conservative sexism" (Jordan 1992, 128)<sup>13</sup>. Her writings belong among the most controversial and original British texts that have won prestigious prizes and been translated into the major

European languages.<sup>14</sup> There is no doubt that "The Lady of the House of Love" (1975)<sup>15</sup> and "The Scarlet House" (1977)<sup>16</sup>, the two short stories to be discussed here, are far from being straightforwardly feminist. However, I would agree with Merja Makinen that often it is the critics, and not Carter, "who cannot see beyond the sexist binary opposition" (2000, 23). In response to Makinen's question, in "Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' and the Decolonisation of Feminine Sexuality" (2000), as to whether reactionary forms can be re-written, I propose an analogous question: can the castrated/castrating witch-woman be re-written for feminist therapeutic reasons? Can she stop speaking as a "hysteric" and challenge the symbolic structures which have kept her half-wild, half-tamed, half-imaginary? As Jean Wyatt observes, Carter "returns to the image of castrated woman again and again, addressing it as ideological issue, as narrative device, as image" (2000, 59). In an attempt to redefine female sexuality, Carter, like Creed, works both with and against this image, disrupting the "inherent" but artificial opposition between the castrated and castrating vagina:

Despite local variations, the myth generally states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas, and that the women must be tamed or the teeth somehow removed or softened - usually by a hero figure - before intercourse can safely take place. (Creed 1993, 2)

Her stories are of interest here precisely in this context: as powerful, although not immediately obvious, revisions of this image. Both the figure of a female vampire in "The Lady of the House of Love," and Madame Schreck in "The Scarlet House" serve as prototypes of the castrated/castrating woman who produces death instead of life. Her womb (her reproductive function), alluding to the (literal) human origin, is associated in Carter's stories with the tomb, or non/being. That non/being, proposed in my analysis as an 'archaic witch', no longer of a female but perhaps of a third, apocalyptic and abysmal sex, is



infinitively suspended between the known and the other, the woman and the monster. As Creed explains,

the reasons why the *monstrous-feminine* horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience. A new term is needed to specify these differences. As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity. (1993, 3)

The *monstrous-feminine*, associated in my analysis with Tina Pippin's interpretation of the biblical abyss as a female "place of pain" (1999, 68) offers an interesting insight into Carter's narratives. Carter's figures of the vampire and Madame Schreck destabilize the phallogocentric concept of the monstrous vagina, construing it as an abyss that alludes to the female sexual organs as penetrated by both males and females.

As examined by Pippin, the abyss in the Apocalypse represents otherness, disorder, and chaos; it is "a female place of difference," "a bottomless pit," "the interior of the earth, a place of exile, the original flood waters under the earth, chaos, the primordial goddess, the source of the universe, the underworld" (1999, 68)<sup>17</sup>. Of all these associations, the abyss-as-chaos and the underlying phallogocentric desire to control and rationalize chaotic forces are especially important for Carter, as "defining" female sexuality.<sup>18</sup> However, for both Pippin and Carter, "to locate oneself at/in the pit means to be in a place that is no place, no ground, no bottom, no context" (Pippin 1999, 65), that is, somewhere outside of the symbolic order. The female abyss can serve here as a reminiscence of the semiotic chora, a trace of the archaic mother, "both a part of earth and a part of the body, the female sexual organs" (1999, 70). Simultaneously, the biblical abyss is a metaphor of eternal punishment, "a prison-house for evil monsters" (1999, 67-8), a womb-like torture chamber, or, as Creed observes with reference to soul-less bodies, "a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal" (1993, 10)<sup>19</sup>. The abyss holds vampires, monsters, phantoms, and witches, all of whom project abjection and horror and simultaneously

fascinate by their ambiguous status. Most of their crimes are of a bodily (sexual) nature, and their souls, if they have any, not only end up in the abyss but originate from it:

The abyss is the black hole in space; what happens when one entered the abyss is still only speculation. Is the abyss where eroticism and death are linked? ... As a "rupture within discourse" the abyss is a hysterical place, when the veil or lid is taken off. Or is it a place of *jouissance*? (Pippin 1999, 74)

In Carter's stories, the abyss represents both female and male unconscious desires for the abject *monstrous-feminine*, a figure that in my understanding provides an important model for the culturally suspended, but sexually and unconsciously fascinating, archaic mother. Carter's inscription of the *monstrous feminine* undermines Freudian theories "that woman terrifies because she is castrated and that it is the father who alone represents the agent of castration within the family" (Creed 1993, 151). She can be castrated, but her mouth - as the abyss - is dangerous.

Approaching the mouth of the abyss is dangerous. The abyss is a cave, an endless serpent. Does this mouth have lips? Could this be the poison kiss - the kiss of death? Or are these 'lips' the vulva [labia]? Does this mouth devour? Does this mouth have teeth - the vagina dentata, the agent of castration? Here is the prison-house of language, under lock and key. Usually words or sounds come out of a mouth; here there is only oral residue, the trace of the spoken, the trace of Wisdom, the hiss of signification. (Pippin 1999, 71)

In fact, the exploration of female sexuality as well as of monstrosity is intrinsic to Carter's use of Tarot imagery in these stories. Her conflicting and ambiguous metaphors from the Tarot can be seen as representing or visualizing the unconscious, and providing a conceptual divergence from the 'symbolic'. This divergence decolonizes established habits of thinking by interpreting "everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday experience" (Carter 1996, 461). I connect these Tarot metaphors with Carter's strategy of sending messages through combinations of texts, rather than individual stories; just as she interprets the Tarot, not in isolated compositions, but

always in the manner in which the readings are associated. The more disordered and multileveled, the more intense are her texts/readings. The two selected tales function explicitly as Tarot deconstructions of the *monstrous feminine*, since they do not read, but re-read and reenact, the instabilities of symbolic/ phallogentric myths and fantasies. In this way, Carter's tales are indeed "forms of repetition" (Gallop 1982, 104), forms of return produced by the desire to reveal the semiotic, the suppressed, and to place the 'semiotic' in the context of "the subliterate forms of pornography, ballad and dream" that so far have "not been dealt with kindly by literati" (Carter 1996, 461).

In "The Lady of the House of Love" Carter re-writes the myth of Dracula by substituting for the male monster a figure of the *monstrous-feminine*. This figure, as Creed argues (1993, 3), has been defined primarily in terms of a sexuality that can be extended or undermined, but always ends up as extortion, disproportion, or disfiguration. The *monstrous-feminine*

constitutes an important and complex stereotype which can be broken down into a number of different figures of female horror: woman as archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, possessed monster, femme castratrice, witch, castrating mother. The representation of the monstrous feminine in patriarchal signifying practices has a number of consequences for psychoanalytically based theories of sexual difference. (1993, 151)

According to Anita Levy, the figure of Dracula, inscribed in the uncontrollable, monstrous paradigm of the Other, "challenge[s], if not destroy[s] values sacred to the bourgeoisie – heterosexuality, masculinity, whiteness, marriage, Englishness, and art" (1999, 130)<sup>20</sup>. In Carter's figure of the vampire, all these challenges are dominated by her monstrous gender transgression, since she seduces as a female, penetrates as a male, and drains as a vampire, transforming into a different species, an abysmal sex. Carter contrasts her heroine's vampirism, (representing the uncanny, the unsettling, and the supernatural), with the

invisibility of her female desires. As if in the reversal of the phallogentric fantasy of Dracula, her monstrosity is displaced, forced into a cultural formula that is incongruent with her particular existence. Due to her alienated degeneration, the desires and needs of the queen represent 'different' pattern of perversity. Rather than a figure of jouissance, she is a psychopathological failure, Dracula's hysterical mimesis, a "cave full of echoes", and "a system of repetitions" (Carter 1996, 195) suspended in the Tarot's Wheel of Mis/Fortune. Although her Tarot readings are neither of her choice nor of her creation, the queen daily simulates her fate at the "round table on a single leg... on which she lays out her inevitable Tarot" (1996, 195). Her nightly rites are of no particular meaning to her: "The carnival air of her white dress emphasized her unreality, like a sad columbine who lost her way in the wood a long time ago and never reached the fair" (1996, 204). As she performs her vampire's duties, the queen is a 'drained hysteric', void of all desires except the one to overcome her nature. "In her dream, she would like to be human; but she does not know if that is possible" (1996, 197).

She loathes the food she eats; she would have liked to take the rabbits home with her, feed them on lettuce, pet them and make them a nest in her red-and-black chinoiserie escritoire, but hunger always overcomes her. She sinks her teeth into the neck where an artery throbs with fear, she will drop the deflated skin from which she has extracted all the nourishment with a small cry of both pain and disgust. (1996, 198)

Although representing different concepts, the *uncanny* (*unheimlich*) desire and the feeling of abjection (as its result) are brought together in a form of eating disorder that destabilizes her 'nature,' and in fact her vampirism. Unable to control her cravings, Carter's vampire endures a hysterical indecisiveness that suspends her Nesferatu identity between the uncanny, repressed familiarity of the *unheimlich* that was once *heimisch*, familiar ("the prefix 'un' ... is the token of repression" (Creed 1993, 54)) and the abjection (repulsion) that does not "respect borders, positions, rules," and which "disturbs identity, system, order"

(Kristeva 1982, 4). The moment in which these two concepts converge has been captured by Creed:

But abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free - it is always there, beckoning the self to take up the place of abjection, the place where meaning collapses. The subject, constructed in/through language, through a desire for meaning, is also spoken by the abject, the place of meaninglessness - thus, the subject is instantly beset by abjection which fascinates desire but which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation. A crucial point is that abjection is always ambiguous. (1993, 10)

In representing this ambiguous desire/ fear of self- annihilation, the queen's devouring lips call into mind the entrance to the abyss in Pippin's analysis, and suspend the vampire's pleasure in a pain produced by disconnection from some repressed maternal territory. The disconnected/ disconnecting lips/mouth also converge here with Bronfen's concept of the navel as a hole that "leads nowhere," the abject leftover after the cut of the umbilical cord. Both are tropes for nourishment, for a connection between the outside and the inside that has been broken, removed, or sealed: "For although the navel is open to the exploration of the touch, its most intimate point remains impenetrable to the eye, already inside the folds of the body - though it is separated as well from the actual body interior by a piece of knotted skin" (Bronfen, 1998 4).

What seems crucial in Carter's story is therefore that the queen, although castrated/ castrating, does not take pleasure in this fantasy. In Stoker's novel, Dracula has been "made" to lure, consume, and pollute in the name of the forbidden pleasure (in order to transcend his unfulfilled sexual desires). In Carter's text, the female lures and consumes because she is by force continuing Nosferatu's 'tradition'. Her plot is short and cruel: it promises pleasure that climaxes in actual death (as opposed to the fantasy of pleasure), and invariably comes as a result of the internalized prohibition of pleasure<sup>21</sup>. "When [the queen] takes [her ignorant victims] by the hand and leads them to her bedroom, they can scarcely believe their luck.

Afterwards, her governess [an obedient crone figure] will tidy the remains into a neat pile and wrap it in its own discarded clothes" (Carter 1996, 198). It is in that double role of the castrated and castrating vagina that the queen experiences an internal split, a break indicating suspension of meaning and hence suspension of pleasure. Unless she is removed from this biological/cultural suspension, the queen is not and cannot become an archaic figure of the semiotic chora, and this is what makes this figure effectively 'useless' in culture. Without being able to express her own desire, she is a wounded fantasy with a "curiously disembodied" voice:

Her voice, issuing from those red lips like the obese roses in her garden, lips that do not move... she is like a doll, he thought, a ventriloquist's doll, or, more, like a great ingenious piece of clockwork. For she seemed inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born, and now the mechanism was inexorably running down and would leave her lifeless. (Carter 1996, 204)

Moreover, she fails to pollute (in the way Dracula pollutes his victims in Stoker's novel), since her victims die too soon, too unexpectedly (and do not become vampires themselves). Her role as a substitute represents the deficiency and asymmetrical incompleteness of a female sexuality that, according to Carter, needs to be reformulated, reinvented. The queen has the body of a young girl, the 'hysterical' body of de Beauvoir's 'second sex', dispossessed and indisposed. Connected to menstrual blood, her indisposition "indicates sickness, estrangement" (de Beauvoir 1993, 330). She is weak, "shivered all the time, a starveling chill, a malarial agitation of the bones... sixteen or seventeen years old, no more, with the hectic, unhealthy beauty of a consumptive" (Carter 1996, 202). Her victims die immediately, but since she does not want or desire them as victims, she is close to death herself, displaced, afflicted and consumed by her own contaminating and consuming nature.

The arrival of her 'rescuer', a culmination point of the story, converges with the queen's longing for a savior, a doctor, a Freudian type of hero. Coming from "the world of the living, frequently represented by a patriarchal figure (Van Helsing in Dracula films) versed in vampire lore" (Creed 1993, 71), the virginal young man in Carter's story "signifies light, life, the sun, destruction of the tomb, blood taboos, the stake/phallus, the unviolated body, and enforcement of the law" (1993, 71). He descends into the world of the female uncanny that "signifies darkness, the undead, moon, the tomb/womb, blood, oral sadism, bodily wounds and violation of the law" (1993, 71). His appearance as a lover and savior is crucial to the queen's fate, since he is the one to 'discover' her hysterical condition, and, ironically, by trying to help, the one who executes her.

Although so young, he is also rational. He has chosen the most rational mode of transport in the world for his trip round the Carpathians. To ride a bicycle is in itself some protection against superstitious fear, since the bicycle is the product of pure reason applied to motion (Carter 1996, 199).

However, these logocentric applications of reason are of little use when he sees the queen. In her presence, all he encounters is (a) difference that, as Felman writes, seeks to negate "the repressive predominance of 'logos'" (1997, 8). The queen is anxiously awaiting her lover (whose presence was foretold in a Tarot reading), but her virginity is already marked with decay and consumption. It contradicts his male virginity, conceptualized as ingenuousness, innocence and purity:

First of all, he saw only a shape, a shape imbued with a faint luminosity since it caught and reflected in its yellowed surfaces what little light there was in the ill-lit room; this shape resolved itself into that of, of all things, a hooped-skirted dress of white satin draped here and there with lace, a dress fifty or sixty years out of fashion but once, obviously, intended for a wedding. (Carter 1996, 202)

Although there is "no room in her drama for improvisation", the queen inadvertently breaks the set of rituals of the House of Nesferatu, improvises for the first and only time, and

hurts her finger with the broken glass. In inflicting a physical wound (a discharge of blood) on her body, Carter's queen initiates a deconstruction of her own vampirism, a deconstruction closely associated with the 'dismembering' or transformation of her body.

And so [the victim-savior] puts his mouth to the wound. He will kiss it better for her, as her mother, had she lived, would have done. All the silver tears fall from the wall with a flimsy tinkle. Her painted ancestors turn away their eyes and grind their fangs. How can she bear the pain of becoming human?" (1996, 207)

Her initiation into humanity represents a momentary fulfillment of her long-suppressed desire. Perceived from her victim's perspective, she is to be cured, re-installed as a healthy human being:

We shall take her to Zurich, to a clinic, she will be treated for nervous hysteria. Then to an eye specialist, for her photophobia, and to a dentist, to put her teeth into better shape. Any competent manicurist will deal with her claws. We shall turn her into the lovely girl she is, I shall cure her of all these nightmares. (1996, 208)

The initiation to humanity (the cure) comes, however, as a transitory state, a temporary border condition closely related to the phallic woman in the cluster of associative roles: unencumbered woman, prostitute, and vampire.<sup>22</sup> This state is momentary since it is inevitably followed by punishment, restriction, or disgrace which are tolerated only as long as the pleasure lasts.

Her huge dark eyes almost broke his heart with their wavelike, lost look; yet he was disturbed, almost repelled, by her extraordinarily fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson, a morbid mouth. Even – but he put the thought away from him immediately – a whore's mouth." (1996, 202)

Carter's figure of the *monstrous-feminine* as a mouth-dominated creature is both sarcastically underscored and potentially liberating. The vampire cannot speak (and has nothing to say), because as a phallocentric fantasy/fetish she is "precisely the Other of any conceivable Western theoretical locus of speech" (Felman 1997, 9). Not only is she mute, but also her sexuality is frozen, she "has no mouth with which to kiss, no hands with which



to caress, only the fangs and talons of a beast of prey” (Carter 1996, 206). The phallogentric presumption (that he/the doctor figure can deliver the cure) is dismantled by Carter, and finally rejected as no option for solving her (female) dilemma. In softening her (removing her teeth) he tames her, however, there is no promise of a cure. Instead, the queen’s difference is devastating, and in fact Carter gives up deconstructing her figure, since there are no philosophical methods available to repair her female condition, except total erasure by death. This is, most certainly, an ironical act, since her erasure can never be accomplished, and she will remain present/absent in the form of an (archaic) trace. Hence, when the victim-savior awakes (after he turned the vampire into a ‘nice girl’), all he ‘receives’ is her practically erased existence:

And then he saw the girl who wore the dress, a girl with the fragility of the skeleton of a moth, so thin, so frail that her dress seemed to him to hang suspended, as if untenanted in the dank air, a fabulous lending, a self-articulated garment in which she lived like a ghost in a machine. (1996, 202)

Alluding to Freudian endeavors to categorize female sexuality through the unconscious, Carter comes close to Felman’s perception of Freud as an important though inadequate and eventually helpless analyst.<sup>23</sup> By demonstrating his failure to recognize the difference of female sexuality, Carter draws on the psychoanalytical (and perhaps feminist) failure to remove female desires (sexuality) from the “symmetrical conception of otherness” (Felman 1997, 9). This failure results, as Felman observes, from “theoretical blindness to the woman’s actual difference” (1997, 9). Hence, through the bodily frustrations of the female vampire, Carter asserts her claim “to a new kind of logic and a new type of theoretical reasoning” (1997, 9) that could account for the “actual difference” expressed through the unconscious.

Breaking into death, the body of the vampire transforms into a dark purple rose, her

banal gift to the man, and a literal trace of her castrated condition. Her death, and especially its transitory character, leaves many questions unanswered. Both unpredictable and inevitable, it could be analyzed from two perspectives: the political (Carter's demystification of the phallogocentric entrapment) and the psychoanalytical, (as a liberating act of 'return' to the unconscious through the uncanny). In both cases, the presence of erasure, (her death), is important in as far as it acknowledges the inadequacy and provisional status of the archetype employed. But can her dying monstrosity be re-defined "outside of its dichotomous opposition to sanity, without being subjugated to reason" (Felman 1997, 10)? Can her "difference be thought out as non-subordinate to identity?" Can she "break away from the logic of polar oppositions" (1997, 10)? As Gallop comments, "[s]imply to refuse authority does not challenge the category distinction between authority and castrated other, between 'subject presumed to know' and subject not in command. One can effectively undo authority only from the position of authority" (Gallop 1982, 21). Carter's attempt to extract the vampire from her entrapment in the phallogocentric fantasy is both therapeutic and ironically futile, echoing de Beauvoir's attempt to remove woman from the stigma of being the second sex (while simultaneously positing her as such).

While "The Lady of the House of Love" examines the subversive and non-compatible zones of the vampire's body, "The Scarlet House" explores multiple female castrations, blurring individual bodies into a plural, repetitive oppression. In this short story Carter's use of the Tarot is far more elaborate, as it illustrates her attempt to deconstruct the universalizing structures of its imagery. The Tarot simultaneously speaks in the name of the unconscious, presumably the unconscious as defined by Lacan, and represses and silences the unconscious. The cards, resembling or parodying "mythemes" (Lévi -Strauss 1963, 54), build upon a universal story which, dispersed throughout the deck, could be restored once all

the cards are laid out. But the narrator is a wounded fortune-teller, devoid of memory, unable to reveal the details. Very little that is said will be explained<sup>24</sup>, and so interpretation, as “a quest for order and intelligibility among the manifold possible patterns of sense” (Norris 1990, 5), is assumed as a process and not as a result.

Moreover, in addressing the plural quality of the unconscious, Carter’s text attempts to dismantle the phallogocentric concept of the ‘house’ and renders it a metaphor of institutional confinement, a prison-house of enslavement and hysteria. Representing the structures of the phallogocentrically defined unconscious, the Scarlet House imitates a violated, abused, and erased female memory, recognizable through marginal moments, such as slips of the tongue and other odd disclosures. There, women (kidnapped, raped and drugged) are kept under restraint. The house ‘embodies’ female sacrifice and “annihilation” (Carter 1996, 421), a monstrous accumulation of indistinguishable female bodies: a bordello and an asylum “built of white concrete ... very much like a hospital, a large terminal ward” (1996, 418). The master of the house, the Magician of the Tarot, is “dedicated to the obliteration of memory” (1996, 419), to the erasure of women’s (personal) memories and lives. As a possessor/ professor of the phallus, he represents an omnipotent psychopathic analyst who lives out the fantasy of female fragmentation. His methods

are more subtle than the knife. Dedicated as he is to the dissolution of forms, he intends to erode my sense of being by equipping me with a multiplicity of beings, so that I confound myself with my own profusion of pasts, presents and futures. (Carter 1996, 423)

Count plays the Game of Tarot with a major arcana of fourteen of his retinue. If Madame Schreck adopts the emblems of the Papess to the manner born, the Fool remains himself, of course. They mask themselves and perform random dances to sounds not unlike screaming that the hallucinated pack make at random and so he invokes chaos. He has methodology. He is a scientist, in his way. (1996, 424)

The Count, whose character is embedded in Lacanian theory, recognizes ‘him/self’ as a

totalized, all-unifying concept and impersonates the Mirror (Stage), the entrance to 'the symbolic'. The structures of his house, once entered, engulf the captured women and force them into a physical and cultural displacement designated in the story as chaos: "Preparing chaos with the aid of a Tarot pack" (1996, 417), the Count/ Magician "sits in a hall hung with embroideries depicting all the hierarchy of hell, a place, he claims, not unlike the Scarlet House.... Chaos [a type of return to the 'real'] is coming, says the Count, and giggles" (1996, 417). In denigrating 'woman's' identity, he follows one particular formula:

There is no woman but excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it has to be said that if there is one thing about which women themselves are complaining at the moment; it's well and truly that – it's just that they don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me. (Lacan 1975)

Returning to Lacan's central question (who is speaking: I or the language?), Carter questions the illusions structuring the authority of the psychoanalytic critic, and her approach parallels in many aspects Baym's constructive criticism of certain overtheorizing tendencies in feminism itself.<sup>25</sup> Like Lacan's laws in Baym's interpretation, the Count's "laws are unbreakable, and he is hence a far less 'forgiving' father than Freud" (Baym 1997, 287). Lacan's "deployment of the castration complex as the basis of the model for the symbolic order into which children – boys – are initiated, takes one particularly 'sexist' element in Freud's rich system (which contains many ungendered insights) and makes it the whole story" (1997, 287). This observation is particularly relevant to my interpretation of the story, since it directly alludes to Lacan's pronouncement condemning women to silence: "Lacan's ideas of women belong neither to his realms of the real nor the symbolic, but to his imaginary. Both Freud and Lacan make haste to correct the fantasies of others that their own prevail. Not truth, but power, is the issue" (Baym 1997, 287)<sup>26</sup>. Carter's story reveals a similar practice of identifying woman with sexuality as a target and vehicle of power and of

knowledge structures. This practice (in Carter's text of a dystopian, ahistorical character) has long been in effect, and it continues: "Soon everywhere will be like the Scarlet House" (Carter 1996, 417), a "well-locked (whore) house [maison bien close]" that Irigaray defined as "a matrix coiled back on/in its interiority [that] is not women's. Except sometimes in their maternal phallicism, or their impotent mimicry" (2000, 63).

Although it is hard to overlook the Count's perversity and madness, the practices of his bordello seem to go hand in hand with the Law of the Father and its phallogocentric institutions, delineated in the story as implementing totalitarian persecution, prohibition and finally extermination of (female) desire. The Count (the Father) is the only authority, the persecutor, the interrogator, the monarch. Again, Carter alludes to a Foucauldian belief that "[a]t the bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king" (Foucault 1990, 88). Moreover, the Count's crucible is reinforced by the presence of the phallic witch, Madame Schreck ("horror" in German), who serves to confirm female denigration: "Madame Schreck waited to greet me in the scarlet splendour of her satin dress that laid open to the view of her breasts and the unimaginable wound of her sex" (Carter 1996, 421). Woman? There is no ~~woman~~, the concept being trapped in ideological/ political and imaginary terms. In its poststructural/ deconstructive composure, Carter's text borders on the carnivalesque, with the witch in the role of a cruel woman in the service of patriarchy:

When they play the Tarot Game, Madame Schreck sits on a small throne. They bring down the Count's special book, the book in black ink on purple paper that he keeps hanging from a twisted beam in his private apartments; they open it up and spread it out on her open lap, to mimic her sex, which is also a forbidden book. (1996, 424)

It is in and during the carnival of forms, carefully arranged and supervised by Madame Schreck, that the women disappear; their “disembodied voices rustle like dead leaves and sometimes [they] stretch out [their] hands to touch one another, lightly, to lay a finger on one another’s mouths to assure [them]selves a voice issues from that aperture” (1996, 425). Most certainly, like Morgner’s, Carter’s carnival is not a liberating procedure; its form is symmetrical to and enclosed in the institutional structure. As a non-linguistic space, this carnival renders “the semiotic chora” an illusion, a different form of fantasy in a far-away land of feminist utopian projections. Her version of the witch is modeled as a cruel femme fatale, invariably reproducing phallocentric prohibitions, fears and anxieties. For Carter, the ‘witch’ is still so deeply entangled in the Western metaphor of the terrible mother that she is far from becoming a therapist figure. Trapped within the constructions of masculinity (just as the female vampire was trapped), the witch impersonates a rapist, a female violator. She lives in a “male-dominated society [which] produces a pornography of universal female acquiescence” (Carter 2000, 20-21). She is “Miss Stern with her rods and whips, Our Lady of Pain in her leather visor and her boots with sharp, castratory heels,” and as such she “is a true fantasy, a distorted version of the old saying ‘The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.’ This whip hand rocks the cradle in which her customer dreams but it does nothing else.” If she is cruel, it is not “for her own sake, or for her own gratification. She is most truly subservient when most apparently dominant” (2000, 21).

In agreement with Creed’s theory, the “phantasy of a phallic woman” in Carter’s story provides indeed an explanation as to “why the male might desire to create a fetish” and might want “to continue to believe that woman is like himself, that she has a phallus rather than a vagina”. Madame Schreck is the fetishized phallic woman, and she has been designed “to deny the existence of ... woman as castrated/castrating” (Creed 1993, 116).

The Count has given her a blue robe to wear over that terrible red dress that reminds us all, every time we see it, of the irresolvable and animal part of ourselves we all hold in common, since we are women. (Carter 1996, 424)

Although not without a liberating potential deriving from her sexual transgressions, a message underlying the story, Madame Schreck is dominated by the presence of the phallus, and cut off from her own pleasures and sovereignty. Her image draws on the symbolic analogy between the female mouth and the labia of the vulva, both holes to be penetrated, hollow body entrances. "To be sure," as Monika Treut argues in a similar context, "it is not without irony that despite her 'psychic reality,' the cruel woman exists entirely as a fantasy figure, more a surface for projections than a real being" (2001, 236). Madame Schreck's mouth resembles a lascivious surface, the mouth of a vampire, and her labia/vulva is part of what makes her abject.

[She] eats small birds such as fig-peckers and thrushes; she puts a whole one, spit-grilled, into her huge, red mouth as lusciously as if it were a liqueur chocolate and then she spits the bones out like the skin and pips of a grape. And she's got other, extravagant tastes as well; she likes to gorge upon the unborn young of rabbits. She acquires the foetuses from laboratories; she has them cooked for her in a cream sauce enriched with the addition of the yolk of an egg. She's a messy eater, she spills sauce on her bare belly and one of us must lick it off for her. She throws open her legs and shows us her hole; the way down and out, she says. (Carter 1996, 419)

Her role is to devour (a phallic fantasy of the vaginal orgasm), not to speak, although it is not her inability to speak that is to be feared but a shift in focus to the other mouth, i.e. her sexuality. Her "hairy hole" promotes a paradigm of an enslaved, fetishized eroticism to which "we all pay homage as if it were the mouth of an oracular cave" (1996, 424). In linking eroticism and death, the mouth alludes to the abyss through which "we must all crawl to extinction, one day; unless it is the way to freedom" (1996, 428), and which "I would learn to fear more than death itself, since death is finite" (1996, 421). This apocalyptic landscape of sexual bodies alludes to a Foucauldian machine in which everyone

is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised, in which sexuality is always a matter of institutional definition ensuring homogeneity by systematically denying and excluding difference.

Arguing that sexuality is never expressed in a vacuum (2000, 11), Carter sees sexual expression as bound to the metaphysics of sexual difference. A reader of Foucault, she formulates her own interpretation of the omnipresent power structures and places them in the context of partly abused and partly romanticized female sexuality. Her aim is to demystify this construct of female sexuality by disrupting the prohibitions placed on the body, a strategy deriving from the conviction that “where there is a desire, the power relation is already present” (Foucault 1990, 83). Hence, Carter’s returns to ‘desire’ and ‘sexuality’ are by no means liberating. These spaces are, in her narratives, historically and socially determined, and therefore deeply political.<sup>27</sup> As she admits, “all art is political and so is mine. I want readers to understand what it is that I *mean* by my stories” (1985, 214). Following Foucault, Carter thus recognizes the agency of sanctions that appropriately channel and sublimate sex into a “negative relation” with power:

[The] connection between power and sex... is negative: rejection, exclusion, refusal, blockage, concealment, mask. Where sex and pleasure are concerned, power can “do” nothing but say no to them; what it produces, if anything, is absences and gaps: it overlooks elements, introduces discontinuities, separates what is joined, and marks off boundaries. Its effects take the general form of limit and lack. (Foucault 1990, 83)<sup>28</sup>

The critical (feminist) task for Carter would thus be to understand how the category of woman has been construed and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation of that woman must be initiated. As in Butler’s theory, female desire

takes on the meaning of ‘repressed’ to the extent that the law constitutes its contextualizing frame; indeed the law identifies and invigorates ‘repressed desire’ as such, circulates the term, and, in effect, carves out the discursive space for the self-conscious and linguistically elaborated experience called ‘repressed desire’. (Butler 1990, 65)



Women themselves, physically/ violently forced back into conformity with an artificial norm, generate their “misunderstanding of sadomasochistic transgressions” (Treut 2001, 234). “This misunderstanding,” according to Treut, “extends from the sexual science of the last century to current everyday consciousness,” in which

sadomasochistic practices are dead-serious events, manifestations of one human being’s rule over the other, born of a “perverse” predisposition. Not the slightest trace remains of the pleasure, the art, and the original thoughts of the sadomasochistic universe. A renewed reading of the text of de Sade and Sacher-Masoch could help clear up these misunderstandings. (2001, 235)

In *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), Carter elaborates on the importance of physical transgressions (rape, sadomasochistic devices), taking into account the submissive role assigned particularly to women:

The whippings, the beatings, the gougings, the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men’s attitude towards women and our attitude to ourselves, that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed. (Carter 2000, 23)

For Carter, as for Foucault, there is no major binary opposition between ‘law’ and ‘revolt,’ as they come to represent “a plurality of resistances... that are possible, necessary, [although] improbable” (Sage 1992, 173-4). Hence, Carter’s attempts to retrieve women’s history from ‘imaginary facts’ rest on a systematic remembering of the oppressive experience. Since women of the Scarlet House are subjected to castration without knowing or remembering it any more, Carter’s message is to remember through the unconscious. In “Scarlet House”, the unconscious is symbolized by the hawk as a trace of the narrator’s memory:

Now, altogether I’ve been erased and substituted and played back so many times my memory is nothing but a palimpsest of possibilities and probabilities, there are some

elements he cannot rid me of and these, interestingly enough, are not those of blood on an old man's hair or his leather-clad minions closing in on me with mineral menace of eyes like stones; no. (Carter 1996, 425)

I remember, I'd been watching a hawk.... Hawk plummet. He's unpremeditated and precise as Yen swordsmen, his fall subsumed to the aerial whizz of the rope that traps me.... (1996, 417)

[The Count] signs himself... with the quill of a hawk dipped in the blood of ruptured virginities... the hawk is nothing more and nothing less than the memory of my capture, preserved as an image, or an icon. (1996, 427)

Once more in Foucault's vein, Carter's point "is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. [This] position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism", and assumes that "the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger" (Foucault 1983).

Voyaging through many styles and genres, Carter's "writing the body" undermines the symbolic value with which (the) 'woman' has been impregnated. Her stories do not posit the witch as an archaic semiotic figure, but insist on a dialectical relation between the pre-linguistic phase (the unconscious) and the order of language. Demystifying mythic, ready-made versions of women and exposing them as devices intended to obscure "the real conditions of life" (Carter 2000, 5), Carter leaves her texts 'unfinished', "written with a space for the reader's activity in mind" (Makinen 2000, 25). Her insistence on an open-ended structure is a strategic proposal for heterogeneity and plurality of female locations. It offers an active challenge to "the myth of patience and receptivity" in which the meaningful semen penetrates "a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled" (Carter 2000, 5). Such a mouth cannot speak, and cannot be productive, but only hysterically reproductive. Carter's defense against this silent reproduction is a deconstructive use of irony, activated best if the reader is informed by feminism (Makinen 2000, 25). The hysterical displacements of the female vampire, of Madame

Schreck, and in particular of the women in the Scarlet House, intermingle therefore with political locations, positions from which to speak against oppression. This may happen even if the only available language is that of the unconscious, as is the case in the next narrative, which continues the theme of the split, while depicting the phallic mother as the very cause and source of fe/male denigration. Published twenty years later in Poland, Saramonowicz's novel explores similar problematic traces of the witch as the unencumbered woman and the terrible (phallic) mother.

#### THE DEFEAT OF THE MOTHER: MAŁGORZATA SARAMONOWICZ'S *SIOSTRA*

**- I have been dreaming again about the doll in red shoes. She lay in the garbage. Her head was cut off and kept on repeating: ma-ma, ma-ma, ma-ma. Like hiccups. Ma-ma, ma-ma, ma-ma. Her naked corpse was buried in the dried out potato peels and old cans. Once, I bought such a doll for my sister.**

**- When was it?**

**- For her sixth birthday. I chose the biggest and the most colorful ... in red shoes... Only later it became clear that one could not take them off. They were sewn on. I thought that Maryśka would never stop crying...**

**- Because of the shoes?**

**- Probably. But you never know why they are crying. Crying, when it is good and when it is bad. If it hurts or if it doesn't hurt. There is no way to figure it out. Mom always said: Don't pay attention to her. She doesn't count. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>29</sup>**

As in Carter's story, the witch figure in Małgorzata Saramonowicz's *Siostra* (Sister) (1996)<sup>30</sup> embodies the destructive features of the abysmal vagina, and operates in and from the oppressive position of home. It is a complex, stream-of-consciousness narrative depicting the 'witch' as a collapsed and degenerate mother, the primary source of oppression, corruption and violence. Placed in the context of a 'dysfunctional' family, the narrative unfolds in the form of a fragmentary dialogue, gradually revealing the following key relationships: Marysia is the daughter of an always absent father, who is pursuing his

career as a doctor-scientist, and an attractive, always present (phallic) mother. Her first coma occurs when she is six; the reasons are obscure. Her mother dies from a brain tumor when she is eighteen; the mother's unexpected death coincides with Marysia's suicide attempt and the hospital's decision to radically separate her from the family. Her brother, older by several years, then (unexpectedly) moves to the United States and there is no further relationship between the siblings. As an adult, Marysia becomes Maria (bearing her mother's first name) and lives in Warsaw with Jakob, her husband. For the last two years she has been working on a dissertation on eighteenth-century French prose, but she secretly changes her topic to "Insects – the motif in literature and art" and locks it in the university computer with an intricate system of passwords. During early pregnancy she unexpectedly loses consciousness and lies in a coma, first in hospital, then at home, until she gives birth (still in a coma) and subsequently dies. Her husband knows very little about Maria's childhood; there are no family pictures, no childhood souvenirs, no connections, except for Maria's occasional but unclear identification with her father. The reason for her coma and her brother seem to be related in Maria's unconscious flow of thoughts, but the links are vague and contradictory. Is her brother a male hysteric in a suspended/ unfinished psychoanalytical treatment? Is Maria a victim of his sexual fantasies? Perhaps. The narration is neither from his position (both his and the mother's positions are silenced) nor that of Maria. The entire narrative, opening with Maria's pregnancy while in a coma and ending with her death, speaks from the position of Maria's unconscious, and reduces the phallic 'mother' to a *monstrous* construction which denies the existence of the archaic (omphallic) comfort of the semiotic.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Saramonowicz's disfiguration of the 'mother' can be linked with Mitchell's analysis of fe/male hysteria in the context of trauma and death in

*Mad Men and Medusas* (2000). Analyzing Dora, Freud's female hysteric, Mitchell refers to death and trauma as "crucial to the onset and manifestations of hysteria" (2000, 33), and emphasizes the long unrecognized importance of the siblings' relationship in the Oedipus myth. Drawing on this emphasis, I associate Dora's life history with that of Marysia in *Siostra*, and argue that Saramonowicz offers an interesting, albeit *monstrous* picture of the Freudian case. Although the "mother has been ignored by Dora... there is one even more strikingly buried player in Dora's life history: her brother Otto, older by eighteen months" (Mitchell 2000, 100). *Siostra*, as the title suggests, has a similar underlying meaning; it is the story of Maria's unconscious, in the form of a repressed dialogue between the siblings: Marysia, speaking from the position of the victim, and Piotr, speaking as and representing an aggressive, omnipresent cockroach.

**Sister. Forget these thoughts. Let me take care of everything.  
Come to us!  
Come to us!  
We play.  
It is dark everywhere  
It is dark everywhere  
Now... (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>31</sup>**

In the/her unconscious, Marysia is reduced to a defenseless, sickening body which the conscious Maria hopes to erase from her memory, but which stubbornly returns to re-enact the scenes of her rape. Moreover, Saramonowicz does not tell us explicitly who, if anyone, has been repeatedly violating Marysia. Hence, there is much more to Marysia's illness than the Freudian assumption about a mother giving all of her attention to her son<sup>32</sup>. In *Siostra*, motherly love turns into a mother-son conspiracy in search of a forbidden *jouissance*. Like Dora, Marysia tries "her best to remedy this situation by always having the normal childhood illnesses, which she caught ... in order to get more attention" (2000, 103), especially from her father, but her "illnesses" and dreams are to be recognized also as an escape mechanism. The

children's rhyme about a carrousel, a recurring motif of a danger that is playful and safe, has been replaced in her unconscious by a permanent warning; it is not the carrousel, but "*the witch [that] is waiting, calling us from afar...*" (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>33</sup>. The 'witch'-mother, as a figure disassociated from comforting maternity, (her reproductive function standing for the voracious and violent aspects of the maternal), represents the seductive and manipulative force of the terrible mother. Constant fear of abuse and her alarming awareness of entrapment suspend Marysia in the vacuum of her obsession with this type of 'mother' who does not come to her rescue. Her illnesses (escapes) beyond her 'home' practices are illusory substitutes for security; they entail frequent in/voluntary hospital treatments (un/consciously) facilitated by coma and suicidal tendencies.

So Freud tells Dora: The dream shows 'that we were here dealing with material which had been very intensely repressed... '[T]he mystery,' says Freud to Dora, 'turns upon your mother.' As the listener to Dora's tales, Freud is not her father but her mother in the transference. Dora not only tells things to Freud the therapist, she talks to her mother. (Mitchell 2000, 96)

Although Maria does not have the luxury of a psychoanalyst with and through whom to speak, she opens a long repressed dialogue with her mother while talking to the fetus in her womb. This dialogue recalls (but conceptually also extends beyond) de Beauvoir's description of a "drama... acted out within the [pregnant] woman herself" (1993, 521):

She feels it at once as enrichment and an injury; the fetus is a part of her body, and it is a parasite that feeds on it; she possesses it, and she is possessed by it; it represents the future and, carrying it, she feels herself vast in the world, but this very opulence annihilates her, she feels that she herself is no longer anything... the pregnant woman feels the immanence of her body at just the time when it is transcendence: it turns upon itself in nausea and discomfort; it has ceased to exist for itself and thereupon becomes more sizable than ever before. (1993, 521)

In her transference, especially in the transference to the mother, Maria repeatedly asks the 'baby' to die within her body. As articulated by the unconscious, she speaks to the repressive dominance of her mother, and wants to make this dominance die. The powerful

figure of the mother, “the unacknowledged foundation of the social order” (Whitford 2000, 25), is actually reinforced by the absence of the maternal comforting structure; the umbilical cord, as a symbolic passage to semiotic pleasures, leads her back to a hollow orgiastic mechanism, a giant cockroach (addressed as ‘he’ in Maria’s unconscious)

*It is becoming claustrophobic. The walls swell with wobbling blackness. Slimy, busy shapes continue to cloy and squeal. I am His. My body is His. There is no salt, no moisture, or the icy cave any more. There is hell. They grunt and whisper there. Scratch, scratch, scratch. ... But he enjoys this heat. I can hear him laughing at me. The walls have eyes. Thousands of eyes stare at me, follow me and you. Little one, he knows that you are here. He knows everything. There is no way out of here. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>34</sup>*

By refusing to give life to her child, Maria ultimately rejects life as a continuous deferral of suffering because of her (becoming a) mother.

**Your mother cast a spell on you. The witch. And she entrusted us [the cockroaches] with all the formulae. Your weaknesses, fears, secrets. It is she who betrayed you. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>35</sup>**

*I lay in the water. Deep. Deeper. Little one. Little one! I can only speak to you. Listen. Listen to me. You have to die. Don't be afraid. It does not hurt. Life hurts.<sup>36</sup>*

*What keeps me here? This saturated uterus? The being which should not be... This newly shaped body is already filled to the brim with my madness. And there is nothing that can stop this. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>37</sup>*

In “Stabat Mater,” Kristeva associates the relationship of the child to the mother with “primary narcissism”: the self-importance and self-absorption resulting from her unresolved biological condition:

If it is not possible to say of a woman what she is (without running the risk of abolishing her difference), would it perhaps be different concerning the mother, since that is the only function of the ‘other sex’ to which we can definitely attribute existence? And yet, there too, we are caught in a paradox. (Kristeva 1986, 161)

The very discreet presence of the Virgin Mary in both narrative figures, the mother (Maria) and her daughter (Maria), at once consolidates and disrupts the role of a patriarchal mother as a silent agent of reproduction in search of her *jouissance*. Such a deconstructive positioning of the Virgin Mary, the only sanctified model of a ‘woman’ in the Polish literary

tradition, provides a distinct, innovative, and quite daring perspective on the maternal. Offering an important expansion of both de Beauvoir's and Kristeva's theories, Saramonowicz discloses her own version of the Oedipus myth in the light of entrapment in the maternal trauma and hysterical erasure of the mother. In linking the mother's narcissism with 'the symbolic,' Saramonowicz grants her an ambiguous position as an object and subject of desire, as someone who is not only the phallus, but who also has it (an achievement in a collaboration with her son). Although in Maria's unconscious the mother is silenced, the projection of silence is not that of a victim, but of a violator. Her violence, linked with her potentially inadequate, uninhibited cultural condition (of being and having 'one'), is already implicit, if unexplored, in de Beauvoir's concept of the mother<sup>38</sup>. In an attempt to resolve her condition by breaking the Law of the Father, Saramonowicz's mother fanatically "seek[s] to compensate for all [her] frustrations through her child" (de Beauvoir 1993, 540).

In sanctioning incest, she unfolds her forbidden desire at her children's cost. The breaking of the incest taboo that, as Gayle Rubin argues, "divides the universe of sexual choice into categories of permitted and prohibited sexual patterns," results here in trauma.

*To mother*

*Even your death does not diminish my hate. I will never forgive you. You are just as much responsible for my persecution. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>39</sup>*

*Come to me. Come to me. She calls. Darkness. She comes here and sings lullabies to me. The witch. I do not open my eyes. She thinks I am falling asleep. She thinks I don't see her huge dog. She says that Cockroaches only live in the kitchen. And then Baba Jaga captured the children and threw them into the oven. And there it was so hot, so hot, so hot and they were screaming, screaming their wits out and ... She hugs me, pulls the cover over ... And Baba Jaga devoured Jaś first, and then she devoured Małgosia... I immediately have to open my eyes to look up. Yes, he's there. Ready to jump on me. Lurching. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>40</sup>*

Saramonowicz's transformation of the mother into a devouring witch draws on the Brothers



Grimm's tale "Hansel and Gretel," about siblings trapped in the chocolate-house of a witch whose only desire is to devour them.<sup>41</sup> This association is particularly painful, since in Brothers Grimm's story there is no mother: the witch is an extension of a mean and always hungry stepmother.<sup>42</sup> *Siostra*, however, depicts the witch as a natural mother, and so the bonding with her (as well as the inability to break the process), is therefore much stronger. Unlike Brothers Grimm's Gretel, Marysia is not able to outwit the witch and fails to succeed in saving either herself or her brother. Subsequently, the witch-mother in *Siostra* slowly consumes her children. Furthermore, the siblings' fascination and fear, as experienced in front of the chocolate-house in Grimm's story, have been transferred in *Siostra* into the regions of premature sexuality, unequally divided between sister and brother. As designed by the witch-mother, the sister (an object of desire) and her brother (a figure of the abject and fear) mutually reinforce their entrapment. One experiencing the abjection, one, exposing and desire, they live out their mother's fantasy of incest.

While the Oedipal story, in Dora's case, results in her "failure to be like, as good as, or just be her brother", it "is the sibling situation that thrusts Dora back on to loving her mother and her father" (Mitchell 2000, 103). Contrary to Dora, who tries to win her father's attention (and for a time succeeds), Maria wins her father's attention when it is too late for her recovery. In both cases, however, the "pursuit of the father ... is still a part of craving for a mother" (2000, 107). In Marysia's case, this craving has been entirely suppressed by her fear of the mother: "*Fear became my skin. But fear does not kill. It only paralyzes*" (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>43</sup>. Her coma manifests such a paralysis and indicates a refusal to live and communicate in an oppressive language; hence it is a return to the state of non-speech, the un/attainable semiotic chora. This final refusal, involving her and her baby's physical death, can also be seen as her silent and only available form of protest against participation

in the experience of fear. Dora's "desperate, exuberant protests, the labile identifications and demonstrative sexualising of every contact are a way of asserting an existence that has gone missing (Mitchell 2000, 107)." If "Dora is trying to find a place for herself" (2000, 107), Maria, on the contrary, gives up trying; her imaginary refuge turns into a hysterical identification with death. "*Unconsciousness. It is better than consciousness. Oblivion is better. Ignorance is better. Emptiness is better. Non-existence is better*" (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>44</sup>.

In her analysis of the Freudian death drive<sup>45</sup>, Mitchell refers to "the so-called negative therapeutic reaction" (2000, 147), and argues that "Freud ... would not consider accepting Dora when she asked to come back in treatment because he knew she did not want to recover." In setting the life drive against the death and sexual drives, Mitchell believes that the "life drive is activated by the presence of caretakers, as opposed to their absence" (2000, 147). Since in Marysia's life there are no actual caretakers, the death drive develops into the dominating drive. Maria's identification with her father thus could be seen as an initial attempt to endure life, at the expense, however, of the repression of trauma. As Cathy Caruth argues in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory* (1995), "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (1995, 9).

Projecting a quasi-normal family life, Maria fails to tell her father what happens during his long absences and learns to maintain her hysteria as an invisible illness.

*They sealed my lips. They had to do it, so that I would not say anything. They want me silent. All of them. Perhaps in the grave. Death is soft, warm and clear.* (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>46</sup>

Maria's hysteria is not only a medical diagnosis, it is her pathological identity carefully

suppressed in the unconscious. Hence, it is the absence and presence of hysteria, caused by the rejection and subsequent objectification of the child by the mother, that renders Maria a passive sexual object of desire. Maria's role is that of a doll, a toy 'removed' from the comforting realm of a little girl's pleasure, and transformed into a passive and speechless instrument of oppression. She fulfils this role in her acting "as if dead" (Saramonowicz makes use of a scientific term "Totstellreflex" (death feigning behavior) (1996, 25), which refers to a state of pretending to be dead, motionless, and speechless because of danger).

*The witch. I could not say anything. Fish don't speak. And if they speak, then it's better to be a stone, a table, a knife... It's better not to speak, not to move. It is almost like not being. Perhaps that would be enough. At least for a short while, before I go deeper. And there nothing matters anymore. That's why, my little one, you have to be quiet. Not one word. Even blood is silent. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>47</sup>*

Maria's "hysterical lethargy – a particularly strong nervous reaction to pregnancy"<sup>48</sup> (as diagnosed by uninformed doctors) could be also interpreted as "a horrid warning" (Carter 2000, 124) sent by the mother to the daughter:

If the daughter is a mocking memory to the mother – 'As I am so you once were' – then the mother is a horrid warning to her daughter. 'As I am, so you will be.' Mother seeks to ensure the continuance of her own repression, and her hypocritical solicitude for the young woman's moral, that is, sexual welfare masks a desire to reduce her daughter to the same state of contingent passivity she herself inhabits. (2000, 124)

In refusing and accepting this passivity, experienced through pregnancy and memories of rape, Maria performs a passive/active abortion, not only of her baby but most importantly of herself as an extension or reproduction of her mother. The thought of repetition of her own experience – as projected onto her baby – is unbearable.

Finally, moving from Freud's phallocentric focus towards a Lacanian metaphysics of *lack*, Saramonowicz endows everybody, including the absent father and Maria's husband, with hysterical, pathological predispositions. Trying to find some rational explanation for the tragedy, Maria's husband explores the truth, but his attempts are obscured, reminiscent

of a cabbalistic initiation, a search for something that is perhaps only imagined, as he initially believes: "Maria, like every other woman, has simply strange whims and fits. Fits are yet to be an illness" (Saramonowicz 1996<sup>49</sup>), or otherwise unattainable, as he begins to suspect that the injury Maria had sustained in her childhood was too painful to share with anyone, an injury she had to hide "deep inside" (1996, 72). The more he reads through Maria's 'academic research', the more he realizes the significance of the mother's role in the tragedy. She is the "reason, the source of evil – the mother, femininity in its entirety, betraying, sly, emotionless. Mother. She has been replaced by the cockroaches. The cockroaches took the burden of childish hatred away from her" (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>50</sup>. Discovering his wife as an object of exchange between mother and son eventually results in his own hysterical rejection of a life that originates in the womb of the terrible (phallic) mother.

**Your husband, Sister, is quite close. Very close. He can hear your voice. But he can't see anything. He can't see you, Sister. He is circling round, round. Let the depths lure him. Let him fall into the abyss. Fear will then return him to us. Out of fear comes acquiescence... Let him lean over the edge. Call him, Sister.**  
(Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>51</sup>

In shifting the castration anxiety from a man to a woman, Saramonowicz configures the witch-mother as an executioner, an assassin entangled in her own sexual obsessions. The mother is present and powerful, but her archaic power (the promise of semiotic pleasures) collapses, as she becomes a monstrous and oppressive substitute for the phallus (as in Creed's definition of the archaic mother as the one "who is thought to possess a phallus" (1993, 21)). This mother is multiplied and con-fused in Maria's unconscious with her brother, who incorporates the phallus in place of his father. As an eroticized phallic abuser, the mother is evil, embodying a transgression of the ultimate taboos. In breaking the incest taboo, she implies a shift away from the moral sanctions of her daughter's body, and

suspends her son in a simultaneous horror (denial) and fascination provoked by her apparent castration. As a result, her son becomes a male hysteric, who “has failed to resolve the Oedipus complex, failed, that is, to internalise a prohibition on parental incest” (Mitchell 2000, 21). He “feels catastrophically displaced... because another [the father] stands in his place” (2000, 107). The fear of being engulfed in the dark abyss between the mother’s legs lives in him as a projection of the violence he performs on his sister’s body. This is how the psychotherapeutic conversation (quoted in the opening of my analysis) continues:

**-I tried to overcome it, but there was something pushing me towards the door of her room. I used to quietly and surreptitiously approach her room, step by step... I saw my shadow move, and I knew that she saw it too. I think that she did not sleep at all. She used to lie there with her eyes open, night after night, and she waited...**

**-Did you beat her?**

**-No, I had never beaten her. I did not have to. – We had cockroaches. ... I have never seen anybody so afraid of them. If a cockroach was near her, she was ready to do everything. Everything. I did not even have to tie her. Only so that it would not touch her. But they did not obey. They crawled into all possible directions, went into every opening, as cockroaches do. Mother took them away later into the kitchen.**

**-What for?**

**- She used to talk to them. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>52</sup>**

Drawing on the concept of “the peer and sibling as mirror,” Mitchell points out that “Dora had a focus for her identification with another child” in her brother (2000, 106-7). In Marysia’s life there is no space for a similar identification, since she does not seem to have a human brother. The leading image for the brother-rapist is that of a cockroach, an armored rider – his armor protecting him against unnecessary compassion. However, Maria’s compulsive repetition of a childhood trauma, and her enormous need to analyze every detail of her drama, indicate her search for a brother-as-mirror. She documents her phobia (her obsession with re/search) in her dissertation, which provides detailed descriptions of cockroaches and their monstrous mutations, their eating habits, and general behavioral

patterns. This investigation circulates in her unconscious in the intermingling images of her brother's unrelieved sexual cravings and cockroaches penetrating her body:

*He lies next to me. Over me. In me. Most often on the wardrobe. Quite motionless. But he is not dead. I know, he is not. He only acts as if he is. He can do everything. I see the saturated, heavy shell growing. Bigger and bigger. Bigger than me. And his speedy legs. Ready to jump. I mustn't move. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>53</sup>*

The mother is never activated in these unconscious reminiscences, except through the monstrous *jouissance* of her brother (who is speaking to Maria as a cockroach):

**Do you know how many years I have waited for this very moment? For the moment of your defenselessness. How many attempts, disappointments, how many tricks I had played to finally have you subjugated? To see that once again you depend on me. MOTIONLESS. And what is my reward? Only your stubbornness, resistance, escapes and hatred. But your mother was so easy to be had. (Saramonowicz 1996)<sup>54</sup>**

Finally, Saramonowicz deliberately places the mother in the context of a Freudian cognitive alliance with the boy, who sees only that the girl's body is penis-less. Yet, if the girl's sexual organs were admitted as the possibility of another libidinal economy, the phallogentric system of social and linguistic projections of her absence/insignificance would collapse, as Wyatt argues, in the context of Angela Carter's stories, in "The Violence of Gendering" (2000, 61). The mother-witch figure in *Siostra* indicates, however, that an attempt to subvert phallogentric entrapments can turn into a traumatic experience. As the figure of abjection and horror, her witch-mother incorporates displacement; she is first devoured by the (symbolic) abyss, and then represented as a distorted, but still the same, symbolic location. As a displaced, fragmented, or disfigured mother, she is subsequently rejected and erased (the intermingling notions of belief in the maternal comfort and fear of the terrible mother lead to that rejection and erasure). The paradox of the mother, trapped in the biological repetition of life, is that she neither continues nor discontinues, but only suffers as does the mother according to Kristeva:

I yearn for the Law. And since it is not made for me alone, I venture to desire outside the law. Then, narcissism thus awakened – the narcissism that wants to be sex – roams, astonished. In sensual rapture I am distraught. Nothing reassures, for only the law sets anything down. Who calls such a suffering jouissance? It is the pleasure of the damned. (Kristeva 1986, 175)

In *Siostra*, the mother cannot continue as the origin of life, but in rejection and death she loses her maternal function. However, her defeat/death will not set up a successful “therapeutic” enterprise unless the paradox is resolved. Indeed, in the narrative the assumption of the mother’s phallic sufficiency, her coherent and self-contained identity as a wicked witch, is disrupted by the collective death of mother, daughter, and subsequently the child. This particular synthesis of death is the only available (re)solution to the trauma, and is, in fact, a dissolution indicating the collapse of the subject, the fetish and the symbol. Speaking through the unconscious against the mother-in-herself, against the unavoidable repetition of trauma, Saramonowicz’s defeat of the mother is also a concrete, physical collapse of the maternal function into a grave-mound composed of abject umbilical cords.

In a similar mode, the intricacies of the language of the unconscious are explored in Maitland’s short stories, published in the eighties in Britain. Employing absences, distortions, and slippages of ‘the symbolic’, Maitland’s narratives continue to speak from the position of the rejected cord (the refused mother), and, in a resonant parallel to *Siostra*, draw on the (phallogentric) force that subjugates the girl/woman’s love and desire of and for her mother, “so as to enter into the desire of/for the father.” This, to continue with Irigaray, throws her into a whirlpool of “a normative hetero-sexuality, normal in our societies, but completely pathogenic and pathological” (2000, 44), and resulting in uprooting her from her identity and her subjectivity.

SPLITTING THE SUBJECT: SARA MAITLAND'S "CASSANDRA" AND "THE BURNING TIMES"<sup>55</sup>

Was there not Cassandra, who always spoke the truth, although admittedly in such a way that nobody ever believed her? And that, in mythic terms, is the hell of it. (Carter 2000, 5)

While Carter's stories attempt to de-mythologize women's sexuality by a systematic rewriting of phallogentric female constructs, such as a female vampire or a monstrous 'femme fatale', Sara Maitland's<sup>56</sup> short stories, "Cassandra" and "The Burning Times," address the problem of feminist fear of historically repetitive return of the oppression of all deviant forms of behavior, especially those associated with the sovereignty of the lesbian/virgin body and the disconnection (incision) between mother and daughter. Maitland's figure of Cassandra is one of those uprooted women, mentioned by Irigaray, a prophetic "madwoman" unable to recognize herself as an autonomous being, as a "unary" and consciously speaking subject. Her clairvoyant powers remain enclosed in a non-linguistic space, a space of non-articulation. My reason for placing this story here, parallel to Carter's and Saramonowicz's texts, is the bizarre context of the 'phallic woman/ mother', collapsing into a phallogentric fetish on one hand and transforming into a threat to masculine identity in the form of Python on the other.<sup>57</sup> Does the 'phallic', as Baym suggests, refer to the Freudian assumption of woman's lack of a penis and the subsequent appropriation of phallic discourse by the symbolically castrated woman? Is this "penis" not perhaps mistaken for a similar, but differently deleted, connotation of the snake (Python), the umbilical cord? And ultimately, in what relation does the phallic woman stand to the pre-Oedipal?

The very term pre-Oedipal suggests the primacy of the Oedipal phase. Why not call the Oedipal phase the "post-Cerean"? Even more bizarre is the coinage 'phallic mother,' which suggests that the child responds to the pre-Oedipal mother only because she or he believes that the mother has a penis. (Baym 1984, 288)



Alluding to Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses*, Maitland describes Cassandra's initial fascination with Apollo, but emphasizes her lack of experience in "sexual matters" and the ease with which Apollo has seduced her.<sup>58</sup> Her narrative focuses on Apollo's sexual force that is incompatible and incommensurable with Cassandra's desire. The intensity of his sexuality in Cassandra's (mortal) body is overpowering and simply too painful for her to endure. She refuses his paternal type of divine penetration that, in a close correlation with the symbolic structure, cannot deliver pleasure but only pain. She will be punished for rejecting the phallus, and perhaps therefore thought to possess one herself.

Maitland's story translates Cassandra's punishment into a violent split (*Spaltung*) of the unary subject<sup>59</sup>. "Since you make a gap between me and my desire I shall make one between your seeing and your saying. You can never leap that gap. It will be a very lonely place" (Maitland 1988, 61). The image of Cassandra's self as a homogeneous and consistent whole is gone, like the image of the child's attachment to the mother: "The pre-Oedipal mother is rudely rejected when the child discovers the mother's appalling 'lack,' such rejection indicating that... the child was never 'really' attached to the mother, only fantasized such attachment; the 'real' attachment was always to the father" (Baym 1984, 288), to 'the symbolic'. In psychoanalytic theory, both the pre-Oedipal and the phallic, when referring to the/a woman, articulate her condition in (and with reference to) 'the symbolic'. Posited, however, as a site of 'real incision' (separation from the 'wholeness' as mother), Maitland's Cassandra, motherless and childless herself, survives between the semiotic and the symbolic, in a position where the first is unattainable (since there is no return to the mother) and the second is incomprehensible (since she is mad). Her disobedience draws on Lacan's concept of female incongruity with the symbolic function, and provides a link to the "symbolic analogy between the mouth that speaks and eats and the other female *stoma* (the

cervix of the uterus and the labia of the vulva),” as analyzed by Gulia Sissa in *Greek*

*Virginity* (1990, 5):

The lexicon of Hippocratic medicine exhibits an early crystallization of this tradition: the upper and lower portions of the female body are shown to be symmetrical through the use of identical terms to describe the parts of both. The mouth (stoma) through which food is ingested and from which speech emanates corresponds to the “mouth” (stoma) of the uterus. A narrow orifice, the latter is nevertheless equipped with lips that close, just as the lips of the upper mouth are sealed in silence. The image was so apt that it even entered the lexicon of Aristotelian biology, which in other respects was not particularly susceptible to the gastric [but also verbal] connotations of the female apparatus. (Sissa 1990, 53)

Cassandra thus represents a mouth-dominated object of desire in a double understanding of the female *labia*: the uncontrollable lips of the speaking female mouth and the insubordinate unreceptive lips of the vulva. Her pain originates in the encounter with phallic desire, with ‘an’ eroticism so different from her own eroticism that it violates rather than excites her senses. It is the same “handsome Apollo, a lover of men rather than women” as in Irigaray’s text, “the narcissistic lover of their bodies and their words,” who helps Orestes “to recover from his madness” (2000, 36), and in turn infuses Cassandra with madness in Maitland’s story. And in Greek understanding, as Ruth Padel argues in “Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons” (1983), such an erotic penetration presents one of the main images for possessing a female (soul) that “reveals natural tendencies towards the demonic” and is “a womb-like receptacle for divine intrusion and inner pain” (1983, 17).

In an attempt to disrupt the symbolic superiority of Apollo’s phallic desire, Maitland’s story centers on Cassandra’s physical pain. Cassandra’s vaginal wound, never articulated in the Greek legend, inscribes her madness with a lack of sexual joy, a type of *jouissance* that has never taken place. In this respect, Cassandra’s punishment for rejecting Apollo’s divine semen follows Sissa’s pattern: she is entrusted /fertilized with the visionary powers that will stay imprisoned within her mouth, unspoken. Just as her vagina refuses the divine power/

knowledge, so her mouth is unable to articulate it.<sup>60</sup> The non-linguistic space, as Cassandra experiences it, has little to do with the semiotic chora as imagined by Kristeva; it is a place of oppression, imprisonment, and paralysis, as enveloped by Saramonowicz in the imagery of the *Totstellreflex* (“playing dead” in reference to a post-traumatic fear of the repetition of rape). Carter also refers to this non-linguistic space as the “oracular mouth,”

located so near the beastly backside, [that] my vagina might indeed be patronisingly regarded as a speaking mouth, but never one that issues the voice of reason. In this most insulting mythic redefinition of myself, that of occult priestess, I am indeed allowed to speak but only of things that male society does not take seriously. I can hint at dreams, I can even personify the imagination; but that is only because I am not rational enough to cope with reality. (Carter 2000, 5)

Cassandra’s brain is projected as inherently divided into the conscious and the unconscious, the accessible and inaccessible halves: the signifier and the signified are split, in a separation between what she knows and what she can/not say. Held responsible and punished for the disintegration of the phallic subject (Apollo’s desire), she is split open right between her two disobedient mouths. The gap, the “hemispheric split,” accounts for her inability, inarticulacy, and insanity. But what Carter would see as “the hell of it” (2000, 5) is that the split, in Maitland’s story, refers to permanent brain damage inflicted as the Father’s revenge.

Thus Cassandra, like the Kristevan Phallic Mother, is the one who is outside the law and the symbolic structure and hence must be annihilated.

No language can sing unless it confronts the Phallic Mother. For all that it must not leave her untouched, outside, opposite, against the law... Rather it must swallow her, eat her, dissolve her, set her up like a boundary of the process where ‘I’ with ‘she’ – ‘the other’, ‘the mother’ – becomes lost. (Kristeva 1980, 191)

Disconnected from her mother/from herself, Maitland’s Cassandra lives in her desire for the whole, for the unary that indeed, in a Lacanian sense, is, or becomes, illusory, since she, the divided speaking subject, does not recognize herself as the Phallic Mother “– as blinding

pillar of the *polis* and unconscious buttress of the laws of the city – ... apprehended, comprehended, and thrust aside” (Kristeva 1980, 192).

There is a gap and she knows there is a gap between what she sees and what she says. She cannot, she cannot leap the gap. It is lonely. It is cold. There are too many feelings of depression and guilt and euphoria. She feels entirely alone, and the horizon still glows with the burning of the towers of Ilium (Maitland 1988, 54).

Frozen in her understanding of self before separation, Cassandra “sees what will happen and she tells it and no one can believe her. She cannot believe herself; in each bitter instant Cassandra hears her own truths as spittle and crazed foaming” (Maitland 1988 56). She represents the hysteric, as described by Kristeva: “That phallus could be the mother is something often said, but here we are all stopped short by this ‘truth’: the hysteric, the obsessed, the fetishist, and the schizoid. It is a focus of attention that drives us crazy” (1980, 191). Her “oracular discourse, split (signifier/signified) and multiplied” by the very fragmentation of the phallic structure, “carries the scar of not merely the trauma but also the triumph of [the] battle with the Phallic Mother” (1980, 193).

When she becomes conscious, she does not remember. They do not understand the long scratches on her face, nor the bruising on her head until she starts having fits. In her fits she murmurs dreadful and dangerous things, lost perceptions that make no sense but are discouraging and not to be encouraged. Although she is very beautiful they conclude that she is mad. She is often placed under restraint, because of the complicated distortions in all her forms of communication (Maitland 1988, 61-2).

Entangled in the impossibilities of language, Maitland’s Cassandra remains frozen in non-speech, in non-structure, because of her own not quite conscious choice.

Further, in a link to the concepts of divine possession and penetration as explored by Padel, Cassandra is infused with a distorted form of the paternal language, with the ‘real’ that, entangled in the umbilical cord, refuses to become symbolic. Padel distinguishes between the Greek understanding of madness as a physical and mental contamination on one hand, and possession as a divine (immaculate) penetration of the fe/male body fertilized by a

god on the other: "The key word [to possession] is *entheos*... 'with god inside'. It distinguishes 'possessed' from *ekphron*, 'mad'" (1983, 14); being possessed implies madness, yet madness does not necessarily mean possession.

The implications of physical pain and erotic penetration [help] to establish in the tradition the idea that prophetic possession by a male god involved pain, which the priestess naturally resisted... The entry of god into woman is painful; as, in medieval fantasies about the Black Mass, women's copulation with the evil was painful, since he was very cold (1983, 14).

Alluding to the famous historical study on witches by Trevor-Roper (1967), these analogies relate to Sissa's parallel between the physical and mental fertilization of a woman, reinforcing the violent and radical character of this phallic intrusion:

Anything that passed through the mouth of a woman that was not intended for her master and judge was a sign of instability. At once corrupt and vain, women's words were marked by foolish ignorance and bogus knowledge, such as idle incantations and talk of supposed magic potions. A man had to remain always on his guard. He was supposed to pour his philosophical knowledge into all his conversations and discussions. Just as he fertilized his wife's body, so must he deposit in her soul 'the seed of the noblest discourses'. (1990, 55)<sup>61</sup>

If Cassandra had not refused Apollo, she would, perhaps, have become (divinely) possessed, and Apollo's semen might have turned her into a "successful" phallic oracle governed by the law of the Father. But her fears are stronger than her aspirations; the fear of being raped and turned against her own pleasure simultaneously gives her the right to reject Apollo and denies her the right of entry into 'the symbolic'. The interrupted and denied fertilization of Cassandra deconstructs the myth of the vaginal orgasm (and of the importance of penetration) as ensuring "sexual monopoly of men over women, which, in turn, is the foundation of the public monopoly of male society over women" (Schwarzer 2001, 225)<sup>62</sup>. Positing Cassandra as the un/speaking subject, and illustrating thus the dialectical opposition between the semiotic and the symbolic, Maitland's story reenacts the experience of a female

suffering that both results from and constitutes the opposition between the two. Cassandra's split position is a painful vacuum, a suspension of the signifying structure.

Drawing on early feminist constructions of the female body as a locus of fear, "The Burning Times" (1988), Maitland's second story for discussion here, offers an interesting insight into another painful split between mother and daughter. The concept of the 'phallic' refers again to a fantasy of a woman who is thought to possess a phallus, either because she acts as if she has one, or because she rejects it in ignoring its symbolic centrality. Like Daly's narrative theories (analyzed in Chapter 1), Maitland's text can be read as "an internal voyage, a metaphorical journey into the heart of patriarchal darkness," (Purkiss 1993, 13) and a therapeutic return to childhood fears. Introducing the figure of a burning Virgin, Maitland conceptualizes her as an absence (ghost, spectrum) of the om-phallic mother, born of flesh and martyred. The narrator, the daughter of a lesbian woman burned as a witch, describes the Virgin as a lady "crowned with the sun, aglow with the light from the candles lit by women like me" (Maitland 1988, 133).

In the absence of the woman-mother's identity, the speech [parole] of the 'daughters' is spoken as a gestual mimesis or flows into the mysterious desire of/for that Other woman. Verbal exchange therefore becomes impossible or useless. Everything takes place before speech intervenes. (Irigaray 2000, 110)

Structured according to the Demeter/ Kore archetype, this type of narrative, according to Pratt, comprises "the rejuvenation of the mother in the personality of the daughter and of the daughter in the personality of the mother" (1981, 172). However, in Maitland's story of the mother, the theme of a victimized, burning body of the witch is projected onto the figure of a sanctified and fetishized Virgin. It is the daughter (as narrator) who focuses on this particular intermingling of her "wild" burning mother (whose body is exhibited, made to be a central focus of the village's attention) with the Virgin, veiled and confined to the

claustrophobic, restricted space of a church. The two figures fuse into one: the mother but not quite. This particular constellation of the (lesbian) mother-virgin that “often seemed on fire” is crucial to the narrator’s split and alienation. Her own body is that of a hysteric daughter oppressed by the hegemonic phallic structure (she is unhappily married, has three adult sons and no space for herself in the cottage). Possessed and displaced, like Cixous’s figure, she becomes “a witch in reverse, turned back within herself” (Cixous and Clément 1986, 36), trapped in the imaginary land of the archaic mother who, unlike the phallic mother, is “never [to] be articulated within patriarchy” (Purkiss 1993, 82-83)<sup>63</sup>. In supplementing the suffocating atmosphere of her present home with reminiscences from her past, the narrator projects her unorthodox childhood cottage onto the church, which, ambiguously as well as ironically, becomes a space of refuge, the semiotic chora, the womb/tomb of her witch-mother.

Like Cixous’s *Medusa*, Maitland’s figure of the lesbian mother has a subversive laugh that undermines and ridicules heterosexual hegemony:

She laughed at everyone and at herself. Her hair was a great mass of tangled curls, and she would not smooth them down. She was a widow woman, they said, though as a child I heard other things as children will. She did not come from that village, but from another further west, towards the mountains. She never spoke of her childhood, or of what and where she had been before. She was a lace-maker; a very skillful lace-maker, and she loved the work. (1988, 135)

The witch-mother is also an excellent story-teller, a mouth-dominated, or two-lipped subject speaking from a place that is sealed, inaccessible to her daughter.

She could tell stories, my mother. I remember that. When I tried to tell them to my sons they came out lumpish and heavy. I do not know where I went wrong, except that for her they were a joy to tell. She told them for her own joy and for mine if I wanted to share hers, whereas I told them to hush the boys when I could stand their bawling no longer.... Sometimes when I was small and she was telling stories, the other children would come and listen too, and on sunny evenings between hay-making and harvest even the grown-up folk would come and she would sing and tell stories. They would

even forget for a while that they did not like her, because they liked her stories so well (1988, 135-6).

The narrator remembers her witch mother as chaotic but creative, and above all self-sufficient, and thereby assuming the phallic position. Capable both of maintaining and trespassing against the unwritten laws of the village, the mother is dangerously suspended between both possibilities, and aware of the inevitability of her collapse. It was as if she knew that her 'end' was just the matter of time and opportunity.

There was just one corner of the room that was clean and that was where her work was kept; her lace pillow with its hundreds of tiny pins bright as jewels and around them the flax threads bleached white and tied into knots that were spiders' webs and flowers and wreaths and pictures that grew magically out of nowhere... Up here they do not make much lace; one of the few things I brought with me, because I knew she would hate it to be lost, was the veil she made me for my first communion. It was the envy of the village, with the sacred host and roses and apple blossom and little violets. Perhaps it was the beginning of our troubles... (Maitland 1988, 135)

Finally, the daughter's fear of historical repetition is intertwined in the story with her personal responsibility for her mother's death:

when I look up at her through the tears and through the candle flames, she seems to me on fire... she is burning, smiling, burning and I scream.

Aloud. Dear mother, let no one have heard. But she will not listen to my prayers, because I burned my own mother, I betrayed her and they burned her and I danced around her pyre... And I cannot confess this sin, because they will burn me too. They will torture and break me as they did her. Then they will burn me (Maitland 1988, 133-4).

Because of her unresolved erotic confusion, the daughter is the first to condemn and denounce her mother to the "authorities" of the village, the first to burn the umbilical cord, although, as Maitland suggests, her mother's sovereignty has been generally projected as an unacceptable form of behavior, cultural disfiguration and inconformity associated with secrecy and potential danger:

The women did not like her because she did not care what they said and seldom gossiped with them. Some evenings men would come round to our cottage, wanting either to kiss her or to marry her and take her lovely lace-pillow and the money she earned home to their own houses. But she would have none of that, but would laugh at



them to their own faces. The men did not like her either, because she laughed and did not care... (1988, 136)

Nothing, not even her mother's laugh, however, can heal the separation and betrayal stored in the daughter's memory. As Purkiss observes, it is "her mother's lesbian sexuality and her own unrecognized desire for Margaret [her mother's lover] that lead the narrator to denounce her mother, but plainly this daughter envies her mother at every possible level" (1996, 23). This envy of the 'phallic' 'wholeness', integration and self-sufficiency, combined with the brutal separation from her mother, repeatedly returns to her as an adult in the form of anxiety attacks. The church merely offers a shelter to her body, where in/dependence (her striving for space) is suspended between the "archaic images of the free woman, as opposed to the domesticated woman [in the] union with the male," as Nor Hall writes in *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine* (1980, 12). Her body balances between virginity and motherhood, but unlike the Virgin she has no alternative but to be one or the other.

The statue of the Virgin is in painted wood. She holds her son somehow clumsily I feel, having held three of my own. A chance lurch of that serene head and he will fall out of her arms; she should bring him lower so that he straddles her hip ... I try to concentrate on that, on that dangerous way in which she is holding the Son of God; and how easy it is for a child to fall out of even the most loving arms (Maitland 1988, 134).

Maitland's correlation of mother/ daughter and the Virgin can be linked here with what Kristeva, in a different context, refers to as an attempt "to unite the logic of passion with the order... of the ideal, of the prohibition, of the law" (2001, 114). "It is... true," writes Kristeva, "that cornering [the Virgin] for her lack of experience with babysitting... is, of course, very funny, but avoids the difficulty of the cunning and, I maintain, splendid construction of the Virgin-Mother-of-God" (2001, 114)<sup>64</sup>. In escaping to the "splendid" Virgin, the daughter is prey to this "cunning": what she faces is at times her burning mother,

and at times a silent stature representing an abstract institution with the omnipresent Father at the top. The daughter, still “alive” and a mother herself, thus burns herself in a self-imposed penance in front of the Virgin’s altar. Not unlike Marysia’s suffering in Saramonowicz’s novel, hers, accompanied by ferocious images of other burning bodies, is underscored by fear that the same thing might happen to her. The “they will burn me, too” motif refers to the reoccurring maternal trauma of the ‘real incision’ that keeps ‘the symbolic castration’ intact: “Torn between the sons and the fathers, the stake or sacrifice in dispute between men, she is fragmented into bits and pieces, and therefore unable to articulate her difference” (Whitford 2000, 27).

In both stories, the dialogue (Cassandra’s inner dialogue and the imagined dialogue between mother and daughter in this story) is broken, divided between what is not known (homosexual desire that remains unspoken) and what is heterosexual and consciously experienced as knowledge. Both the maternal body and the lesbian experience are described “from a position of sanctioned heterosexuality that fails to acknowledge its own fear of losing that sanction,” (Butler 1990, 87)<sup>65</sup> and that, instead, already acknowledges its loss. Cassandra’s brain is fractured/ “split lonely” (Maitland 1988, 61), isolated like the figure of the daughter in “The Burning Times”. This alienation (separation and madness), as explored in the split of one subject (that of mother and daughter), is central to the analysis of the next text, Atwood’s novel, *Alias Grace* (1996).

IDENTIFYING MADNESS: MARGARET ATWOOD'S *Alias Grace*

Gone mad is what they say, and sometimes Run mad, as if mad is a direction, like west, as if mad is a different house you could step into, or a separate country entirely. But when you go mad you don't go any other place, you stay where you are. And somebody else comes in. (Atwood 1996, 33)

The first fable of our first book is a fable in which what is at stake is the relationship to the law. There are two principal elements, two main puppets: the word of the Law or the discourse of God and the Apple. It's a struggle between the Apple and the discourse of God. All this transpires in this short scene before a woman. The Book begins *Before the Apple*: at the beginning of everything there is an apple, and this apple, when it is talked about, is said to be a not-to-be-fruit. There is an apple, and straight away there is the law. (Cixous 1994, 133)

In *Alias Grace*, a woman's mental disorders (hysteria, madness) are assumed to derive from her supposed connection with the distorted mother of mankind, Eve, who was seduced by the snake and infused with disobedience. Margaret Atwood<sup>66</sup> identifies this apparently 'female type' of disobedience as a socially and lawfully determined necessity, and as a revolt against phallogocentric assumptions about female passivity, as Cixous (quoted above) argues in "Extreme Fidelity" (1998). Mapping the intellectual territory of nineteenth-century Canada, Atwood reclaims the documented but enigmatic story of Grace Marks, a child of the poorest Irish immigrants, who arrived in Canada with nothing, and started her working life as a maid-of-all-work. Mysteriously involved in the murder of her employer and a fellow servant, she served a life sentence in the Kingston Penitentiary as well as being held in the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto. In suggesting a link between sexually exploited women (who forced to passively accept their exploitation) and a fantasy of the archaic, narcissistic self of the woman-mother, Atwood explores the estrangement and alienation experienced by Grace, one such woman, who is suspended between her innocence and her alien (strange to herself), uncanny and demoniacal double. Speculating on alternative states of consciousness in a pre-Freudian context, *Alias Grace* is intertwined with biblical imagery, superstitions,

and fortune-telling, and alludes to “the unknown [that] is always more wonderful... than the known, and more convincing” (Atwood 1996, 268), to the possibility of the ‘archaic mother’ that remains open. However, Grace’s madness is also brought into immediate and recurring association with her culturally restricted but exploited body. Her body is not only subjected to science and law, but also to the private fantasies of the doctors and judges. It is “an image almost medieval in its plain lines, its angular clarity: a nun in a cloister, a maiden in a towered dungeon, awaiting the next day’s burning at the stake, or else the last-minute champion come to rescue her” (1996, 59).

Focusing on Grace’s absence of mind in the moments of her ‘hysterical’ attack, Atwood inscribes madness as ‘mysteria’, a “Western nineteenth-century view, which linked hysteria to a specific version of femininity as itself a ‘mystery’” (Mitchell 2000, 112).

‘Two hundred years ago, they would not have been at a loss’, says Reverend Verringer. ‘It would have been a clear case of possession. Mary Whitney would have been found to have been inhabiting the body of Grace Marks, and thus to be responsible for inciting the crime, and for helping to strangle Nancy Montgomery. An exorcism would have been in order’.

‘But this is the nineteenth century,’ says Simon. ‘It may be a neurological condition.’ He would like to say *must be*, but he doesn’t wish to contradict Verringer too bluntly. Also he is still quite unsettled, and unsure of his intellectual ground. (Atwood 1996, 405)

Possession or hysteria, both seen as neurological conditions, are clearly linked in *Alias Grace* with a sociological projection of deficient and biologically inferior female bodies, conceived to assist and support a masculine “consciousness to itself” (Felman 1997, 9). In the nineteenth century, women’s bodies are “meant” to be domesticated, “caged in wire crinolines... so that they cannot get out and go rubbing up against the gentlemen’s trousers” (Atwood 1996, 22), just as they are destined to become pregnant in order to preserve their double (biological and cultural) entrapment. This female condition of entrapment correlates

with Felman's concept of hysteria as a particularly female complaint. According to Felman, the dilemma of a Western woman is that she does not fit into the description of the model ('proper') body, since this body is, inevitably, always already projected as masculine. The social role assigned to the woman is that of serving "the central image of man", the role conditioned by her body in which she "is first and foremost a daughter/ a mother/ a wife" (Felman 1997, 7-8)<sup>67</sup>. Excluded from the patronymic signifier, she does not qualify as an identity, but only as a relational supplement. Indeed, Grace Marks attempts to become one of the many dutiful Daughters committed to the patriarchal system without understanding its doctrine, and also unknowingly reinforcing their own subjugation. A witness to her mother's continual pregnancies, Grace is already prematurely urged to become a 'little mother'. The wish to kill the father who possesses (impregnates) the mother becomes her part in the Oedipal drama. Her family position is ambiguous, placed between hating the father and becoming a parent-substitute, a role she literally assumes after her mother's death but is soon forced to abandon. This double separation, first from her mother, then from her numerous siblings, reinforces her need for identification with another person, which she finds in Mary Whitney, her roommate and a servant like herself. Mary introduces Grace into the life of the maid-of-all-work, a 'respectful' life within the structure of the patriarchal household, contrasted with prostitution as the only alternative. Echoing de Beauvoir's juxtaposition of these two female positions<sup>68</sup>, Atwood makes them equally products of the Law that encodes women in the nineteenth century as submissive subjects to the system or potentially mad. As depicted by Atwood, not only the maid-of-all-work, but every woman, quite independently of her social position, can be "[e]xploited, enslaved, treated as a thing rather than a person" (de Beauvoir 1993, 586), and consequently, needs to be analyzed in the context of "madness" which Felman formulates as

the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation. Far from being a form of contestation, 'mental illness' is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration. This socially defined help-needing and help-seeking behavior is itself part of female conditioning, ideologically inherent in the behavioral pattern and in the dependent and helpless role assigned to the woman as such. (1997, 8)

What seems to be most problematic in the image of the nineteenth-century woman is her disobedient (speaking) mouth that in refusing to keep silent destabilizes the Law of the Father:

... you know why God made women with skirts, it's so they can be pulled over their heads and tied at the top, that way you don't get so much noise out of them, I hate a screeching slut, women should be born without mouths on them, the only thing of use in them is below the waist. (Atwood 1996, 240)

Having a cunning mouth, Grace Marks is fascinating, and then abject, trapped, and imprisoned, as she continues to speak. Her stories, like those of the Homeric Sirens, "ought never to be subjected to the harsh categories of Truth and Falsehood," since they "belong in another realm altogether" (1996, 377). The realm Atwood refers to is the Freudian *Unheimlichkeit*, correlated by Kristeva with the state of being a stranger to oneself.<sup>69</sup> Although Grace's "behavioral pattern" is what Felman terms "ideologically inherent" (1997, 8) to phallogentric thinking, it discloses irregularity, slippages of personality, and difference from patriarchal patterns. The violent death of Mary Whitney, in particular, undermines the ideology Grace was taking for granted and deemed "kind enough" and "usual" (Atwood 1996, 308). Her behavioral "irregularity" begins with a sudden loss of memory and a split in her mind that causes the "other voice, whatever it was" (1996, 189) to speak and to act in her name. Left in the room with Mary's body, Grace imagines or is able to hear her dead friend asking her to "let [her] in" (1996, 179). The shock she experiences implodes both her mind and her body: "An auditory hallucination, of course... followed... by an episode of fainting, and then by hysterics, mixed with what would appear to have been somnambulism;

after which there was a deep and prolonged sleep, and subsequent amnesia” (1996, 189).

This uncanny collapse of Grace’s identity could be seen as a Freudian *Spaltung* (the break, fracture, split) caused by the repetition of an abrupt female ‘death in blood’. In both cases (Mary’s, and earlier on her mother’s) death is caused by the lack or incompetence of doctors.

The death of Mary Whitney, victim of an illegal and clumsy abortion, initiates in Grace the return of repressed desires. Returning as the uncanny, unsettling, and supernatural, Mary becomes what Creed calls “the phantasy of the castrating mother,” who “undermines Freud’s theories that woman terrifies because she is castrated and that it is the father who alone represents the agent of castration within the family” (1993, 151). Mary, as the voice of the witch, “remarkable for its violence” but “not without a certain logic” (Atwood 1996, 406), expresses Grace’s unconscious, subversive desires:

And do you know who Pandora was, Grace? And I say, Yes, she was a Greek person from days of old, who looked into a box she had been told not to, and a lot of diseases came out, and wars, and other human ills... Mary Whitney had a low opinion of the story, and said why did they leave such a box lying around, if they didn’t want it opened. (1996, 146)

... the Bible may have been thought out by God, but it was written down by men. And like everything men write down, such as the newspapers, they got the main story right but some of the details wrong. (1996, 459)

It seems that Grace takes on the double task of clarifying these details in the name of her mother and her friend. What Grace desires, without being able to articulate it, is not a masculine self-identity, but the imaginary semiotic chora, the protective space of the maternal. In her somnambulistic trance, she keeps “asking where Grace had gone. And when they told [her] that [she herself] was Grace, [she] would not believe them, but cried, and tried to run out of the house, because [she] said that Grace was lost, and had gone into the lake, and [she] needed to search for her” (1996, 180). The lake, a watery space, evokes the

protective and destructive potential of the mother's womb, as well as the memory of the ocean, the uncanny space that devoured her mother's body during their journey to Canada:

And then with the icebergs floating around us and the fog rolling in, my poor mother was tipped into the sea. I hadn't thought about where she was going until this moment, and there was something dreadful about it, to picture her floating down in a white sheet among the staring fish. (Atwood 1996, 121)

Atwood provides evidence that Grace's mother's death was due to the numerous pregnancies which distorted her womb: "There was a hard swelling, and I thought it was another little mouth to feed," although the doctor said "it was most likely a tumor, or a cyst, or else a burst appendix... but there was no way of telling without cutting her open" (1996, 120). The female womb, suggesting the end rather than the beginning, becomes in Grace's imagination the source of an uncanny desire to avenge her mother's and Mary's death-causing pregnancies. Drawing on Creed's analysis of the Freudian uncanny as "a token of repression" (1993, 54) and Kristeva's concept of the abject, both can be seen as disturbing Grace's identity by leading back "to what is known of old and long familiar" (Creed 1993, 54). As Kristeva points out, the term *heimlich* signifies friendly, familiar, intimate, as well as concealed, deceitful and malicious, hence the positive term is already marked with its own negation. In *Alias Grace*, the familiar and the intimate are reversed into their opposites in an analogous way: pregnancy and death are brought together with an uncanny strangeness rooted in the *Unheimlichkeit* of wombs cut open. This strangeness will manifest itself in Grace as madness, although it can also appear to be a 'clumsy' defense of the distressed uneducated woman, or mother (to be).

Moreover, locating female madness in the context of a homicide, Atwood shows that the concept of crime is constructed along the axis of masculine presence and female absence, a conclusion drawn also by Creed in her conceptualization of the *monstrous-feminine*. The



difference in association between murderer/ monster and the murderess/ monstrous feminine lies in the allusive presence-absence of the female body, both intensifying and suspending the act of murder and its monstrosity. Owing to this unresolved suspension, the female suspect will be projected as a female demon or a witch, and, contrary to Foucault's claim, will continue to be displayed in a spectacle<sup>70</sup>.

The reason they want to see me is that I am a celebrated murderess. Or that is what has been written down. When I first saw it I was surprised... what is there to celebrate about murder? All the same, Murderess is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell to it, that word - musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase. (Atwood 1996, 22-23)

In analyzing the treatment of the condemned in the nineteenth century, Foucault refers to a body that is no longer tortured but caught up in a system of constraints, obligations and prohibitions:

One no longer touched the body, or at least as little as possible, and then only to reach something other than the body itself. It might be objected that imprisonment, confinement, forced labour, penal servitude, prohibition from entering certain areas, deportation -which have occupied so important a place in modern penal systems -are 'physical' penalties: unlike fines, for example, they directly affect the body. But the punishment-body relation is not the same as it was in the torture during public executions... (Foucault 1995, 11)

Grace's body in the asylum and prison is still above all an attractive (fascinating) body that does not correspond entirely to Foucault's system, and even constitutes an exception from that system. Grace, as a woman-patient "is always a temptation": her body is suspended between the doctor's scientific interests and his physical desires, "if possible to arrange it unobserved" (Atwood 1996, 29). Her madness and/or her monstrosity are used as a medical pretext to interrogate her female organs: "Keep still, I am here to examine you, it is no use lying to me" (1996, 32).<sup>71</sup> Contrary to Foucault's assumptions, physical pain, in the context of the female body, is still the "the pain of the body itself", even if officially it "is no longer the constituent element of the penalty" (Foucault 1995, 11). Grace's abused body is loaded

with fear, and it is the particular combination of female pain and fear that constitutes “a remarkable aphrodisiac” (Atwood 1996, 378) somehow overlooked by Foucault.

The disappearance of spectacle as a part of the new “economy of suspended rights” (Foucault 1995, 11) is illusory in itself, since Grace’s sexuality is put on display and confession is in order: “Confess, confess. Let me forgive and pity. Let me get up a Petition for you. Tell me all” (Atwood 1996, 35). Consequently, in a hysterical spectacle of outrage, Grace re-enacts her initial shock at death as well as her vulnerability, whereby death is displaced/ replaced by an “irrational” fear of doctors, “of being cut open by them, as some might have a fear of snakes” (30). As Bronfen argues in *The Knotted Subject*,

[w]hat the hysteric broadcasts is a message about vulnerability – the vulnerability of the symbolic (the fallibility of paternal law and social bonds); the vulnerability of identity (the insecurity of gender, ethnic, and class designations); or, perhaps above all, the vulnerability of the body, given its mutability and mortality. (Bronfen 1998, xiii)

When she is “back to normal,” Grace stops “telling them anything” (Atwood 1996, 32), and with the wisdom of the “hysteric” she refuses to assist in the preparation for death: “Even when they are not doing the killing themselves it means a death is close, and in that way [the doctors] are like ravens or crows” (1996, 27-8). As Mitchell explains, the nature of any shock is that it converts

the previous pleasure of contact to a desperate, painful excitement, a kind of survival – sexuality kit which could well lead to rape or compulsive, violent sexual encounters. The frenetic repetition is the mark of the death of the ‘other’ and of his own survival – it is sexuality in the interest of the surviving self (Mitchell 2000, 143).

Although Dr. Jordan, a ‘psychotherapist’ pursuing Grace’s case, is a liberal thinker, he still represents the Law and analyses Grace as “one of the negative female variety” (Atwood 1996, 361). According to this Law, as Irigaray has argued, what “women say appears to be of little importance”:

When it comes to knowing how things stand with women and what treatment should be prescribed them, [the male practitioners] are self-sufficient. No need to listen to women. That no doubt explains their therapeutic choices. (Irigaray 2000, 34)

Indeed, Dr. Jordan treats Grace's fluctuating identity as a provisional neurological but inherently female indisposition. The biblical motifs Grace interweaves into her story clearly center on this female indisposition. However, in an attempt to adjust the symbolic imagery to her own understanding, Grace unfolds new spaces within her biblical knowledge, spaces for the archaic mother. Filling in the missing role of the mother as a powerful and autonomous life-giver, this imaginary, dyadic figure connects in Grace's fantasy with a revengeful and angry woman, cornered, like her own mother, and abused like Mary Whitney. Grace, subconsciously identifying with Mary, is now able to laugh at "the curse of Eve [i.e. menstruation] which we must all bear" (Atwood 1996, 179), because Mary "thought that was stupid, and the real curse of Eve was having to put up with the nonsense of Adam, who as soon as they were in trouble, blamed it all on her" (1996, 164). These imaginary and autonomous spaces allow her to keep Dr. Jordan at a distance, and make her suspicious of all his suggestions:

I look at him, then look away. An apple, I say. He must think I am simple; or else it's a trick of some sort; or else he is mad and that is why they locked the door – they've locked me into this room with a madman. ... The apple of the Tree of Knowledge, is what he means. Good and evil. Any child could guess it. But I will not oblige. (1996, 40)

On the other hand, linking Grace's amnesia with "the effects of a hysterical seizure", Dr. Jordan maps the unconscious as a form of "auto-hypnotic somnambulism, not much studied twenty-five years ago but well documented since" (1996, 432). Both idealistic and disillusioned, he resents "the widely held view that women are weak-spined and jelly-like by nature, and would slump to the floor like melted cheese if not roped in" (1996, 73). He has dissected enough women to know better and "has been where they could never go, seen what they could never see; he has... peered inside" (1996, 82). Visiting Grace in the Penitentiary,

he approaches her as he would any of the cornered women, but Grace eludes him: "She glides ahead of him, just out of his grasp, turning her head to see if he's still following" (1996, 407). The only memory "she seems to have forgotten" is the memory of the crime, "the very plenitude of her recollections may be a sort of distraction, a way of drawing the mind away from some hidden but essential fact" (1996, 185). Does she need him at all? He offers his therapeutic treatment as a rescue from the abject umbilical remnants that keep her entangled in the semiotic. But what if she does not need to be rescued? "If she has anything to hide, she may want to stay in the water, in the dark, in her element. She may be afraid she won't be able to breathe, otherwise" (1996, 322). Projected as Pandora or Eve, both locked in a paradox of primordial sin and eternal punishment, his patient might be nothing but a phallogentric fantasy of evil, fluctuating pleasures and dangers.

According to Mitchell's analysis of the relationship between the patient and the therapist, the traumatic shock experienced by the patient becomes the moral shock of the therapist. This is one of the reasons why it should never be the task of the therapist to investigate what actually happened – that task must fall to others. But the shock itself is crucially important. (2000, 141)

Dr. Jordan follows precisely what Mitchell postulates: he is the first who rejects the necessity to investigate Grace's crime, and concentrates instead on defining the source of her shock. However, Grace's sexuality constitutes a significant obstacle to his investigation: "With memory blasted, the shock can be sexualised. The shock itself becomes an end in itself" (Mitchell 2000, 142). Climaxing in the image of her uncanny mouth, Grace's hysterical symptoms already refuse cooperation. Dr. Jordan got "the hook in her mouth, but can he pull her out? Up, out of the abyss, up to the light. Out of the deep blue sea" (Atwood 1996, 322). Grace's hysterical body is projected by him as the abyss, the biblical metaphor of eternal punishment, of "a bottomless pit" (Pippin 1999, 68), as referred to in my analysis

of Carter's vampire queen. An ambiguous Siren, she fascinates the doctor who "[has] cast [his] nets into deep waters" and "may have drawn up a mermaid, neither fish nor flesh but both at once, and whose song is sweet but dangerous" (Atwood 1996, 423). It is hence the abject, demonized Grace who is sexually attractive, fascinating, and irresistible: "It comes to him that Grace Marks is the only woman he's ever met that he would wish to marry" (1996, 388).

Madness, of course; a perverse fantasy, to marry a suspected murderess. But what if he'd met her before the murders? He considers this, rejects it. Before the murders Grace would have been entirely different from the woman he now knows. A young girl; scarcely formed; tepid, bland, and tasteless. A flat landscape." (1996, 389)

Incongruously, Grace herself is a good, dutiful Daughter, but because of her unresolved nucleus of unconscious emotions, she cannot be successful in the symbolic order. She has a history of lapses, of dangerous splits of identity, of not being in control of her hysterical body, of the *it* in herself:

If I am good enough and quiet enough, perhaps after all they will let me go; but it's not easy being quiet and good. It's like hanging on the edge of a bridge when you've already fallen over; you don't seem to be moving, just dangling there, and yet *it* is taking all your strength. (1996, 5, my italics)

As the recipient of a shock, Grace "is, by definition, passive" (Mitchell 2000, 141). Her "strongest prison is of her own construction" (Atwood 1996, 361), and her passive, stubborn strength is set to thwart the doctors, to prevent the "recovery". According to Mitchell, violent death, the trauma of separation, and collapse of identity belong to the most "penetrating" of human experiences (Mitchell 2000, 141), and need a long-term psychological convalescence: "When, in the process of recovery, a fantasy is constructed, this fantasy bears the marks of both the shock and the implosion" (2000, 141). Placed in the context of such a fantasy, Grace's subconscious projection of herself as Mary can be understood as the protest of a hysteric who cannot define herself in the world. The world is

“like a puzzle [she] could not guess” (Atwood 1996, 202), it has become for her a place of difference. Because the “hysteric does not remember. An actual trauma... wipes out memory. The hysteric unconsciously models [her]self on this process and becomes amnesiac in order to create a traumatic shock” (Mitchell 2000, 141). Grace escapes to the unconscious, so that she cannot remember.

The entrenched hysteric repeats and creates shocks for [her]self; these shocks entail the blasting of memory. The broken object, rather than the feeling that caused the breakage, becomes the focus of attention – the feeling can then be forgotten. (2000, 142)

In a process of self-therapy, simultaneously an attempt to repent for what she has (not) done and a protest against the repentance, she locks herself out of anybody’s reach and performs an interrogation on herself. Moreover, this self-interrogation expands into an interrogation of the doctor, “as if it were [the doctor], not she, who was under scrutiny” (Atwood 1996, 59). The more she remembers and relates to the doctor, the more energy “she’s drawing out of him – using his own mental forces to materialize the figures in her story, as the mediums are said to do during their trances” (1996, 291). Finally, approaching the center of Grace’s story, Dr. Jordan realizes that the center was always lacking, that there is no answer and no language in common:

‘The truth may well turn out to be stranger than we think’, says Simon. ‘It may be that much of what we are accustomed to describe as evil, and evil freely chosen, is instead an illness due to some lesion of the nervous system, and that the Devil himself is simply a malformation of the cerebrum’. (1996, 80)

For Grace as much as for Dr. Jordan, the “area of erasure” (1996, 291) cannot be grasped, analyzed or named. To break the inaccessibility of the unconscious, Dr. Jordan agrees to hypnotize his patient, which happens in front of an audience: together with other representatives of the Law he agrees to display Grace’s body. The hypnosis should constitute advancement, albeit with shocking disruptions, towards remembering the object.

However, in his final attempt to link science with the unconscious, the hypnosis becomes a session of modern exorcism (the reenacted shock causes an estrangement of Grace's body/mind in the form of Mary's voice). The "area of erasure" turns ironically into a carnival, a sort of 'sabbath,' a temporarily liberating force. Mary's voice, representing Grace's unconscious, is not prepared for compromises, and refuses to speak in 'the symbolic', and hence erodes any possibility of scientific understanding. The voice/ force actually comes close to 'becoming' the semiotic chora, a 'place' or a 'state' that Grace, with all her "incongruence", is unable to retrieve since the voice, besides refusing cooperation, is body-less. Mary's voice represents "quintessentially, the absent or missing body" as part of the collapsed mother's body, and "it is the terror of the body going absent that drives the hysteria" (Mitchell 2000, 221). Rather than providing a therapeutic treatment, Mary gives Grace a therapeutic shock (competing with Dr. Jordan's therapy) that re-enacts (remembers) the mother's dying body. Coming against Grace's will (without her consent), Mary's uncompromising voice initiates an unsettling confrontation between fear and fascination with death, as analyzed by Gallop (1982, 21). Moreover, her absent body constitutes a misleading, paradoxical factor since, as Mitchell explains, "there is no more excessively present body than that of the hysteric (in hysteria the body is always acting and thereby expressing something)". However, "it is exactly this bodily excess which is dependent on its subjective absence" (Mitchell 2000, 222). From that paradox Atwood derives the objectification of Grace (or one of her identities) as "the inhuman female demon," a woman already marked with the Scarlet Letter<sup>72</sup>, "a foul-tempered witch" (Atwood 1996, 277) "unrepresentable" to the subject, that is, to Grace in her consciousness.

Placing the figure of a doctor in the context of an institutionalized confession, Atwood describes him as "one of the dark trio – the doctor, the judge, the executioner", all sharing

“the powers of life and death” (1996, 82), powers similar to those issuing out of the mother’s womb. Certainly, Atwood’s narrative focuses on institutionalized forms of female madness and on professional doctors who, as in Carter’s and Saramonowicz’s narratives, fail to penetrate the unconscious. But most importantly, her narrative is about Grace’s failure to locate the (unconscious) voice/ force within herself. She had been only as far as “the threshold of the unconscious” (Atwood 1996, 412). Owing to this lack of (self-) communication Grace does not succeed in defining herself outside of ‘the symbolic’. Upon her release from the prison (as a result of general amnesty), her story converges with the promise of pregnancy, indicating her return to ‘the symbolic’. The return is provisional, because Grace’s story refuses to end precisely where Atwood’s narrative ends, offering an open (unspoken) conclusion. The pregnancy re-introduces her to the mother’s body, which as a metonymy of female execution articulates pain that cannot be ignored. Although Grace comes to represent the Imaginary and the Unconscious associated with the mother, she necessarily tries, but eventually fails, to articulate her experience in the symbolic. This confirms Mitchell’s view that what, in fact happens is “a division of the woman into, firstly, a ‘true’ woman who accepts her ‘castration’ and the replacement of her missing penis by a baby, and, secondly, a false or phoney woman who only pretends to. This phoney woman is the new name given to the hysteric” (2000, 187).

Without being aware of the consequences (without becoming a conscious feminist), Grace finally re-evaluates her biblical knowledge, and in fact her world knowledge, as censored and castrated (missing in significant detail). Towards the end of her (narrated) story, she decides to make a new quilt (Atwood 1996, 459), and weave into it whatever remains unspeakable, and whatever otherwise (if she started to speak) might interfere with her newly arranged status of wifehood. In many ways, her weaving alludes to Penelope’s un/weaving as



a female type of speech, her-story as a strategic protest to which Carolyn G. Heilbrun refers in "What was Penelope unweaving" (1990). Grace's quilt-making in itself is a conservative, conforming activity placing her among the obedient daughter of patriarchy, but the pattern (the language) of her quilt is subversive; it steals the patriarchal myth away in order to rewrite it, and to revise its meaning.

The pattern of this quilt is called the Tree of Paradise, and whoever named that pattern said better than she knew, as the Bible does not say Trees. It says there were two different trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, but I believe there was only the one, and that the Fruit of Life and the Fruit of Good and Evil were the same. And if you ate of it you would die, but if you didn't eat of it you would die also; although if you did eat of it, you would be less bone-ignorant by the time you got around to your death. (Atwood 1996, 459)

Like Arachne, posited by Miller as a metaphoric figure of female creativity in "The Arachnologies: the Woman, the Text and the Critic" (1996), the phoney or hysterical Grace 'weaves' thus her own story instead of telling it. Her pregnancy, like her (non)-speech, offers space for the om-phalic mother, the one symbolically inarticulate and prohibited (Kristeva 1986, 14) - even though the space is open-ended, subjective, and therefore vulnerable, and even though, as Butler would argue, it "reinstates the paternal law at the level of the semiotic itself" (Butler 1990, 81).

While Atwood, Maitland, and Carter attempt to re-write history in turning the specific (his)stories of female figures (Grace, Cassandra and the female vampire) into more general case studies underscored by Freudian theory, the last narrative analyzed in this chapter, Tokarczuk's *E.E.* explores similar techniques (she even introduces Freud as one of the characters) in a culturally different but nevertheless analogous feminist context.

TRANSCENDING PUBERTY INTO DEATH: OLGA TOKARCZUK'S *E.E.*

Then for the first time [Freud] saw his mother naked. Her full breasts must have awoken an anxiety in the child. He desired and feared them at the same time. Her naked body was a knot by which the world was tied. (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>73</sup>

... Erna looked somewhere else, at a contour, an edge, a boundary dividing the object from the background, as if she were not interested in the object itself, but in something beyond. (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>74</sup>

Providing a link to the geography of the unconscious at the turn of the twentieth century in Central Europe, Tokarczuk's novel *E.E.* (1999)<sup>75</sup> offers another paradoxical illustration of the powerless/powerful figure of a hysteric and/or visionary. Drawing on the 'uncanny' as something "frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," Tokarczuk's narrative provides an interesting parallel to Freud's personal discoveries and encounters.<sup>76</sup> Among other elements, it introduces the figure of a six-year-old Freud who travels by night in a train with his mother (the fragment cited above). Tokarczuk contextualizes the uncanny as "nothing new," but separated through death, and hence alienated and repressed. The uncanny is no longer the womb relating "to the literal origin of the subject," or "to the subject's first experience of separation" (Creed 1993, 54)<sup>77</sup>, as is the case in *Siostra* or *Alias Grace*. Rather, it transcends the "literal origin" to broach the supernatural, or paranormal, beyond earthly phenomena.

This narrative focuses on the puberty drama as hysterical and uncanny, and as it involves culturally somatized figures of both mother and daughter it inevitably touches upon Irigaray's "paralysis" and "non-differentiation between one woman and another,"

enforced rejection or hatred, or at best 'pretence' [faire comme]. The girl's earliest pleasures will remain wordless; her earliest narcissizations will have no words or sentences to speak their name, even retroactively" (2000, 101).

Tokarczuk's E.E., the ambiguous, teenaged Erna Elzner, belongs to the Freudian prototype of an upper middle-class German family, living in Breslau around the year 1910. The city itself represents a permeable borderland between Polish, German and Jewish cultures<sup>78</sup>. Her mother, Mrs. Elzner, is a housewife of Polish origin who takes care of the home and her numerous children. She lives an unexciting life in a spacious apartment in the heart of the city, with her German husband, Fryderyk Elzner, owner of a small textile factory (Tokarczuk 1999, 12) and two other women, a servant and a cook. Tokarczuk depicts Erna as an insignificant young girl whose body is thin, uninspiring, perhaps even disappointing to her. She is one of the mother's many daughters, placed in the unattractive middle between her younger and elder siblings. A few days after her fifteenth birthday, during a typical family dinner, Erna suddenly sees, or becomes aware of a ghostly apparition and loses consciousness:

Nobody paid attention to the man standing in a visible spot, and Greta went through him with a bowl full of asparagus.

Why did the sight of a man, through whom one could see the pattern of the wallpaper, appear so terrifying to her? Well, she raises her eyes over her plate... and sees her younger brother, Max, and right behind him, there it is. It looks at her with eyes full of many thoughts at once, many words and pictures. (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>79</sup>

After this 'accident,' Erna is left alone in her mother's spacious bedroom to have a rest before seeing a doctor. In the meantime, she concludes "that she became ill due to some disease which enables her to see ghosts," (Tokarczuk 1999, 19), a condition that cannot be recognized or diagnosed. The status of her illness builds an ambiguous tie between neurological predicaments and supernatural phenomena.

When Dr. Löwe came, Mrs. Elzner [Erna's mother] closed herself up with him in the lounge and told him in a clear and confident tone what, or rather whom Erna saw yesterday during the dinner. She also said that most probably Erna had revealed mediumistic skills that were not uncommon among Mrs. Elzner's family members. – 'In that case I have nothing to do. You should rather call for some exorcist,' – said Dr. Löwe and stood up. (1999)<sup>80</sup>

In this context, Mitchell's comments on Freud's Dora, mentioned already in reference to *Siostra*, are relevant once more. Although it "is commonplace to note the patriarchal suppression of Dora's mother to a marginalized position of housewife's neurosis, of making life difficult and of being ill-educated and lacking culture" (Mitchell 2000, 96), neither Mitchell nor Kristeva<sup>81</sup> agree with this (feminist) belief:

When Dora came to Freud... at the turn of the century, we can see that mothers were powerful and important figures behind the strictures of patriarchy, and that sexuality among the bourgeoisie was rampant and profoundly subject to sickness. It was round this conjuncture that Freud the doctor started to shift his ground to become Freud the psychoanalyst. And hysteria was at the centre, indeed was really the cause, of this shift. (Mitchell 2000, 98)

Dr. Löwe, a Jewish doctor and family friend, is a conservative, pre-Freudian figure who prescribes herbal infusions and purges for all types of complaints (1999, 61). However, in a case like this, "the scientific word 'hysteria' was the key," and doctor Dr. Löwe, "the same evening when he was called to Erna, remembered that term and held on to it" (1999)<sup>82</sup>.

In medical science, as in a textile or furniture business, various fashions come and go. Hysteria was an absolute hit, but it was also something particularly shapeless, undefined. He sometimes had the feeling that this word slid off his colleagues' lips when they were trying to cover up their embarrassment. (1999)<sup>83</sup>

Hence, under the influence of the newest fashion, Erna is diagnosed as hysterical but healthy; her "indisposition" is linked to her biologically immature, "transitory" body (1999, 13). During one of his regular visits, Dr. Löwe concludes that "Erna's nervous system is still not fully developed and at this age she can be prone to faints or convulsions. Complementing this with some made-up diabolical fairy-tales could upset her already unstable balance" (1999)<sup>84</sup>.

To Erna, however, the experience offers a chance to be noticed. Her hysteria is "one whose almost manageable symptoms are modelled on the behaviour or condition of close relatives and friends" (Mitchell 2000, 86). As a sibling, Erna naturally exhibits her greed for

love/ food in her un/consciously-enacted deviances. The incident with the ghost takes place in the presence of all the family members (greed for love) at the dining table (greed for food), and provides an interesting parallel to the phobia from which Freud himself suffered, as well as his patient E., as analyzed by Mitchell<sup>85</sup>:

The motives for being ill often begin to be active even in childhood. A little girl in her greed for love does not enjoy having to share the affection of her parents with her brothers and sisters; and she notices that the whole of their affection is lavished on her once more whenever she arouses their anxiety by falling ill. She has now discovered a means of enticing out her parents' love, and will make use of that means as soon as she has the necessary psychical material at her disposal for producing an illness. (2000, 89)

Erna's newly animated otherness (alienation from everyone else in the household) derives also from the fact that all her sisters have either already experienced or are still far away from their first menstrual bleeding. The longing for her mother, "the old and long familiar" womb, to have her entirely to herself before it is too late (before she herself becomes a woman /mother), turns for Erna into a desire for the uncanny, categorized by Creed as related "to the notion of a double: a cyborg; twin; doppelgänger; a multiplied object; a ghost or spirit; an involuntary repetition of an act" (1993, 54). "Whatever it is, let us pretend that nothing happened" (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>86</sup> is Dr. Löwe's suggestion, but Mrs. Elzner does not share his opinion. On the contrary, she insists on what he calls "the easiest method to make a madwoman out of [Erna]" (1999)<sup>87</sup>.

In fact, in a narcissistic trance, the mother recognizes herself in Erna, "the only one among her daughters" (1999, 13) who suddenly reminds her of how "she was herself at her age and even younger – modest, ugly, lonesome and strange to the world, as if she did not belong to it" (1999)<sup>88</sup>. The mother, "imprisoned in the same house with a man, who did not understand her at all, as if they were from different worlds, as if they spoke different languages," (1999)<sup>89</sup> projects Erna's newly discovered talents as her own. Erna,

subconsciously trying to please her, becomes the mother's new chance to enliven her tedious life as a wife. The narrative, which mostly maintains a neutral to slightly entertaining form of expression, becomes here sadly ironical. Erna's parents, coming from different cultural backgrounds, do indeed speak different languages. The mother's Polishness is characterized by Tokarczuk as hysterical, irrational "in itself," and set in opposition to everything that is 'rational' represented by her German husband. The mother's inspiration to cultivate the psychic tradition of her family, to "become significant" (organizing séances, inviting interesting people) is a sign of her subconscious protest against "housewife's neurosis" (Mitchell 2000, 96). Not unintentionally, the mother thus instigates the process of objectification of her daughter, turning her into a multiple object of desire, not only her own desire but that of many others, whom she initiates into Erna's "hysterical" condition, including the doctors, the "specialists," the audience. This narrative pattern clearly echoes Irigaray's claim that "[all] desire is connected to madness. But apparently one desire has chosen to see itself as wisdom, moderation, truth, and has left the other to bear the burden of madness it did not want to attribute to itself, recognize in itself" (Irigaray 2000, 35).

Artur Schatzman, an ambitious student-doctor, "expected a person much more diabolical, a woman rather than a girl. Erna, according to him, did not look in any way unusual, not like a person who talks with ghosts. Perhaps she was slightly anaemic, that's all" (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>90</sup>. For Arthur, Erna is an object of study, and he needs to be certain that he is dealing with a hysteric, even a temporary, biologically "conditioned" one: "Be certain – isn't it most important for a scientist" (1999)<sup>91</sup>?

His excited imagination started to create pictures of laboratories, working spaces full of instruments to measure blood pressure and pulse, into which the hysterical girls are plugged, lecture rooms packed with students, graphs drawn on the board. And the wave of mystery, true, inaccessible mystery that should be crashed like a nut. It would be an

excellent topic for a doctoral thesis opening a whole series of research projects, a research program. (1999)<sup>92</sup>

Walter Frommer, on the other hand, is employed in a department of statistics where he “counts the dead people” (1999, 19). He pursues his secret dream to develop a system of communication with the “astral bodies,” and, in contrast to Artur, truly believes in an after-life. According to Frommer’s theories, the souls of the dead exist as in-between “astral” bodies and dwell in a “repository” dimension of the universe because of their “moods, desires and bonds” with earthly life (1999, 80). This imaginary place calls to mind the semiotic chora, a womb-like place of return that Frommer subconsciously longs for in trying to locate his own mother, whom he only “remembers” having known as a very young child. Hence, Frommer sees in Erna “a wise, old woman and a naïve small girl” (1999, 33), a combination that finally offers a chance to prove his methods. His desire for the “beyond” seduces not only Erna’s mother but even, to some extent, doctors like Artur, into the realm of the supernatural.

Frommer’s diabolical appeal is particularly compelling to Greta, who is the least involved but an alert servant: “When the door closed behind Frommer, Greta had the feeling that she had let some evil force, chill and darkness, she did not know what, into the room of the defenseless girl” (1999, 84). According to Greta, Frommer, an interrogator, doctor, and a devil all in one, “is *examining* her. He wants to know everything: her dreams, her thoughts, her desires...” (1999)<sup>93</sup>. Indeed, once the door is closed and he is left alone with Erna, Frommer starts talking; his monologue, given in an explanatory, clarifying, and enlightening manner, is meant, like Artur’s, to assert his right to “examine”:

This is a gift. You have been chosen as one of the few. But this gift does not mean an easy life, that is why you can make a decision, if it is not too late. If you agree to accept what you have unexpectedly received, both I and your mother will use your skills. Do you know what a séance look like? If you don’t want it, you can still turn your back on

it within yourself, close it. And everything will pass away like a dream. I am sure.  
(1999)<sup>94</sup>

On the contrary, along with Erna's mother, Artur, and others involved in Erna's case, Frommer is far from "being sure." Unlike his sister Teresa, he wasn't "there," he is not the gifted one, but a curious, frustrated voyeur: "Are you listening to me Erna? Do you understand?" Erna nodded, but Frommer did not see an understanding in her eyes. He felt a sudden dismay" (1999)<sup>95</sup>. The obvious lack of communication between Erna and Frommer (as well as the rest of the people involved), leads to the séance, a séance that finally offers everyone an opportunity to act.

Already, before Erna "becomes" a woman, she is "the phoney or hysterical feminine" (Mitchell 2000, 187), not unlike her mother who has long since turned into the type of woman linked by Mitchell with Freud's/ Lacan's concept of "femininity as masquerade":

Joan Riviere, a British analyst analysed by Freud... wrote of 'femininity as a masquerade', indicating a particular type of woman whose femininity was an act, or, I would claim, hysterical. Lacan turned this notion of Riviere into 'femininity is a masquerade' (thereby echoing Freud's mistake of a universal repudiation of femininity instead of a repudiation of the hysterical situation). In this argument one cannot be a 'true' woman, as the woman is defined as being nothing to be – no penis. (2000, 187)

Or, as Irigaray writes, her 'femininity' "is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity. The fact remains that this masquerade requires an *effort* on her part for which she is not compensated" (Irigaray 2000, 130). Associated with her immature, not-yet-fruitful womb, Erna's phoniness is linked in Tokarczuk's narrative with the abysmal figure of another medium, Teresa Frommer. These two female (but, for different reasons, not quite 'feminine') bodies echo each other in the story. Teresa, a visionary marginal character with "an appearance of a very old, wrinkled child," or a "hunchbacked gnome from a fairy-tale" (Tokarczuk 1999, 22), bears the marks



of the witch, and becomes central to the narrative through Erna. Teresa's "soul ... so big, so huge" overwhelms and deforms her female body (1999)<sup>96</sup>, evoking cultural associations of the mind/soul with masculinity and the body with femininity.<sup>97</sup> Teresa's huge soul is incompatible with her body and renders her an abstract creature of 'the imaginary' with no place in the symbolic order. There is no "proper boundary" between her soul (which could be understood as the unconscious) and her physical body:

Only with difficulty had she learned how to read, but she bravely performed all the household duties. She talked in an unclear and chaotic manner, however, when she described her dreams, they seemed much more real than reality.... Whenever [her brother] managed to convince her to tell him one of her dreams, he was surprised to be able to find, in these fragments, connections with real events, some important like political strategies, catastrophes, conflicts, others banal, like the neighbor's illness, the cat's death or Dr. Löwe's visit. Simultaneously everything was different, it had the difficult to define atmosphere of a nightmare." (1999)<sup>98</sup>

Teresa is a malformed and slow-witted daughter of an always travelling, mentally unstable but fascinating mother. She lives with her brother, first in their aunt's wealthy residence in the country, later in a modest apartment in the city. She has her first and only erotic experience with Rainer, an ambiguous half-relative who finds shelter in the aunt's quarters. It is Rainer who discovers Teresa's mediumistic talents and it is

Rainer who told them that their mother was a madwoman. Children thought that to be a madwoman meant something like messing around, being naughty, running in the rain, getting into puddles and answering back rudely to the nanny. Yet, walk after walk, every new meeting with Rainer slowly opened a different perspective. With satisfaction, Rainer was unfolding before them a new kind of a fairy-tale: what madness looks like. (1999)<sup>99</sup>

The mother's madness, consisting of numerous nervous breakdowns and her subsequent suicide, as interpreted and retold by Rainer, has a tremendous impact on the siblings. For both Teresa and Walter Frommer the mother is a familiar stranger, a source of the uncanny. In passing away, she generates in her children a life-long fascination with death and death-related phenomena: "Very long ago, when [Teresa] was a medium during the séances, she

talked with ghosts, but that gift was taken away from her” (1999)<sup>100</sup>. Now, she participates in the séances with Erna as her silent ally, someone who knows “that all things that happen, are connected, perhaps in a chaotic way, but with no exception” (1999)<sup>101</sup>. She comes to represent the shadow of the archaic mother, the om-phalic that refuses to be cut off and thrown out, wasted. She emerges as the Kristevan “another *other* – which is not the *other* person, my neighbor, my brother, but *the other logic in me*, my strangeness, my heterogeneity” (Kristeva 2001, 163). Teresa senses the spirits of the dead “passing through Erna’s body and mind” and “leaving behind scraps of meanings” and “pictures so foreign to Erna’s experience that they were incomprehensible and therefore momentary” (Tokarczuk 1999, 43).

They washed her away and identified with her. Erna was no longer somebody who feels, thinks or perceives, she was something completely devoid of boundaries. She wasn’t even able to die, because she transcended beyond life, beyond death, beyond time. In this fragmentation there was peace, but somewhere deep down there was a seed of consciousness that hurt. ‘It hurts’ Erna said or thought. And that was all. (1999)<sup>102</sup>

Teresa’s and Erna’s perception of the world is similarly borderless, it concentrates on the beyond, and transcends their phoney, un/feminine bodies. In describing these bodies, Tokarczuk explicitly renders them fluid, bottomless receptacles for all the *other* dis/connected elements (voices, pictures, apparitions), which are contrasted throughout the narrative with the dominant and acceptable discourse of the symbolic structure within which the medical and “spiritual” doctors operate. According to these doctors, there is no doubt that in “unusual,” situations, that is those that escape the symbolic structure, “like, for instance, madness,” (Tokarczuk 1999, 94) their patients’ perception has a dual character: “One world is usual, regular, understandable,” the other one “is far away, hard to grasp, anti-intellectual, but its influences are enormous and unpredictable.” This “other” world stands for a “primordial” womb; it is “our cradle and our future.” In a sense, this other world is

actually much more a “reality,” while the world “in which we live every day seems to be a fading decoration, a waiting room” (1999)<sup>103</sup>. The suspension, or the gap, between these two dimensions could be conflated, psychoanalytically, with the gap between the unconscious and the conscious, or the semiotic and symbolic functions. Erna seems to be living in this suspension and her instability derives precisely from it:

When I look at this girl, I have the feeling that she is balancing on the edge between two worlds. You know it better, I suppose, you saw it in your patients... She is first here where everybody else is, she sits, talks, laughs, and then there comes the moment... well, of a backtrack inside and from there it is as if she were entering into somewhere else... (1999)<sup>104</sup>

Erna’s position on the border, where she is neither “dual” nor “unusual,” is (believed to be) temporary, whereas Teresa seems to permanently occupy the in-between position: yet they are both able to synthesize binaries, polarities, and different “scientific” approaches with the passive amusement of an observer. For Teresa and Erna alike, the only two in the narrative who are (apparently) in touch with the “beyond,” the experience of the chora is all-encompassing, unifying, as if closing the gap between the living and the dead. Erna and Teresa do not long for but involuntarily ‘incorporate’ the experience/place in which the voices/bodies speak. Precisely as such incarnations, they can be identified with the archaic female of the semiotic chora, the witch figure that will be employed, indeed spectacularly “utilized,” during the séance, in contradistinction to phallic figures, including Erna’s mother, who utilize (ab/use) their ghost-like presence.

The séance in *E.E.*, like Cixous’s “sabbat,” is a “reverse spectacle” (1986, 10), with Erna’s theatrical body as a central object of desire for the “beyond”. The guests gather round her and “through” her body take part in the trance, in “the celebration, in which everyone participates, in which no one is voyeur” (1986, 10). This type of “audience, ready

to satisfy its fantastic desire" (1986, 10), calls to mind the spectacular scene of hysteria in Atwood's depiction of Grace Marks's hypnotism, and Cixous's description of a comparable scene: "It is, above all... the circle of doctors with their fascinated eyes, who surround the hysteric, their bodies tensed to see the tensed body of the possessed woman" (1986, 10). However, in Tokarczuk's text, the mother also takes part in the trance, and her presence is crucial to Erna. The mother is the knot which ties her down rather than a knot by which the world was tied, as in Tokarczuk's reference to Freud's encounter with his mother's naked body (1999, 130). The motherly knot is also the one which Erna involuntarily holds on to in her hysterical, hypothetical "thought delivery" (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>105</sup>. The mother is, in fact, the very secret of the trance, the actual ghost and the reason for her daughter's "madness". "Trickery? No, even if the other world did not exist and there were no ghosts, should we call the hysterical attack, epilepsy, madness a trickery" (1999)<sup>106</sup>? Artur, after having been a witness to "what happens during these séances," is no longer convinced that it "has nothing to do with ghosts" (1999, 49). The narrator's hypothesis seems to be equally undecided, dialogical. Although depicting Erna as seduced by her mother's (and perhaps her own) narcissism, it also involves the memory and experiences of the others, "suggestion and auto-suggestion are at work, and perhaps even a kind of hypnosis" (1999, 49). Tokarczuk's narrative welcomes all thinkable explanations of the case, including fraud, as long as the secret is kept.

[N]either the clandestine sabbat nor the children's games are public. They are not seen. Children play in public but secretly; their games are not made to be seen. The spectacle is for later; it is the scene of punishment, of purification, of exorcism. When the institutional spectators of the Church are in place, when the parents are ready to enforce the punishment - that is the spectacle. For the moment, there is play: what sorceresses and hysterics achieve is the updating and actualization of old childhood scenes. The scene will soon take shape. It is a scene of seduction. (Cixous 1986, 12)

Interweaving the adults' dances (séances, secret gatherings) with the children's secrets, Tokarczuk finally brings Erna's younger twin sisters into the scene. They act, or imagine they act, as enchantresses, "little witches" as they call themselves. Through their equally seductive but also threatening presence (like their mother's), Tokarczuk once more draws our attention to Erna's objectification: "If you tell on us, you will die. We'll kill you with the mirror" (1999, 149). In a "secret" performance that is set up to imitate the adults' séance, the twins 'deconstruct' its phallic structure. Their subversive voice undermines what Cixous has referred to as a "terrifying, immense, and paternal character... as indefinite as the huge shadow of a he-goat haunting the sabbat nights" (Cixous 1986, 12). Erna's body and her talents are "returned" to her in the children's play, that is simultaneously meant as a serious therapeutic act and an 'unconscious' feminist strategy (in the girlish acting 'as if adults') to remove Erna from the 'phallogocentric' vacuum, caused by the mother's and Frommer's desires. Conscious, or not, it is a strategy to give voice to Erna, who should finally speak for herself:

They were circling around her on tiptoe lightly and noiselessly. They were blowing some half-words, half-breaths into her, and then they put on her sleeping body some tiny intricate knotted strings. They raised her joined hands over her head and jumped back, chased away when Erna turned while dreaming... - Sister, you have an enormous magic power and you refuse to do magic. Spells are running away from you and don't listen to you. We'll take some of them away from you to show them to people. We'll liberate some of your dreams - said Christine. - But not to play with it - added Katherine quickly - but to help you and defend you from the demons, the biggest of which is Frommer. (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>107</sup>

It is in the twins' aggressive presence, as they act here against the on-going denigration of their mother as well as the forthcoming denigration of all their elder sisters, that Erna performs her 'speech', in the form of a spectacular hysterical attack.

Stop it! Erna stamped her foot, her face became severe. And then the objects started to fall down on the floor: the small flower vases, porcelain figures, small, framed pictures,

books, empty glasses with the remnants of cocoa. Glass broke with a smash; as if pushed by some invisible malicious finger... (1999)<sup>108</sup>

This scene, in contrast to the séance that belongs to the adults' sphere, takes place in the children's room and returns Erna to her pre-mature condition: "Doctors, for quite a long time now, have noticed such phenomena in maturing girls. It can be a kind of as yet unexplored energy that helps them to mature, to become a woman" (1999)<sup>109</sup>. Indeed, Erna has her first menstruation shortly thereafter, and enters the sphere of womanhood, the sphere of her elder sisters who initiate her into the "feminine" ritual of blood/ filth disposal:

She placed a pad between her legs, where the blood flowed. She hooked the tiny loop in front on a button, her sister Marie helped her with the back. She felt as if in a harness, the whole complicated cotton device was tight on her hips and in between her legs.  
– So, you are a real woman. – Our little Erna has become a woman.  
... Erna was embarrassed, she wanted to leave the room. She approached the door and grasped the handle. – Wait, from now on you have to wash your filth for yourself – called Marie and threw the pants at her. (Tokarczuk 1999)<sup>110</sup>

The final scene in Tokarczuk's text describes Erna's moment of most intense pleasure, one that climaxes in death, or a death-like condition. Standing in the wood by herself, Erna stopped suddenly, "lifted her shirt and touched the device restraining her body. She undid the loops" (1999, 187), "froze," and for the first time

started to examine this hot, pulsating place with her hand. She did not know that she could touch herself like that. Her body shivered, became full just by the one twist of her finger. It waited. She opened her arms and started to pick up the leaves hanging over her. She pressed them and started to put them in between her legs, like a compress, instead of the drapes, loops and pads. She was overwhelmed by the bitter, suffocating smell of the living plants... She placed the leaves on her naked belly, breasts and arms, she scattered them over her face, until she was finally out of breath. (1999)<sup>111</sup>

Her (uncanny) blood intermingles with orgasmic pleasure, the newly discovered desire of the woman's body. The blood is "nothing new," but in combination with the place it issues from, it 'becomes' strange. It separates from her through a death-like experience, and, in a way, transcends the "literal origin" of her womb. The question as to whether she

momentarily loses her breath, or whether her ecstasy causes her death, remains open.

However, if her puberty drama, as discussed, is a preparation for phoney 'femininity', a masquerade of womanhood, then perhaps it is not meant to be reached (or real-ized) in 'the symbolic', but in the return to the very first symbolic act, the act of 'real incision'.

#### RECAPITULATION: THE WITCH AS THE MOTHER NOWHERE TO BE FOUND

Shifting our critical interest from the 'witch' as a source of feminist powers of sisterhood (the powers of the *herstorical fantasmatic*) to the properties of the 'witch' as archaic mother, the narratives discussed in this chapter have been seen to focus on identification with the loss of the mother rather than the loss of the phallus. They deviate from the restorative and liberating function attributed by some to the archaic mother. Rather than a locus of semiotic pleasures, the archaic chora appears as a hole that leads nowhere, an empty barren space (as deployed by Carter, Saramonowicz, and Tokarczuk), or as a ghostly (spectral) apparition of repressed, uncanny desires (as in Atwood's and Maitland's texts). All the authors discussed here recognize the problematic aspects of associating the 'witch-woman' with an imaginary place where female desire will inevitably be perceived as a hysterical inconsistency. For various reasons, the relationship with the mother, as described in these narratives, "is a mad desire", a 'dark continent' which "remains in the shadows of our culture; it is its night and its hell" (Irigaray 2000, 35). Although coming from different cultural contexts, these narratives clearly converge in the "the recognition of the debt to the mother," that, as Irigaray advocated, would free the mother "to become a sexual and desiring woman," and "the daughter from the icy grip of the merged and undifferentiated relationship" (Whitford 2000, 77).

Marking the possibility of the mother's cultural re-birth and re-evaluation, the 'archaic witch' clearly manifests a desire to connect the semiotic chora with 'the symbolic'. Designated as the om-phalic (in distinction to the phallic) mother, she is still so deeply entangled in the Western metaphor of the terrible, abject, or otherwise non-existent figure that she cannot provide a therapeutic but only a traumatic passage to 'the symbolic'. In Carter's stories, the 'witch' comes to represent 'the imaginary' and the unconscious associated with the evil mother, or stepmother, a monstrous creature that turns out to be nothing but another phallocentric entrapment in which women think, speak and write as hysterics. *Alias Grace* continues to evolve around the dilemma between mother and daughter, as a gap between woman and woman in a historical (nineteenth-century) context of female displacement, while Saramonowicz's *Siostra* describes a late-twentieth-century phallic rape performed by the mother on her daughter's body, and the daughter's subsequent trauma of 'real incision' ending up in her death. As patients to be cured, Grace, Marysia, and E.E. are positioned on the border between the comforting dream of the mother and the horror of the other 'visiting' body that comes instead of her. This sends them back to the position of being caught in the split between the castrated/castrating or phallic woman, a position in which women speak and write as hysterics. Although not without liberating potential, the om-phalic 'witch'-mother is above all a woman dominated by the presence of the phallus (as Grace Marks is dominated by the presence of doctors and judges), and cut off from her own pleasures and sovereignty. So is Erna's mother, who does not hesitate to turn her own daughter into an object of physiological and psychological (self)-explorations. Trapped within the constructions of phallocentric discourse (just as Carter's and Maitland's heroines are), the 'witch'-mother functions as a rapist rather than a therapist. Because of the split, her cultural identity is suspended in the gap between the unconscious and the



conscious, or the semiotic and symbolic functions. It is from that culturally inarticulate gap that the 'witch' has to resolve her position, neither as the radical *fantasmatic* nor the archaic mother, but as a dialogical in-between figure negotiating her transgressions of phallogocentric boundaries. The next chapter will continue to explore narrative attempts to move beyond the limiting experience of disassociation from the 'symbolic', while insisting on the need for 'the illusion' of identity, which in the end, owing to its paradoxical status, contests and possibly bridges the gap between the semiotic and symbolic types of articulation.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Ann Rosalind Jones in "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l'Écriture Féminine*" (1981), the ground shared by these critics "is an analysis of Western culture as fundamentally oppressive, as phallogocentric: 'I am the unified, self-controlled center of the universe ... [while the] rest of the world, which I define as the Other, has meaning only in relation to me, as man/father, possessor of phallus'. This claim to centrality has been supported not only by religion and philosophy, but also by language" (1997, 371). Placed in the context of textual psychoanalysis, the feminist theories discussed here will be referred to as (re)conceptualizations of "phallogocentric" models, such as Freudian hysteria understood as an exclusively female condition, or the Lacanian illusionary degendering of the phallus.

<sup>2</sup> Kristeva borrows the concept of the *chora* from Plato, who describes it as "an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible (Plato, *Timaeus*)... While the *chora*'s articulation is uncertain, undetermined, while it lacks thesis and position, unity or identity, it is the aim of Kristeva's practice to remove what Plato saw as 'mysterious' and 'incomprehensible' in what he called 'mother and receptacle' of all things" (Roudiez, 1982, 6).

<sup>3</sup> Creed continues that "the *monstrous feminine* constitutes an important and complex stereotype which can be broken down into a number of different figures of female horror: woman as archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, possessed monster, femme castratrice, witch, castrating mother. The representation of the *monstrous feminine* in patriarchal signifying practices has a number of consequences for psychoanalytically based theories of sexual difference. On the one hand, those images which define woman as monstrous in relation to her reproductive functions work to reinforce the phallogocentric notion that female sexuality is abject. On the other hand, the notion of the monstrous feminine challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity. Furthermore, the phantasy of the castrating mother undermines Freud's theories that woman terrifies because she is castrated and that it is the father who alone represents the agent of castration within the family" (1993, 151).

<sup>4</sup> In *The Knotted Subject*, Bronfen posits "the navel as critical category for cultural analysis, namely, the enmeshment between connection, incision, bondage, and negation, that is, the bond constructed over naught. To speak of the knotted subject emphasizes not that the subject is split and multiple but how this multiplicity offers a new means of integration" (1998, 9).

<sup>5</sup> According to Sprengnether, "'spectre' is related to 'spectacle,' 'speculation,' and 'suspicion,' while its immediate source is the Latin *spectrum*, meaning, simply, an appearance" (1990, 5).

<sup>6</sup> As Moi writes, "Cixous often finds herself in great trouble when she tries to distinguish her concept of a feminine writing from the idea of a female writing. After a heroic struggle against the dangers of biologism, it is probably fair to say that Cixous's theories of an *écriture féminine* in the end fall back into a form of biological essentialism" (1986, 125). Wittig also, in *The Straight Mind* (1992), argues against Cixous's ambiguous and essentialist view of giving birth to a text, which is 'delivered' from the body (Cixous's *Souffles*). Wittig rejects the ontological difference between the sexes as heterosexual and capitalist; for her the difference is not sexual but political.

<sup>7</sup> As Irigaray explains, "the empty gestures of an enforced everydayness, a single or plural image, a mechanism or a dream, a shade or even a ghost, [the mother] is never unified in her insistence or existence, for want of the words to envelop her, cover her, assist her in passing from interior to exterior, situate her in an identity, like a shelter that would accompany her, clothe her in herself and protect her without need to cling or give her allegiance to the world of the other" (2000, 107).

<sup>8</sup> As Gallop comments, a "desire must insistently repeat itself until it will be recognized. If satisfaction, the reduction of tension, were the true goal of a desire, it might find a more efficient path than repeated insistence, just as, if the goal of the death instinct were simply the reduction of all tension, it could surely find a quick path to death. Thus repetition... is the effect not so much of the frustration of a desire but of the lack of recognition of a desire" (1982, 104).

<sup>9</sup> And further, "Lacan's preference for metaphor and verticality may be an 'illusion,' but it is one to which we all fall victim... The most extreme and explicit form of metaphor's privilege in Lacan's text inhabits its association with liberation, which contrasts with metonymy's link to servitude" (Gallop 1982, 128).

<sup>10</sup> Wittig refers to the "entire world" as "a great register where the most diverse languages come to have themselves recorded, such as the language of the Unconscious, the language of fashion, the language ... where human beings are literally the signs which are used to communicate. ... The ensemble of these discourses produces a confusing static for the oppressed, which makes them lose sight of the material cause of their oppression and plunges them into a kind of a-historic vacuum" (1992, 22).

<sup>11</sup> Wittig's postulates of invention in writing do not entirely converge with Cixous's and Irigaray's 'feminine writing'. As Butler argues, "Wittig argues that positions like Irigaray's reconsolidate the binary between masculine and feminine and recirculate a mythic notion of the feminine" (1990, 26).

<sup>12</sup> In *Expletives Deleted*, Carter writes: "my life has been most significantly shaped by my gender. ... I spent a good many years being told what I ought to think, and how I ought to behave, and how I ought to write, even, because I was a woman and men thought they had the right to tell me how to feel, but then I stopped listening to them and tried to figure it out for myself but they didn't stop talking, oh, dear no. So I started answering back" (1992, 4).

<sup>13</sup> Carter's particular position within feminist debates has been analyzed by Jordan in "The Dangers of Angela Carter" (1992). See also Easton's Introduction to *Angela Carter: Contemporary Critical Essays* (2000, 7).

<sup>14</sup> Born in 1940 in Eastbourne (England), Carter was brought up in Yorkshire and London, failed to qualify for higher education, and followed her father into local journalism. Marrying in 1960, she moved to Bristol, where she relieved her boredom as a housewife by taking a degree in English. Her first novel *Shadow Dance* (1965), written while she was still an undergraduate, is a detective story introducing her characteristic interrogation of female sexuality, followed by *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). In *Several Perceptions* (1968), which won the Somerset Maugham Prize, Carter further pursues themes of sexual fantasy, as well as revealing her fascination with fairy tales and the Freudian unconscious. Following her divorce in 1972, she lived in Japan for two years, working as a bar hostess and writing essays for *New Society* before moving to the USA and Australia, where she taught creative writing. Her experiences with different cultures are described in the collection *Nothing Sacred* (1982). In 1979 she published *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, where she questioned culturally accepted views of sexuality, particularly, sado- and masochistic interrelations, drawing on Sade's protagonists-types, Justine and Juliette. In *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), Carter's protagonist, Evelyn, undergoes deranging adventures in a futuristic New York and is captured in the desert by a cold-blooded female scientist who calls herself Mother and has assembled in her person various attributes of the goddess. In the acclaimed *Nights at the Circus*, published in 1984, which is also the year in which Carter gave birth to her son, she continues to express her interest in sexual politics and changing gender roles. In 1979 her collection of short stories, *The Bloody Chamber*, which retell classic fairy tales, won the Cheltenham Festival of Literature Award. Carter also wrote a screenplay for the film *The Company of Wolves* (1984), a bloodthirsty Freudian retelling of the 'Little Red Riding Hood' story. Another collection of masterfully written short stories, *Black Venus* (1985), brought her the label of a 'high priestess of post-graduate porno'. Carter's poetry was published in the *Listener* and *London Magazine*, and her journalist texts, *Nothing Sacred* (1982) and *Expletives Deleted* (1992), are now being reissued. Carter has served as an Arts Council fellow at Sheffield University, England, and as visiting professor of creative writing at Brown University. Her last novel, *Wise Children*, was published in 1991, just before she died of cancer. Since her death she has become the most popular modern

British author, occupying a central position within debates about feminist pluralism and postmodernism (Macmillan 1999).

<sup>15</sup> "The Lady of the House of Love" was first published in *The Iowa Review* (Summer/Autumn 1975). Here quoted in *Burning Your Boats. Collected Short Stories* (1996).

<sup>16</sup> "The Scarlet House" was originally published in *A Book of Contemporary Nightmares* (Michael Joseph, 1977). Here quoted in *Burning Your Boats. Collected Short Stories* (1996).

<sup>17</sup> In *Apocalyptic Bodies* (1999), Pippin analyses the fifteenth-century depiction (in the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves*) of the mouth of the abyss, which can signify both female pleasures (castration desires) and their annihilation.

<sup>18</sup> The concept of chaos has been analyzed by Katherine Hayles in *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (1990). In a similar way to Pippin, Hayles makes an interesting connection between chaos theory in science and postmodernism/ deconstruction in literature, and argues that otherness "is also always a threat, arousing the desire to control it, or even more extremely to subsume it within the known boundaries of the self, thus annihilating the very foreignness that makes it dangerously attractive. ... The desire to control chaos is evident in the search for ways to rationalize it" (1990, 173).

<sup>19</sup> According to Creed, the 'bodies without souls' (the vampires), the 'living corpses' (the zombies), the corpse-eaters (the ghouls), the robots and the androids are "creatures, whose bodies signify a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal and the witch (one of her many crimes was that she used corpses for her rites of magic) also belong to this category" (Creed 1993, 10).

<sup>20</sup> I am drawing on Anita Levy's psychoanalytic analysis of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in *Reproductive Urges. Popular Novel-Reading, Sexuality and the English Nation* (1999).

<sup>21</sup> I refer to Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1990) in which he elaborates on the "insistence of the rule" in that "[p]ower is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden" (1990, 83).

<sup>22</sup> These roles are joined together by the metaphor of the woman's womb as "a site of terror because it bleeds; it is the blood which flows from the inside to the outside of woman's body that is viewed as abject. The vampire is a creature of evil because she/he lives on blood drawn from a wound that marks the surface of the skin. Like all abject figures, the vampire is both terrifying and seductive" (Creed 1993, 66).

<sup>23</sup> As Felman observes, it was Freud who "for the first time freed thought from a certain conception of the present and of presence-to-onself." His "notions of deferred action, of the unconscious, of the death instinct, and of the repetition compulsion radically undermine the classical logic of identity." However, Felman continues, Freud "remains ... himself a prisoner of philosophy when he determines the nature of sexual difference in function of the a priori of sameness, that is, of the male phallus. Female sexuality is thus described as an absence (of the masculine presence), as lack, incompleteness, deficiency, envy with respect to the only sexuality in which value resides" (1997, 9).

<sup>24</sup> According to Lévi-Straus in *Structural Anthropology* (1958), the mythical value will be "preserved even through the worst translation... a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the story which it tells" (1958, 53).

<sup>25</sup> As Baym argues, "[t]oday's feminist literary theory makes asking an act of empirical anti-theory, and hence a heresy. It is finally more concerned to be theoretical than to be feminist. It speaks from the position of the *castrata*" (1997, 280).

<sup>26</sup> With reference to this quotation, Baym argues further that although "Lacan's defenders... have claimed that he was attempting, here and elsewhere in his attacks on the French feminists, to counter their return to an overt biologism and a worship of the Eternal Feminine... [his] linguistic essentialism is no improvement on the biological" (1997, 287).

<sup>27</sup> In *The Sadeian woman*, Carter observes: "In the stylization of graffiti, the prick is always presented erect, in an alert attitude of enquiry or curiosity or affirmation; it points upwards, it asserts. The hole is open, an inert space, like a mouth waiting to be filled. From this elementary iconography may be derived the whole metaphysic of sexual differences – man aspires; woman has no other function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning" (2000, 4).

<sup>28</sup> As Butler notes, "Foucault's analysis of the culturally productive possibilities of the prohibitive law clearly takes its bearing within the existing theory on sublimation articulated by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* and reinterpreted by Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*. Both Freud and Marcuse identify the productive effects of sublimation, arguing that cultural artifacts and institutions are the effects of sublimated Eros" (1990, 73).

<sup>29</sup> I will provide my own translation of the selected quotations, and preserve the original choice of font (regular, bold, and italics). **"Wiesz, miałem znowu sen o lalce w czerwonych butach. Leżała na śmietniku. Jej obcięta głowa powtarzała: 'ma-ma, ma-ma, ma-ma'. Jak czkawka. 'Ma-ma, ma-ma, ma-ma'. Nagi tułów ginał w stosie zeschłych obierek i starych puszek. Kiedyś kupiłem taką lalkę mojej siostrze.// -Kiedy to było? // -Na jej szóste urodziny. Wybrałem największą i najbardziej kolorową ... w czerwonych butach... Potem okazało się, że nie można ich zdjąć. Były zaszyte. Myślałem, że Maryśka nigdy nie przestanie płakać...// -Z powodu butów? // -Chyba tak. Zresztą nigdy nie wiadomo, dlaczego one płaczą. Płaczą, jak jest dobrze i jak jest źle. Jak je boli i jak nie boli. Nie można się w tym połapać. Mama zawsze mówiła: 'Nie zwracaj na nią uwagi. Ona nie ma żadnego znaczenia'"** (Saramonowicz 1996, 145).

<sup>30</sup> Born in 1964, Saramonowicz belongs to the most promising writers of the last decade in Poland, placed among so-called third wave-feminist or feminism-informed authors, such as Izabela Filipiak, Natasza Goerke, Manuela Gretkowska and Olga Tokarczuk (Ewa Kraskowska, "O tak zwanej 'kobiecości' jako konwencji literackiej" ("Of So-called 'Femaleness' as Literary Convention"), *Krytyka Feministyczna*). She studied Polish literature and history at the University in Warsaw, where she lives and works as a journalist for the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the Polish edition of the magazine *Elle*. Her first novel, *Siostra* (Sister) was an immediate success as a 'psychological thriller', however, it should also be considered as a 'feminist' work offering an exceptional position on the motherhood issue in the light of the effects of postcommunist debates around the legal status of abortion in the nineties in Poland. *Sister* has been translated into Dutch, Lithuanian, and German (an English translation of the novel is not available yet). In 1999 she published her second novel, *Lustra* (The Mirrors), an account of a harmful crone-figure obsessed with aging, loneliness, and alienation, which eventually drive her to commit a crime.

<sup>31</sup> **"Siostro. Zapomnij o tych myślach. Pozwól, abym się wszystkim zajął. // Choć do nas! // Choć do nas! // Bawimy się.// Ciemno jest wszędzie // Ciemno jest wszędzie // Już..."** (Saramonowicz 1996, 15).

<sup>32</sup> Illness, according to Mitchell, "was" and still "is a standard means of getting more attention when one is jealous of one's siblings" (2000, 102).

<sup>33</sup> **"Czarownica czeka, wzywa nas z daleka..."** (Saramonowicz 1996, 54)

<sup>34</sup> **"Jest coraz ciśnieć. Puchną drgające czernią ściany. Obłe, ruchliwe kształty wciąż kłębią się i piszczą. Jestem Jego. Moje ciało jest Jego. Nie ma już soli ani wilgoci, ani lodowatej jaskini. Jest piekło. W nim chroboczą i szepczą. Skrob, skrob, skrob... Ale on dobrze się czuje w tym upale. Słyszę jak śmieje się ze mnie. Ściany mają oczy. Tysiące oczu gapia się, śledzą mnie i ciebie. Maleństwo, on wie, że tu jesteś. Wszystko wie. Stąd już nie ma wyjścia"** (Saramonowicz 1996, 43-44). In translation, the pronoun "his" can refer to the cockroach brother or cockroach mother, or even perhaps to the foetus in Maria's womb as a symbolical extension of the monstrous semen.

<sup>35</sup> **"Twoja matka zaczarowała cię. Czarownica. I wszystkie zaklęcia powierzyła nam. Twoje słabości, lęki, sekrety. To ona cię wydała"** (Saramonowicz 1996, 151).

<sup>36</sup> **"Leżę w wodzie. Głęboko. Coraz głębiej. Maleństwo. Maleństwo! Tylko do ciebie mogę mówić. Posłuchaj. Posłuchaj mnie. Musisz umrzeć. Nie bój się. To nie boli. To życie boli"** (Saramonowicz 1996, 113).

<sup>37</sup> **"Co mnie tu trzyma? Napęczyła macica? Istnienie, którego powinno nie być? ... To dopiero co ukształtowane ciało wypełnione jest już po brzegi moim szaleństwem. I nie można już tego zatrzymać"** (Saramonowicz 1996, 123).

<sup>38</sup> In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir writes: "The great danger which threatens the infant in our culture lies in the fact that the mother to whom it is confined in all its helplessness is almost always a discontented woman: sexually she is frigid or unsatisfied; socially she feels inferior to man; she has no independent grasp on the world or on the future. She will seek to compensate for all these frustrations through her child. When it is realized how difficult woman's present situation makes her full-realization, how many desires, rebellious feelings, just claims she nurses in secret, one is frightened at the thought that defenceless infants are abandoned to her care" (1993, 540).

<sup>39</sup> *"Nawet twoja śmierć nie zmniejsza mojej nienawiści. Nigdy ci nie wybaczę. Jesteś tak samo odpowiedzialna za moje prześladowanie"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 159).

<sup>40</sup> *"Choć do mnie. Choć do mnie. Woła. Ciemno. Przychodzi tu i śpiewa mi kołysanki. Czarownica. Nie otwieram oczu. Myśli, że zasypiam. Myśli, że nie widzę jej wielkiego psa. Mówi, że Karaluchy żyją tylko w kuchni. I wtedy Baba Jaga złapała dzieci i wepchnęła je do pieca. A tam było tak strasznie gorąco, tak gorąco, tak gorąco i one krzyczały, krzyczały z całych sił i ... Przytula mnie, naciąga koldrę ... I Baba Jaga pożarła najpierw Jasia, a potem Małgosię... Muszę natychmiast otworzyć oczy i spojrzeć w górę. Jest. Przygotowany do skoku. Rozkołysany"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 82).

<sup>41</sup> Since there are no significant evil constructions of the mother in the history of Polish Christianity, the role of the terrible mother remains somehow unfilled, vacant. Should the terrible mother be understood as a fantasy, a reminiscence of the archaic, promiscuous, and unencumbered female body, she will be found in the images of step-mothers from the world of folklore and fairy-tales.

<sup>42</sup> I am referring to the Polish translation of the Brothers Grimm's "Hänsel und Gretel" in *Baśnie Braci Grimm* (1989, 87-95).

<sup>43</sup> *"Lęk stał się moja skórą. Ale lęk nie zabija. Tylko unieruchamia"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 137).

<sup>44</sup> *"Nieświadomość. Jest lepsza od świadomości. Niepamięć jest lepsza. Niewiedza jest lepsza. Głupota jest lepsza. Nieistnienie jest lepsze"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 13).

<sup>45</sup> Contrary to Freud's hypothesis of the "death drive as innate and in perpetual struggle with an equally innate life drive linked to a sexual drive", Mitchell "combines the sexual drive with the death drive as well as with the life drive, as maybe innate, but all activated by the initiating trauma of the conditions of life" (Mitchell 2000, 139).

<sup>46</sup> *"Zamurowali moje usta. Musieli to zrobić, bym nic nie mogła powiedzieć. Oni chcą żebym milczała. Wszyscy. Chyba w grobie. Śmierć jest miękka, ciepła i jasna"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 90-91).

<sup>47</sup> *"Czarownica. Nic nie mogłam powiedzieć. Ryby nie mówią. A jeśli mówią, to jestem kamieniem, stołem, nożem... Lepiej nic nie mówić, nie poruszać się. To prawie tak, jak nie być. Może to wystarczy. Chociaż na krótką chwilę, potem będę już coraz głębiej. A tam nie ma to już znaczenia. Dlatego, Maleństwo, musisz być cicho. Ani słowa. Nawet krew teraz milczy"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 23).

<sup>48</sup> "letarg histeryczny - szczególnie silna reakcja nerwicowa na ciężę" (Saramonowicz 1996, 9).

<sup>49</sup> "Maria jak każda kobieta, miewa po prostu dziwne nastroje i chandry. Chandra to jeszcze nie choroba" (Saramonowicz 1996, 17).

<sup>50</sup> "to była przyczyna, to było źródło zła - matka, totalna kobiecość, zdradzająca, podstępna, nieczuła. Matka. To ją zastąpiły karaluchy. Z niej zdjęły ciężar dziecinnej nienawiści" (Saramonowicz 1996, 77).

<sup>51</sup> *"Twój mąż, Siostró, jest już blisko. Bardzo blisko. Słyszysz twój głos. Ale niczego nie widzi. Nie widzi ciebie, Siostró. Krąży, krąży. Oby skusiła go głębia. Oby runął w otchłań. Lęk wtedy odda nam go w posiadanie. Z lęku zrodzi się posłuszeństwo... Oby pochylił się nad krawędzią. Zawołaj go, Siostró"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 133).

<sup>52</sup> *"Walczyłem z tym, ale coś pchało mnie pod drzwi jej pokoju. Skradałem się powoli i cicho, krok po kroku... Widziałem swój ruchliwy cień i wiedziałem, że ona też go widzi. Myślę, że w ogóle nie spała. Leżała tam z otwartymi oczami, noc w noc, i czekała... // -Bileś ją? // -Nie, nigdy jej nie uderzyłem. Nie musiałem. -Były przecież karaluchy.... Nigdy nie widziałem, żeby ktoś tak się ich bał. Przy karaluchu gotowa była zrobić wszystko. Wszystko. Nie musiałem jej nawet wiązać. Byleby tylko jej nie dotknął. Ale one były takie niesforne. Rozłaziły się, wlażyły wszędzie, jak to karaluchy. Mama wynosiła je potem do kuchni. // -Po co? // -Rozmawiała z nimi"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 151).

<sup>53</sup> *"Leży koło mnie. Nade mną. We mnie. Najczęściej na szafie. Całkiem nieruchomo. Ale nie jest martwy. Wiem, że nie jest martwy. Uduje tylko. Wszystko potrafi. Widzę pęczniejący chitynowy pancerz. Coraz większy i większy. Większy ode mnie. I jego szaleńczo rozpędzone nogi. Gotowe do skoku. Nie wolno mi się ruszyć. Nie wolno mi drgnąć. Jest bezlitosny"* (Saramonowicz 1996, 48).

<sup>54</sup> *"Wiesz ile lat czekałem na taką chwilę? Na chwilę twojej bezbronności? Ile prób, rozczarowań, ilu forteli musiałem użyć, by wreszcie zdobyć nad tobą władzę? Byś znowu stała się ode mnie zależna. NIERUCHOMA. A co mnie spotkało z twojej strony? Tylko zaciętość, opór, ucieczki i nienawiść. A przecież twoja matka była taka uległa..."* (Saramonowicz 1996, 23).

<sup>55</sup> In the Introduction to *Desire in language*, Roudiez defines the “unary subject” (sujet unaire) as being “closely related to traditional concepts of consciousness, where the self is seen as a homogeneous, consistent whole. It is the subject implicitly posited by science, society, and most political theory and practice. Marx still accepted that notion of the subject, which he inherited from Feuerbach. The phrase, however, was introduced by Kristeva in the wake of Freud’s theory of the unconscious and Lacan’s elaboration of the same” (1980 19).

<sup>56</sup> Born in 1950, Maitland would not necessarily identify herself as a radical feminist, but a ‘novelist, fabulist, feminist’. She lives in Northamptonshire (East Midlands), where “she is enjoying herself”, as she writes in *Island Voices*, “A LOT” (a website designed and built by Bernard Cohen and hosted by Trace Online Writing Community, supported by East Midlands Arts and coordinated by Tony Graves of Loughborough University). Her fiction offers complex visions of female characters and their spiritual relationships, such as those of daughters, mothers, and grandmothers as in her collection of short stories, *Telling Tales* (1983), or the healer-witch in “Angel Maker” in *A Book of Spells* (1987). The latter is a re-writing of *Hansel and Gretel*, and could be brought into association with Saramonowicz’s version of the tale in *Sister*, since Gretel in Maitland’s story speaks to the witch as a part of her own split personality, asking her for an abortion. In a deconstructive mode similar to Carter’s, Maitland passionately re-writes fairy-tales, myths and legends: “Cassandra,” the short story to be discussed, which appears in the collection *Women Fly When Men Aren’t Watching* (1988) draws for example on the Greek myth of the sibyl. Maitland’s *Daughter of Jerusalem* (1978) which won the Somerset Maugham Award, and her non-fiction works, *Walking on the Water: Women Talk about Spirituality* (1983), and *A Big-Enough God: Artful Theology* (1995) explore various forms of female spirituality across feminism, magic (witchcraft), and the arts, which seem to concur with Irigaray’s postulates of repairing relationships between mothers and daughters. Her more recent novels are *Home Truths* (1993), *Brittle Joys* (1999), and *Garden of Illusion: Places of Wit and Enchantment* (2000).

<sup>57</sup> This conflict, as referred to by Bronfen, “crystallized in the myth of Apollo’s slaying of the snake Python, who was both Gaia’s child and guardian of the omphalos.” After Gaia’s defeat, and the displacement of her prophetic powers through Apollo’s sacrificial murder, “the general apparatus of her cult, the mephitic cleft in the earth and the omphalos as site of oracle, were maintained. The fetish stone and maternal emblem, however, received a new encoding and were transformed into the sign of the earth’s center on which Apollo’s monistic faith in a paternal God could be based” (1998 18).

<sup>58</sup> According to Geoffrey Miles, this legend, most famously told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (book 14), relates that Apollo “granted the Trojan princess Cassandra powers of prophesy but, when she refused to submit to him, added the rider that no one would ever believe her” (Miles 1999, 39).

<sup>59</sup> The ‘unary subject’, as Roudiez explains, “is thus not an outdated notion, but it is seen as a momentary stasis or damming up of intellectual drives and the transversal process; the concept is opposed to those of ‘split subject’ and ‘subject in process’” (1980 19).

<sup>60</sup> Apollo’s amatory adventures with human females - and males as well - are even more destructive than those of his father, Zeus (Alcmene, Leda, Io). Besides Cassandra, Apollo offers the gift of prophecy to Sibil, but faced with the continuous refusal of his advances, he punishes Sibil by making her immortal without granting her eternal youth. Daphne, who may have been immortal herself, actually escapes Apollo’s lust by being metamorphosed into a laurel tree. All three are destroyed by Apollo’s attention.

<sup>61</sup> Sissa quotes Plutarch’s *Coniugalia praecepta* in which the author insists on the fact “that no woman can make a child without the participation of a man ... Care must be taken ... Left to their own devices, women continually conceive deformed and incongruous creatures” (1990, 55).

<sup>62</sup> Schwarzer believes that “only the destruction of the male sexual monopoly from the foundation up will cause gender roles to collapse” (2001, 225).

<sup>63</sup> “In the sense of writing about the past, history is always already hystery, since it is always already in the act of displacing memory into a narrative enactment or theatre in which the events of the past are performed anew. In remembering the witch and reworking her, we are all hysterics” (Purkiss 1993, 83).

<sup>64</sup> Kristeva does not refer to Maitland’s narrative. I am drawing on her commentaries on the figure of the Virgin Mary in *The Feminine and the Sacred* (2001).

<sup>65</sup> Butler’s argument refers to Kristeva’s notion of cultural subversion that, according to Butler, “not only repudiates female homosexuality, but denies the varied meanings and possibilities of motherhood as a cultural practice.” Cultural subversion “is not really Kristeva’s concern, for subversion, when it appears, emerges from beneath the surface of culture only inevitably to return there. Although the semiotic is a possibility of language

that escapes the paternal law, it remains inevitably within or, indeed, beneath the territory of that law" (Butler 1990, 88).

<sup>66</sup> The internationally acclaimed Canadian poet, novelist, and literary critic, Margaret Atwood, was born in 1939 in Ottawa, and brought up in northern parts of Ontario, and Quebec. She graduated from the University of Toronto, took her master's degree from Radcliffe College, traveled extensively, and held teaching positions at various Canadian universities (among others at UBC in Vancouver). Her first collection of poetry, *The Circle Game* (1966) won the Governor General's Award, followed by *Power Politics* (1971), *You are Happy* (1974), *Interlunar* (1988), and *Morning in the Burned House* (1995). A prolific writer, she has also produced short stories, children's books, and literary criticism, including the controversial *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). Atwood's work as a critic and editor has played an important role in defining Canadian literature as a distinctive tradition. Since the 1970s she has been active in Amnesty International and anticensorship campaigns. Her early novels include *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing*, a story of an artist discovering the truth about her past, her inner fears as well as strengths she never knew she had (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), and *Bodily Harm* (1981). *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is a futuristic story about a state in which women are totally subordinated to their reproductive role, and became a worldwide bestseller made into a film in 1990. This book was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, as was her *Cat's Eye*, a story of a controversial painter engulfed by vivid memories of her childhood, and her initiation into the secret world of friendship, longing, and betrayal (1988), as well as *Alias Grace* (1996), selected for analysis here (Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Expanding Phyllis Chesler's fundamental rejection of the romanticized forms of madness in *Women and Madness* (1973), Felman returns to "the logical principle of Identity" conceived as "a solely masculine sameness, apprehended as male self-presence and consciousness-to-itself" (Felman 1997, 8-9).

<sup>68</sup> In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir observes "that a large proportion of harlots are former domestic servants. A glance at any maid's room is enough to explain that fact. Exploited, enslaved, treated as a thing rather than a person, the maid-of-all-work, the chamber-maid, can look forward to no improvement in her lot; sometimes she has to accept the attentions of the head of the family. From such domestic slavery and sexual subjection she slips into a slavery that could not be more degrading and that she dreams will be happier" (1993, 586).

<sup>69</sup> Drawing on the Freudian concept of *Unheimlichkeit*, Kristeva writes: "We can understand why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche into its opposite, das Unheimliche, for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Kristeva 1991, 184).

<sup>70</sup> According to Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1995), the modern rituals of imprisonment, interrogation, and execution attest to "the disappearance of the spectacle and the elimination of pain" (1995, 11).

<sup>71</sup> Marysia in Saramonowicz' narrative is in a similar situation, being in hospital (her naked body open to any investigation which also takes place) with the only difference that she is (kept) still, while her violence turns against her own body (of the mother) which she subconsciously wants to destroy.

<sup>72</sup> Atwood refers to Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), which provides one of the most memorable images of social stigma, hypocrisy and punishment set in the early days of Puritan America, two centuries before its publication. In Atwood's novel, Simon "is surprised to find a clergyman reading Hawthorne: the man has been accused of sensualism, and – especially after *The Scarlet Letter* – of a laxity in morals" (1996, 192).

<sup>73</sup> All translations are mine, the original is provided in the endnote. Unless otherwise stated, all italics are the author's and all ellipses, mine. "Wtedy po raz pierwszy zobaczył matkę nagą. Jej pełne piersi musiały wzbudzić niepokój dziecka. Pragnął ich i bał się jednocześnie. Nagie ciało matki było supłem, na który zawiązany był świat" (Tokarczuk 1999, 130).

<sup>74</sup> "Gdyby jednak poprowadzić prostą linię między żrenicą a oglądanym przedmiotem, okazałoby się, że Erna patrzy gdzieś obok, na zarys, krawędź, granice oddzielającą przedmiot od tła, jakby nie była zainteresowana samą rzeczą, ale tym, co jest poza nią" (Tokarczuk 1999, 59).

<sup>75</sup> Olga Tokarczuk, born in Sulechów in 1962, is an 'established' contemporary Polish writer, "one of the biggest literary discoveries", included in the encyclopedia of the contemporary Polish literature (*Literatura Polska XX Wieku. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*. 2 vols. Warszawa: PWN, 2000). She graduated from Wrocław University with a Master's degree in psychology. In 1989 she published a lyrical journalistic work *Miasto w lustrach* (A Town in the Mirrors) followed by her first novel *Podróż ludzi księgi* (The Journey of the

Book-People, 1993), *E. E.* (1995) and *Prawiek i inne czasy* (Prehistory and Other Times, 1996), which won numerous literary prizes. According to a Polish critic, A. Górnicka-Boratyńska, in *Parnas bis. Słownik literatury polskiej urodzonej po 1960 roku* (Dictionary of Polish Authors Born After 1960), *E.E.* "is written slowly, as an epic – realistic and psychological, but also full of mystery and the atmosphere of sadness and fleeting humor. *E.E.* represents in a sense a novel of initiation, it is a story about entering maturity and definition, about a simultaneously difficult and funny process of structuring one's personality" (1995, 138). In 1997, Tokarczuk published her first collection of short stories *Szafa* (The Wardrobe). Her novel, *Dom dzienny, dom nocny* (The Day House, the Night House) (1998), to be discussed in Chapter 3, has been acclaimed as the best and the most controversial of her works. Her books have been translated into Dutch, French, Italian, and German. Tokarczuk lives near Wałbrzych in Lower Silesia. She has recently published a collection of stories *Gra na wielu bębenkach* (A Play on Many Drums) (2001).

<sup>76</sup> As Mitchell observes, "Freud worked during the initial period of psychoanalysis with a number of patients whose neurotic difficulties were partially or predominantly hysterical. The one whose case history has been most fully extracted from the letters to Fliess and from *The Interpretation of Dreams* is 'E'. According to an essay by Eva Rosenblum, both Didier Anzieu and Douglas Davis, who have reconstructed the case history, note the blurring of therapist and patient roles between Freud and 'E': the two men are not fully distinguishable as together they produce the universal Oedipus complex. The relationship also shows male hysteria in action... E' was a patient whom Freud treated for five years around the turn of the century. He was a diagnosed case of hysteria – an 'illness' that had developed in his youth. Freud learnt as much about himself as he did about his patient during 'E's' treatment – and a great deal for psychoanalysis" (2000, 64-65).

<sup>77</sup> Creed notes: "It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before,' we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body" (1993, 54).

<sup>78</sup> Tokarczuk introduces an interesting blend of Polish and German names into her narrative. The story, written in Polish, takes place in Wrocław that in the narrative time belongs to Germany and is referred to as Breslau. Fryderyk Elzner's first name has a Polish spelling, his surname is German. Streets and places have German names, the servants' first names are German, etc.

<sup>79</sup> "Nikt nie zwracał uwagi na stojącego w widocznym miejscu człowieka, a Greta przeszła przez niego z półmiskiem pełnym szparagów. Dlaczego widok człowieka, przez którego przebiega wzór tapety na ścianie, wydał jej się taki przerażający? Oto podnosi oczy znad talerza ... i widzi młodszego brata, Maxa, a zaraz za nim jest t o. Patrzy na nią wzrokiem, w którym jest wiele myśli naraz, wiele słów i obrazów" (Tokarczuk 1999, 9). The word 't o', translated as 'i t' (with a space in between) refers in the original text to the ghost.

<sup>80</sup> "Kiedy przyszedł doktor Löwe, pani Elzner zamknęła się z nim w salonie i dobitnym, pewnym siebie tonem opowiedziała mu, co, a raczej kogo zobaczyła Erna wczoraj przy obiedzie. Powiedziała też, że najprawdopodobniej w Ernie ujawniły się zdolności medialne, które posiadała cała rodzina pani Elzner. – Wobec tego nie mam tu nic do roboty. Trzeba raczej posłać po jakiegoś egzorcystę – powiedział Löwe i wstał" (Tokarczuk 1999, 14).

<sup>81</sup> In her letter to Clement in 1994, Kristeva notes: "Freud wrote that women did not have the capacity for a superego. I am well aware that he was thinking of his Vienna and his protected middle-class women, but that doesn't ring true for everyone, far from it. The anorectic is welded to her superego: hypermoral, hyperscrupulous, hyperdevoted to the Law, to God, to the One – call them what you like. It is because of that rigidity, which both sustains and destroys her, that she has come to me, to ask that I get rid of it" (Kristeva 2001, 116).

<sup>82</sup> "Naukowe słowo 'histeria' stanowiło klucz do chorób nerwowych i doktor Löwe jeszcze tego samego wieczoru, kiedy wezwano go do Erny, przywołał w pamięci ten termin i trzymał się go" (Tokarczuk 1999, 39).

<sup>83</sup> "w medycynie, jak w branży konfekcyjnej czy meblarstwie, przychodzą i odchodzą różne mody. Histeria była absolutnym przebojem, ale była też czymś wyjątkowo niekształtnym, nieokreślonym. Czasem miewał nawet wrażenie, że to słowo spływało z ust jego kolegów, gdy usiłowali pokryć zamieszanie" (Tokarczuk 1999, 39).



<sup>84</sup> "System nerwowy Erny nie jest jeszcze w pełni ukształtowany i w tym wieku może ona być bardzo podatna na omdlenia czy konwulsje. Dorabianie do tego jakichś z palca wyssanych diabolicznych bajek może zaburzyć jej i tak chwiejną równowagę" (Tokarczuk 1999, 14-15).

<sup>85</sup> Mitchell writes that Freud and 'E', his friend and patient, both "had a phobia of rail travel and it was 'E's' association to his phobia that unleashed Freud's interest in his own symptom: '[E] demonstrated the reality of my theory in my own case, providing me in a surprising reversal with the solution, which I had overlooked, to my former railroad phobia.' The phobia, Freud said, was due to infantile gluttony – and though we learn no more about this, it would link with what Freud was to call the hysterical greed for love. In hysteria, which in my account wants the mother that the sibling has taken, sexuality is predominantly oral and 'hungry'; hence the prevalent symptom of eating disorders. Freud would seem to have felt that if he did not get to the station early (the table first) he would miss the train (meal). With the many sisters that followed the birth of his brother, he may well have been right" (2000, 65-6).

<sup>86</sup> "Cokolwiek to było, udawajmy, że nic się nie stało" (Tokarczuk 1999, 15).

<sup>87</sup> "Jest to najprostszy sposób, żeby zrobić z niej wariatkę" (Tokarczuk 1999, 17).

<sup>88</sup> "W Ernie, jedynej spośród swych córek, widziała siebie, jaka była w jej wieku i jeszcze młodsza – nieśmiała, brzydka, samotna i obca światu, jakby do niego nie należała" (Tokarczuk 1999, 13).

<sup>89</sup> "Była uwięziona w jednym domu z człowiekiem, który kompletnie jej nie rozumiał, jakby byli z innego świata, jakby mówili innymi językami" (Tokarczuk 1999, 17).

<sup>90</sup> "Artur obserwował medium. Był rozczerowany. Spodziewał się osoby bardziej demonicznej, raczej kobiety niż dziewczynki. Erna według niego nie wyglądała na osobę w jakikolwiek sposób niezwykłą, na kogoś, kto rozmawia z duchami. Może była trochę anemiczna, to wszystko" (Tokarczuk 1999, 68-9).

<sup>91</sup> "Mieć pewność – czy nie jest to najważniejsze dla naukowca? Pewność jest afirmacją. Pewność jest też formą konsumpcji rzeczywistości. To, co zrozumiałe... zostaje połknięte przez wiecznie głodny umysł i zużyte do budowy ogromnych budowli z pojęć, systemów i hierarchii" (Tokarczuk 1999, 52).

<sup>92</sup> "Jego podniecona wyobraźnia zaczęła tworzyć obrazy sal laboratoryjnych, pracowni pełnych przyrządów mierzących ciśnienie i tętno, w które wpręga się szalejące dziewczyny, auli wykładowych wypełnionych szczelnie studentami, wykresów rysowanych na tablicy. I powiew tajemnicy, prawdziwej, nieprzenikalnej tajemnicy, którą należałoby rozłupać jak orzech. Byłby to świetny temat na pracę doktorską otwierającą cały cykl badań, program badań" (Tokarczuk 1999, 65).

<sup>93</sup> "Kiedy drzwi zamykały się za Frommerem, Greta miała wrażenie, że wpuściła do pokoju bezbronnej dziewczynki jakieś złe moce, chłód, mrok, sama nie wiedziała co" (Tokarczuk 1999, 84).

"On ją wybaduje. Chce wszystko wiedzieć: co jej się śniło, o czym myśli, na co ma ochotę..." (Tokarczuk 1999, 84) The form of Polish verb „wybaduje” is in my italics, since its form is not grammatically correct and emphasizes Greta's 'simple' uneducated style, perhaps illiteracy.

<sup>94</sup> "To jest dar. Zostałaś obdarzona jako jedna z niewielu. Ale ten dar nie daje lekkiego życia, dlatego możesz, o ile nie jest już za późno, podjąć decyzję. Jeżeli się zgodzisz przyjąć to, co niespodziewanie dostałaś, oboje z twoją matką wykorzystamy te zdolności. Wiesz jak wygląda seans? Jeżeli nie chcesz, możesz się jeszcze od tego wszystkiego odwrócić w sobie, zamknąć. I wszystko przejdzie jak sen. Jestem tego pewien" (Tokarczuk 1999, 35).

<sup>95</sup> "Słuchasz mnie Erno? Rozumiesz? Erna kiwnęła głową, ale Frommer nie widział w jej oczach zrozumienia. Opanowało go nagłe zniechęcenie" (Tokarczuk 1999, 81).

<sup>96</sup> "Ona ma za dużą duszę, ogromną, przygniatającą ciało duszę" (Tokarczuk 1999, 25).

<sup>97</sup> "In the philosophical tradition that begins with Plato and continues through Descartes, Husserl, and Sartre, the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether. The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism" (Butler 1990, 12).

<sup>98</sup> "Teresa Frommer, starsza od brata o pięć lat, miała wygląd pomarszczonego ze starości dziecka, garbatego gнома z bajki. Z trudnością nauczyła się czytać, ale dzielnie wykonywała wszystkie domowe obowiązki. Mówiła niewyraźnie i chaotycznie, a jednak, kiedy opowiadała swoje sny wydawały się one bardziej realne niż rzeczywistość. Zajmowała się powolnym krzątaniem po kuchni, kilkudniowymi porządkami w jednej szafie,

nigdy nie kończonymi robótkami na drutach i spaniem. Kiedy udawało mu się skłonić ją do opowiedzenia snu, odkrywał z zaskoczeniem w jej rojeniach te same zdarzenia, które działy się w rzeczywistości, niektóre ważne, jak rozgrywki polityczne, katastrofy, konflikty, inne banalne, jak choroby sąsiadów, śmierć kota czy odwiedziny doktora Löwe. Jednocześnie wszystko to było inne, miało trudną do określenia atmosferę koszmaru" (Tokarczuk 1999, 22).

<sup>99</sup> "To właśnie Rainer powiedział im, że ich matka była wariatką. Dzieci myślały, że być wariatką znaczy tyle, co bałaganić, łobuzować, biegać po deszczu, wchodzić do kałuż i niegrzecznie odpowiadać niańce. Jednak spacer po spacerze, każde kolejne spotkanie z Rainerem powoli wyprowadzało je z błędu. Rainer z satysfakcją rozciągał przed nimi nowy rodzaj baśni: jak wygląda szaleństwo" (Tokarczuk 1999, 27).

<sup>100</sup> "Mówiła, że [duchy] wyświetlają się na ścianach jak postacie z magicznej latarni. Bardzo dawno temu, kiedy była medium na seansach, rozmawiała z duchami, ale ten dar został jej odebrany" (Tokarczuk 1999, 23).

<sup>101</sup> "Erna zrozumiała, że wszystko, co się wydarza, łączy się ze sobą może chaotycznie, lecz bez wyjątku" (Tokarczuk 1999, 60).

<sup>102</sup> "Teraz przechodziły przez nią, jakby w ogóle nie istniała. Płynęły przez jej ciało i umysł, zostawiając strzępki znaczeń, obrazów tak obcych doświadczeniu Erny, że niezrozumiałych i przez to ulotnych. Rozmywały ją i z nią się utożsamiały. Erna już nie była kimś, kto czuje, myśli i spostrzega, była teraz czymś kompletnie pozbawionym granic. Nie mogłaby już nawet umrzeć, ponieważ rozciągała się poza życiem, poza śmiercią i poza czasem. W tym rozpięciu się był spokój, ale gdzieś głęboko tkwiło... ziarno świadomości, które bolało. 'To boli,' powiedziała czy też pomyślała Erna. I to był koniec" (Tokarczuk 1999, 43).

<sup>103</sup> "Nie mam wątpliwości, że w sytuacjach niezwykłych, jak na przykład szaleństwo, głęboko odczuwamy tę dwoistość. Ten świat staje się światem zwyczajnym, powszednim, który potrafimy zrozumieć i przez to nad nim zapanować. Tamten – jest daleki, trudny do pojęcia, antyintelektualny; jego wpływy są potężne i nieprzewidywalne. Jest pierwotny w stosunku do 'tego' świata, jest naszą kolebką i naszą przyszłością. W tym sensie jest światem realnym, ten zaś, w którym żyjemy na co dzień, wydaje się przemijającą dekoracją, poczekalnią" (Tokarczuk 1999, 94-95).

<sup>104</sup> "Kiedy się przyglądam tej dziewczynie, mam wrażenie, że ona balansuje na granicy dwóch światów. Pan to pewnie zna lepiej, widzi pan to u chorych... Ona najpierw jest tu, gdzie wszyscy, siedzi, mówi, śmieje się, a potem następuje moment... hm wycofania się do wewnątrz i stamtąd jakby przejścia gdzie indziej..." (Tokarczuk 1999, 94).

<sup>105</sup> "To co dzieje się na takich seansach, nie ma związku z duchami. Ludzie uruchamiają swoją pamięć, doświadczenia, działa sugestia i autosugestia, a może nawet jakiś rodzaj hipnozy. Może coś w rodzaju przekazywania myśli, ale to jest tylko hipoteza, nic pewnego" (Tokarczuk 1999, 49).

<sup>106</sup> "Oszustwo? Nie. Nawet jeżeli tamten świat nie istnieje i duchów nie ma, to czy atak histeryczny, epilepsja, szaleństwo nazwałbyś oszustwem?" (Tokarczuk 1999, 64)

<sup>107</sup> "Krażyły wokół niej na palcach lekko i bezszelestnie. Wydmuchiwały na nią jakieś pół słowa, pół oddechy, a potem kładły na jej uśpione ciało misternie zaplatane sznureczki. Podnosiły nad jej głową złączone ręce i odskakiwały spłoszone, kiedy Erna przewracała się we śnie... 'Masz, siostró, potężną czarodziejską moc i nie chcesz czarować. Czary ci uciekają i nie słuchają cię. Weźmiemy ich trochę od ciebie i pokażemy ludziom. Wypuścimy na wolność kilka twoich snów' – mówiła Christine. – 'Ale nie po to, żeby się bawić' – dodała szybko Katherine – 'ale żeby ci pomagać i bronić przed demonami, z których największym jest Walter Frommer'" (Tokarczuk 1999, 149).

<sup>108</sup> "Jak będziesz skarżyć, to umrzesz. Zabijemy cię lusterkiem. – Nie mówcie tak! – krzyknęła Erna. – Nie wymawia się tego słowa. Nie wolno tak mówić – zaprotestowała mała i zadrżała jej broda. – Nam wszystko wolno, bo umiemy czarować. – Przestańcie! Erna tupnęła nogą, twarz jej stężała. I wtedy nagle zaczęły spadać na podłogę przedmioty: wazoniki na kwiaty, porcelanowe figurki, obrazki w ramach, książki, puste szklanki po kakao. Szkło rozbijało się z hukiem; jakby popychał je niewidzialny złośliwy palec..." (Tokarczuk 1999, 141).

<sup>109</sup> "Po pierwsze, wierzę w to, co się stało... w samoistne przemieszczanie się tych przedmiotów. Lekarze od dawna obserwują takie fenomeny u dorastających dziewcząt. Jest to być może rodzaj jakiejś niezbadanej jeszcze energii, która pomaga im dojrzewać, z dziecka stać się kobietą" (Tokarczuk 1999, 143).

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<sup>110</sup> "Włożyła poduszeczkę między nogi, tam skąd płynęła z niej krew. Zaczepiła pętelkę z przodu o guziki, z tyłu pomogła jej to zrobić Marie. Czuła się jak w uprzęży, całe to skomplikowane płócienne urządzenie obciskało jej biodra i krocze. - No, i jesteś prawdziwą kobietą. - Nasza mała Erna jest kobietą. ... Erna była zmieszana, chciała już stąd wyjść. Podeszła szybko do drzwi i chwyciła za klamkę. - Poczekaj, odtąd musisz już sama prac swoje brudy – zawołała za nią Marie i rzuciła jej majtki" (Tokarczuk 1999, 186).

<sup>111</sup> "Podniosła spódnicę i dotknęła tego krępującego jej ciało urządzenia. Odpięła pętelki i znieruchomiła na chwilę. Cisza przyglądała się jej nagiemu podbrzuszu. Erna po raz pierwszy świadomie zaczęła badać dłonią gorące, pulsujące miejsce. Nie wiedziała, że można siebie dotykać w taki sposób. Jej ciało wzdrygnęło się, nabrzmiło od jednego muśnięcia palcem. Czekąło. Wyciągnęła ręce i zaczęła zrywać wiszące nad nią liście. Gniotła je, wkładała między nogi jak kompres, zamiast tych pasków, pętelek i poduszeczek. Ogarnął ja cierpki, duszący zapach żywych roślin, dotykały jej ciała delikatnie i brutalnie, głaskały ją i przygniatały. Kładła liście na nagi brzuch, piersi i ramiona, obsypywała nimi twarz, aż w końcu zupełnie straciła oddech" (Tokarczuk 1999, 187).

### CHAPTER 3: THE WITCH AS TRANSGRESSION OF IDENTITY

#### STIGMA AND THE PARADOX OF CULTURAL SUBVERSION

... what sort of *transgression* must appear as supremely incompatible with the proper order of belonging and, by its very reality, make the limits of that order apparent in a way that is unbearable for the passion of identity: Is it betrayal, crime, heresy, unbelief? Or is it rather abnormality, monstrosity, deviance, representable 'difference'? And why has a whole literature continually – whether to stigmatise it or valorize the paradox – sought to *translate* one of these forms into the other? (Balibar 1995, 190)

Building on the feminist reconstructions of the hysteric and the archaic mother discussed in previous chapters, here I set out to examine the conceptual knots that confuse and hold together the historical and contemporary identities of the 'witch'-woman. As a figure slipping across borders, the witch evokes notions of exclusion and absence, but she also mobilizes hybridity through her un/belonging. The witch as fugitive draws on her confinement to the 'far away' land of collective imagination, myths and superstitions, to her expulsion from the 'here and now', and simultaneously her ubiquitous physical presence, her hidden closeness as a neighboring woman, mother, daughter. Her non-conforming physical appearance is ambiguous, because as a phallogentric projection of the feminine it should be familiar, motherly, attractive, *heimlich*, but it is not. In fact, as argued earlier, the diasporic image of the witch's body is marked by the stigma of the "third sex" (the *monstrous feminine*, the castrating/ed vagina, the witch as a grotesque, and carnivalesque 'unfeminine' figure). Her enforced exile or voluntary flight is first of all from her initial gender, as she is caught between the various laws and languages of the Fathers that stigmatize her body as fe/male.

However, as Butler would argue, her gender is not to culture as her sex is to nature, because "gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural

sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (1990, 7).

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (1990, 16)

Moreover, reflecting the phenomena of migration (traveling) and the dissemination of traditions, Etienne Balibar refers to identity as an accumulation of stigmas, hyphenated names and identifications (1995, 187)<sup>1</sup>. Identity is "not given but 'fictive'... made from elaborated differentiations and constructed communications" (1995, 186), and appears as

... a collection of traits, of objective structures (as such spontaneously thought of in the dimension of the collective, the social and the historical) and as a principle or a process of subjectivisation (spontaneously thought of in the dimension of 'lived experience,' of 'conscious' or 'unconscious' individuality). (1995, 174)

Drawing on these formulations of identity (Butler's dealing with gender and Balibar's with ethnic tradition), my analysis here will focus on the allegedly free-floating and/or bisexual identities ascribed to witches, as paradoxical creatures 'at the edge' that escape from the limits of cultural boundaries, from the bonds/ bounds preserved by traditional household structures and national frontiers. Precisely because of its subversive potential, the edge (or the margin, taking into account the wide range of geographical/spatial and linguistic images employed in this selection) transforms the reassuring concepts of 'home', 'nationality' and 'gender' into the blurred areas of cultural un/belonging. As I will suggest in the following analysis, there is no formula that can predict when or how the historical or traditional identity of the 'witch'-woman can be released from its derogatory origins, or can avoid the abjection that persistently echoes in the insulting names given to her, such as the wicked witch, ugly hag, or evil crone. The witch, as a supposedly imaginary female

transgressor, seems to be suspended in a vacuum between a traditional cultural structure that she has already been made to abandon (and in this sense she is homeless), and another unknown, culturally *unheimlich* structure that she is about to enter. Trans-ported, she “executes her transit imaginarily, perched on the black goat that carries her off, impaled by the broom that flies her away; she goes in the direction of animality, plants, the inhuman” (Cixous and Clément 1986, 8). In crossing the borderline between human and non-human, she “endures” in culture as the *monstrous feminine*. For Rosi Braidotti, what connects the figure of the witch with the monster is her association with “the in-between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word *monsters*, *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration” (Braidotti 1994, 77). Whether in a narrative spectacle (as for Cixous) or a narrative ritual (as for Kristeva, or Creed), “the demarcation lines between the human and non-human are drawn up anew” (Creed 1993, 8). Accused of using corpses for her magic rites, the witch nevertheless retains her humanity. She is never a living corpse, a zombie, an ultimate abjection<sup>2</sup>, but rather a negotiator between the centralities of life and the marginalities of death. The witch as a border-crosser and boundary marker opens a new “system of classification” in which, paradoxically, “the negative and borderline values of contaminating objects are reversible, and reverse themselves into omnipotent and positive values” (Kristeva 2001, 92)<sup>3</sup>.

Un/belonging, a term designating both the physical location (belonging) and the socio-political marginalization (unbelonging) of the ‘witch’, conveys her diasporic (decentralized) cultural topography. The critical task here, following Butler, is “to locate strategies of subversive repetition” that are made possible by the narrative constructions of the ‘witch’ as a boundless, or un-bound woman, Irigaray’s ‘volume without contours’ rather than a traditional wife, mother and housekeeper. Drawing on Butler’s concept of a bisexuality

“that is said to be ‘outside’ the Symbolic and that serves as the locus of subversion,” I posit the witch as one of “the construction[s] of an ‘outside’ that is nevertheless fully ‘inside’, not a possibility beyond culture, but a concrete cultural possibility that is refused and redescribed as impossible” (1990, 77):

What remains ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unsayable’ within the terms of an existing cultural form is not necessarily what is excluded from the matrix of intelligibility within that form; on the contrary, it is the marginalized, not the excluded, the cultural possibility that calls for dread or, minimally, the loss of sanctions... The ‘unthinkable’ is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture. (1990, 77)

Indeed, in mainstream Western history, witches have consistently been perceived and depicted as peculiar and as outcasts, within any given culture (Sanders 1995). In the absence of any mediation between the particular and the universal(ized), witches have been construed as dangerously polluting the universal ‘norm’ because of their peculiarity. Projected as homeless and *unheimlich*, they both expose and are exposed to numerous inappropriate and noncanonical cultural forms, through which they mediate their cultural vulnerability. Although specific appearances and connotations of the witch-woman vary from culture to culture, this (projected) peculiarity of her cultural body is common to all the contexts concerned here. It could be defined as an awareness or consciousness of un/belonging which manifests itself as an openness (vulnerability) to heresy and deviation, and comes to represent not what is contained and sustained by traditional identity but rather what is eliminated or restricted, often ab-jected, or (r)ejected to confined spaces, such as asylums or prisons (Cixous and Clément 1986, 6). Simultaneously, their invulnerability (which ties in with Kristeva’s ‘porousness’) associates ‘witches’ with a *lack* of any recognized, institutionalized tradition or cultural inheritance that could be attributed to them.

In the contemporary narratives selected for this chapter, there is both a tension and a dialogue between the particular/peculiar and the normalized, a dialectic reflecting what

Homi Bhabha divided into “culture as the noun for naming the social imaginary, and culture as the act for grafting the voices of the indentured, the displaced, the nameless, onto an agency of utterance” (1995 52). In view of the paradox or “illusion of a true body beyond the law” (Butler 1990, 93), the illusion which they often represent, the identities of the ‘witch’ in these narratives evoke certain types of cultural transgression that insert (or smuggle) a semiotic articulation into the collective symbolic discourse. The witch-figures are positioned as having cross-cultural, heterogeneous forms of identity, illustrating types of non-conformity or transgression that deliberately straddle borders and propose what Butler refers to as “a strategic provisionality” (1995, 131). These transgressions, as indicators of political positioning, point to a knowledge of when to abandon one particular position for another, “knowing when to let it go, living its contingency, and subjecting it to a political challenge” (1995, 131). They differ from, but are already suggested by Kristeva’s (or Cixous’s and Clément’s) formulations of transgressions as part of a “carnavalesque structure” that ignores “substance, causality or identity outside its link to the whole,” and “exists only in or through relationship” (Kristeva 1980, 78)<sup>4</sup>. According to these theoreticians, in an attempt to disrupt the “imaginary zone” of every culture (Cixous and Clément 1986, 6), the carnival sets up a new frontier, “where meaning collapses... where nobody *is*, but *transgresses*” (Kristeva 1982, 2). However, an inevitable return to culture, its order and sanctions, suggests that these transgressions have an anxiogenic character. Butler, referring to Kristeva’s position, denounces this type of subversion (disruption of cultural form) as “a futile gesture, entertained only in a derealized aesthetic mode which can never be translated into other cultural practices” (1990, 78)<sup>5</sup>. On the contrary, as I will argue in discussing these narratives, Kristevan concepts of border transgression and subversion are effective as both unsettled and unsettling, and relate in many respects to the ‘abjection’ she



defines as that which does not “respect positions, rules,” and which “disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 1982, 4). They are also effective, following Clément’s argument, as a form of sacred disorder: “The sacred shatters the order and introduces a new one... the mystic order, the trance, the transcendence” (2001, 113). We are returning here to the ‘witch’ as “a primal cartography of the body,” representing what Kristeva calls the “semiotic,” defined as “the precondition for language even though it depends on language, and which suffers and takes pleasures in an other logic, complementary to the logic of linguistic signs imposed and consolidated by paternal laws” (2001, 95).

Subverting the culturally stigmatized cartographies of the body, Kristeva’s semiotic “unquestionably celebrates our difficult – impossible – separation from that authority, the mother” (2001, 95), and further connects with the psychoanalytical intricacies of the navel as analyzed by Bronfen and discussed in Chapter 2.

Visualized as a common point of connection but also as an incision and severing, the navel emerges as a cultural image fraught with reticence... a willfully unexplored part of the human body, an obscene detail that fascinates even as it repels, owing precisely to its intangibility... (Bronfen 1998, 3)<sup>6</sup>

The semiotic is founded on the abject, or what is considered “filth” (Kristeva 2001, 95), and the navel, “a flashback or an analeptic index of a bodily wound” (Bronfen 1998, 4), embodies this semiotic filth, and exists already in terms of culture as a

boundary line that makes the dirty turn into the tainted, since it is then understandable how the ritualization of filth can be accompanied by a complete effacement of the dirty object itself... Definitely, the dirty object vanishes as such when it is transformed, within a particular logic, into “filth” [that] is no longer noticed, it no longer smells (Kristeva 2001, 93).

In the figure of the witch, the semiotic and the navel converge in the maternal space of filth (placenta, umbilical cord), “echoing the old practice where midwives would read the knots on umbilical cords as prophetic signs that allowed them to predict how many more

pregnancies a woman would undergo” (Bronfen 1998, 4). This practice suspends the midwife-witch between ‘symbolic castration’ (addressed in Chapter 1) and ‘the real incision’ (the actual cut, separation of mother and child addressed in Chapter 2). To distinguish between ‘symbolic castration’ and the ‘real incision’, Bronfen proposes the concept of “denaveling,” which is useful in the following analysis since it “harks back to the traumatic wound at the onset of mortality yet defies any direct representation by not referring to any clearly marked single experience or event” (Bronfen 1998, 11), and allows me to posit the witch as a negotiator between the phallic and the *omphalic*. In choosing the navel as “an anatomical sign to designate this other force field constituting the subject,” Bronfen follows Mieke Bal, who asserts that the phallus invokes gender-specific associations in terms of “to have it” versus “to be it,” whereas the *omphalos*,

is fundamentally gender specific – the navel is the scar of dependence on the mother – but it is also democratic in that both men and women have it. And unlike the phallus and its iconic representations disseminated throughout post-Freudian culture, the navel is starkly indexical. (Bal 1991)

Favoring the omphallic as “a source of effective subversion” (a positive aspect rejected both by Bronfen and by Butler (1990, 80)), the ‘witch’, in this context, like Cixous’s figure, “serves to connect all the ends [i.e. loose strands] of a culture that is hard to endure” (Cixous and Clément 1986, 8); that is, she effectively negotiates with the symbolic by tying a knot rather than remaining entangled in one made to entrap her.

Although Butler’s position implies that Kristeva’s aesthetic mode has only a passing subversive effect, and does not change the underlying dominant system, I would argue that the ‘witch’ as an aesthetic (literary, narrative) figure is not a temporary escape route to the outside of culture but a concrete (collectively imagined) representation of ‘woman’ as an ongoing, subversively repetitive alternative to the dominant order. As Butler herself argues,

the “unthinkable” subversion of the dominant culture is fully situated within culture, but simply “excluded from *dominant* culture” (1990, 77). Adopting ambiguous, provisional positions in-between (dramatic) performance and religious ritual, the witch figures therefore express their cultural presence (rather than absence) in carnivalesque structures of culture, “the idea of carnival being both licensed and illicit” (Webb 2000, 211). Echoing the carnivalesque enthusiasm evoked in the *herstory* discussed in the Chapter 1, these women-characters change into witches and take part in their own sabbath of cultural transgression. What this form of carnival offers, in contradistinction to a *herstorical* celebration of ‘orgasmic freedom’, is the enticing promise of how things might look like, if we altered the confining conditions of the dominant culture. Defined thus as a strategically provisional form of cultural subversion, the carnivalesque structure will be posited here as a meeting point of Kristeva’s and Butler’s positions.

As a strategic form of rebellion against stigma, carnival can also be usefully linked with Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of *la mestiza*<sup>7</sup>, as both validate, in a multicultural and diasporic context, the paradoxical presence of the witch as an un/belonging woman. Bringing out the dual sense of boundaries (gender and race/ ethnicity), *la mestiza* “continually walk[s] out of one culture and into another, because [she is] in all cultures at the same time” (1997, 77). Her consciousness is that of the Borderlands. Anzaldúa’s theory of border writing strives toward a new type of cultural consciousness, beyond standing “on the opposite riverbank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions” (1997, 78). At some point, she asserts, “on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave” or “perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause” (1997, 78). For Anzaldúa, the “possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react,” since “[n]othing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first

happens in the images in our heads” (1997, 78-79). Thus, *la mestiza* /the witch will be formulated here as a symptom of un/belonging, a combination of stigma (the problem) and its solution, and a fusion of self and the other into a dialogical structure. Falling as such into the “category” of Kristeva’s Bakhtinian dialogical stranger, or the Derridean *undecidable pharmakon*, *la mestiza* is simultaneously assumed as the poison and its antidote, and maintains her integrity “by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa 1997, 79). While expanding that “new value system”, she has to perform “an act of kneading, of uniting and joining,” that inscribes her doubly (as “a creature of darkness and a creature of light”), and then “questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (1997, 81). Consequently, she cannot resolve her un/belonging, and remains paradigmatically defective in any of the cultures in question, while belonging to a new class of wanderers or displaced persons, “a constant changing of forms, renacimientos de la tierra madre [rebirths of the mother earth]” (1997, 84-85).

Echoing Anzaldúa’s “constant changing of forms,” I thus propose to view the ‘witch’ in this chapter as transgressing her ‘fixed’ (stigmatized) identity to produce a range of hybrid and plural literary representations. The notion of hybridity is particularly relevant in the narratives here, in which the distinction between a wicked and a benevolent witch is prone to disappear altogether. Her textual plurality, however, should not be seen as a universal nihilism or ‘postmodern condition’<sup>8</sup>, but rather as a transcultural acceptance of “difference which has to be negotiated rather than fought over” (Webb 2000, 200). Although belonging to different national traditions, Carter’s figures of Mary Magdalene and Jeanne, Morrison’s Consolata, Robinson’s Sylvie, Tokarczuk’s figures of Marta and Wilga, as well as Kofta’s figures of Szotka and Sabina, all occupy a dialectical position between their cultural abjection and their ‘porous’ bodies, signifying both cultural transgression and

gender ambiguity. This dialectical position allows us to see Kristeva's concept of "porousness" (in *The Feminine and the Sacred*), Irigaray's *disruptive excess* (in "The Power of Discourse") and Butler's concept of gender identity (in *Gender Trouble*)<sup>9</sup> as converging in a common intention to elaborate a theory of a "new value system" (Anzaldúa 1997, 81), a "different legality" (Kristeva 1980, 111). This system, or legality, does not refer to 'woman' as a/the subject or the object of discussion, but "of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal" (Irigaray 2000, 126), and therefore must be seen as a theory of cultural negotiation. The following narratives will illustrate my hypothesis that the 'witch', as a figure of identity transgressions, provides a valid response to the/a woman's 'veiled' condition, while negotiating between the sacred, heretic, phallic and *om-phallic* spaces in culture. In her ambivalence and borderlessness, the 'witch' conveys the permanent deferral of meanings, a paradox of subversion, since it is at once refused by and initiated within phallogentric culture. If un-veiling of her cultural condition is possible, it will constitute what Butler envisages as

a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities. (1990, 93)

THE SACRED MAY NOT BE THE SAME AS THE RELIGIOUS: ANGELA CARTER'S "IMPRESSIONS: THE WRIGHTSMAN MAGDALENE" AND "BLACK VENUS"

... what if the sacred were the unconscious perception the human being has of its untenable eroticism: always on the borderline between nature and culture, the animalistic and the verbal, the sensible and the nameable? What if the sacred were not the religious need for protection and omnipotence that institutions exploit but the jouissance of that *cleavage* – of that power/powerlessness – of the exquisite lapse? (Kristeva 2001, 27)

As Marina Warner observes in *Alone of All Her Sex*, devotion to the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene venerates two Western ideals of the feminine – the “consecrated chastity in the Virgin Mary and regenerate sexuality in the Magdalene” (1990, 235). Treated in liturgy, literature and art for centuries as a penitent sinner, Mary Magdalene emerges as more physically ‘real’, more bodily focused than the equally powerful but alone-of-all-her-sex Virgin.<sup>10</sup> Because of the presence of her erotic but penitent body, she answers both to the phallic (symbolic, paternal) gaze that accepts her penitence, and to the om-phalic (semiotic; maternal) one that identifies with Magdalene’s fate. Following Warner, in the “identification of physical beauty with temptation, and its practice of bodily mortification,” the Magdalene prototype “neatly condenses Christianity’s fear of women” (Warner 1990, 232) and its desire to re-form them.

The witness of the risen Christ, who, veiled and carrying her jar of ointment, walks up silently to the empty sepulchre in so many early Christian representations of the Resurrection, was transformed in the Middle Ages into a hermitess, the perfect embodiment of Christian repentance. As such, the Magdalene was considered a powerful and beneficent witch, a great and beloved saint. (Warner 1990, 229)

But Mary Magdalene can also be linked with the image of a heretic, anti-religious (not yet/no longer ‘reformed’) woman, incarnating “the equation between feminine beauty, sexuality and sin” (Haskins 1993, 3).

Angela Carter’s short story, “Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene” (1996)<sup>11</sup>, which provides a commentary on a painting by Georges de La Tour, draws on images of the

female body as a dividing line, representing the borderlands and the separation between symbolic language (phallogentric control) and semiotic ecstasy or *jouissance*. Like Kristeva (quoted above), Carter pursues a distinction “between belief and religion, on the one hand, and the sacred, on the other” (Kristeva 2001, 27). In portraying “the fallen woman who through Jesus was able to rise again” (de Boer 1996, 8), Carter’s narrative extends the image of Magdalene as “the repentant harlot” (Carter 1996, 409) towards the remnants of her “voluptuous,” “happy non-virgin” existence at the crossroads of sacredness and sacrilege:

The Virgin Mary wears blue. Her preference has sanctified the colour. We think of a ‘heavenly’ blue. But Mary Magdalene wears red, the colour of passion. The two women are twin paradoxes. One is not what the other is. One is a virgin and a mother; the other is a non-virgin, and childless. Note how the English language doesn’t contain a specific word to describe a woman who is grown-up, sexually mature and *not* a mother, unless such a woman is using her sexuality as her profession. (Carter 1996, 410)

Carter’s understanding of the sacred in connection with Magdalene recalls Clément’s concept of the sacred as a form of disorder. The sacred, in Clément’s perception, “shatters the order and introduces a new one... the mystic order, the trance, the transcendence” (2001, 113). In Carter’s text, as in Clément’s and Kristeva’s analysis, the sacred alludes to specifically ‘feminine’ traces.<sup>12</sup> If she had been an apostle, Magdalene would have had much to tell, since she “had followed Jesus from the beginning of his work,” was “one of the few who were present at the crucifixion and the burial,” and “the first to proclaim the resurrection” (de Boer 1996, 2). As a “fallen” woman, however, she does not speak but meditates through her ‘feminine’ body. The fallen and the feminine meet together in her female posture:

Mary Magdalene meditates upon the candle flame. She enters the blue core, the blue absence. She becomes something other than herself.... She can’t speak, won’t speak. In the desert, she will grunt, maybe, but she will put speech aside, after this, after she has meditated upon the candle flame and the mirror... But something has already been born out of this intercourse with the candle flame. See. She carries it already. She carries it

where, if she were a Virgin mother and not a sacred whore, she would rest her baby, not a living child but *a memento mori*, a skull. (Carter 1996, 413)

This silent archetype of Magdalene, the non-mother, “brought into existence by the powerful undertow of misogyny in Christianity,” (Warner 1990, 225) gives Carter an opportunity to speak against the association of Magdalene with an anti-maternal degradation of the flesh.<sup>13</sup> Echoing Warner’s argument, Carter opens her narrative with an image of Magdalene’s body as wounded but surviving, in a scene that emphasizes her separation from other pious women:

For a woman to be a virgin and a mother, you need a miracle; when a woman is not a virgin, nor a mother, either, nobody talks about miracles. Mary, the mother of Jesus, together with the other Mary, the mother of St John, and the Mary Magdalene, the repentant harlot, went down to the seashore; a woman named Fatima, a servant, went with them. They stepped into a boat, they threw away the rudder, they permitted the sea to take them where it wanted. It beached them near Marseilles. (Carter 1996, 409)

But the other Mary, the Magdalene, the not-mother, could not stop. Impelled by the demon of loneliness, she went off on her own through the Camargue; then she crossed limestone hill after limestone hill. Flints cut her feet, sun burned her skin. She ate fruit that had fallen from the tree of its own accord, like a perfect Manichean. She ate dropped berries. The black-browed Palestinian woman walked in silence, gaunt as famine, hairy as a dog. (1996, 409)

There is something about “the other” Mary, in Carter’s text, that connects with what Kristeva defines as “sexual *jouissance* and the immature child’s narcissistic dependency on its parents, but also [her] dependence on nature, biology, genetics” (Kristeva 2001, 27). Her *jouissance* contradicts the religion she follows, and diverges from Christian communion with other believers towards hermetic loneliness, self-denial, and mortification, as she separates herself from the “first” Mary. While interpreting de La Tour’s depiction of Magdalene, Carter’s narrator experiences a sensation similar to what Clément refers to as a “bizarre feeling” in front of a sacred work. She experiences “the sensation that someone wants to impose a vision” on her (Clément 2001, 120): that the religious doctrine leaves no



choice of perception, and that precisely this lack of choice provokes antagonism, and a desire for culturally subversive insights.

Mary Magdalene, the Venus in sackcloth. George de La Tour's picture does not show a woman in sackcloth, but her chemise is coarse and simple enough to be a penitential garment, or, at least, the kind of garment that shows you were not thinking of personal adornment when you put it on. Even though the chemise is deeply open on the bosom, it does not seem to disclose flesh as such, but a flesh that is more akin to the wax of the burning candle, to the way the wax candle is irradiated by its own flame, and glows. So you could say that, from the waist up, this Mary Magdalene is on the high road to penitence, but, from the waist down, which is always the more problematic part, there is the question of her long, red skirt. (Carter 1996, 409-10)

Although merely suggested, Magdalene's sexual *jouissance* could be linked here with the sacred and the 'feminine,' as a type of her(m)etic link already crossing the forbidden border towards the knowledge of unexplored eroticism, sensuality, the body. Whereas Clément argues that the sacred is sexual "[b]ecause it authorizes the brutal insurrection of the forbidden humors during ceremonies" (2001, 20), Carter explains that "[b]ecause Mary Magdalene is a woman and childless she goes out into the wilderness. The others, the mothers, stay and make a church, where people come" (Carter 1996, 410). The sacred associated with Magdalene's untamed sexuality is impossible within the domesticated space of tamed women; however, as Carter seems to imply, it is not (culturally) impossible altogether.

The ecstasy Magdalene experiences in mortifying her body, in purging her body of its 'impure' femininity, suggests that it is precisely the intersection of sensuality and the 'beyond,' of earth-bound and unbound elements, a dialogue of oppositions, that transforms her experience into 'the sacred'. As Clément puts it, the sacred "authorizes the lapse, the disappearance of the Subject, the syncope, vertigo, the trance, ecstasy" (Clément 2001, 30). Magdalene's earthly ecstatic sins represent, in Carter's narrative, the dark side of the ancient fertility virgin, the dark side of the moon erased by Christian orthodoxy, as referred to by

Irigaray in "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother". Until her repentance, she is the trace of an unencumbered woman, the extravagant combination of a harlot and a virgin that to some extent "absorbed the role of the classical goddesses of love" (Warner 1990, 235)<sup>14</sup>. While the "unspotted goodness" of the Virgin Mary "keeps her in the position of the Platonic ideal" and "prevents the sinner from identifying with her," it is Mary Magdalene who "holds up a comforting mirror to those who sin again and again, and promises joy to human frailty" (1990, 235). Is her scarlet frock, as Carter's text suggests, only a piece of "left-over finery" (Carter 1996, 410)?

Was it the only frock she had, the frock she went whoring in, then repented in, then set sail in? Did she walk all the way to the Sainte-Baume in this red skirt? It doesn't look travel-stained or worn or torn. It is a luxurious, even scandalous skirt. A scarlet dress for a scarlet woman. (Carter 1996, 410)

As Warner suggests, the Virgin Mary, the mother of god, and Mary Magdalene, the lover of god, complement each other, and together form a diptych of the Christian woman (Warner 1990, 235)<sup>15</sup>. Magdalene, however, and this facet of her character is traced by Carter, eventually transcends her female sexuality, turning "into something wild and strange, into a female version of John the Baptist, a hairy hermit, as good as naked, transcending gender, sex obliterated, nakedness irrelevant" (Carter 1996, 411). In her long-lasting retreat as a hermit, her body develops into that of an old crone/ hag, and fulfills the final role of the pagan triple goddess that is lacking in the eternally young Virgin Mary.

Sometimes she wears only her hair; it never saw a comb, long, matted, unkempt, hanging down to her knees. She belts her own hair round her waist with the rope with which, each night, she lashes herself, making a rough tunic of it. On these occasions, the transformation from the young lovely, voluptuous Mary Magdalene, the happy non-virgin, the party girl, the woman taken in adultery – on these occasions, the transformation is complete. (1996, 410)

Has she any choice of 'where she wants to be', or is she "beyond choice," beyond antagonisms, without any other "option but virtue" (Carter 1996, 411)? In Donatello's picture, also mentioned by Carter, Magdalene's repentance borders on masochism, an internalised desire for self-destruction, a nullification of the flesh that, in a way, is a type of choice:

... dried up by the suns of the wilderness, battered by wind and rain, anorexic, toothless, a body entirely annihilated by the soul. You can almost smell the odour of the kind of sanctity that reeks from her – it's rank, it's raw, it's horrible. By the ardour with which she hated her early life of so-called 'pleasure'. The mortification of the flesh comes naturally to her... Penitence becomes sado-masochism. Self-punishment is its own reward. (Carter 1996, 411)

The odor of sanctity, also mentioned by Clément and Kristeva, marks the intersection of the feminine and the sacred with violence and the uneasiness of bodily vapors:

As a matter of fact, perfume, or vapor/odor if you like, permeates the relation of women to the sacred – Mary Magdalene, who anoints the feet of Jesus with perfumed oil, is the consecrated figure for that – but it is nevertheless charged with a great deal of violence, and also attests to a sacré sense of unease. (Kristeva 2001, 22)

In abolishing the physical distance between herself and Jesus, a distance between "the sinful woman and God" constructed by the post-medieval Church (de Boer 1996, 71), Magdalene comes within reach of *jouissance*, and returns the divine kiss<sup>16</sup>. This trace, virtually erased from the popular myths of Mary Magdalene, indicates that she might have been a visionary entrusted (by the kiss?) with divine wisdom. Since Jesus's kisses can be seen as a divine penetration of the female mouth<sup>17</sup>, the Magdalene-harlot receives a sacred gift from her master that heals (purifies) her body of the "seven devils"<sup>18</sup>. But why then, returning to "The Wrightsman Magdalene," "has she taken her pearl necklace with her," to the cave, the site of her mortification? "Look at it, lying in front of the mirror. And her long hair has been most beautifully brushed. Is she, yet, fully repentant?" (Carter 1996, 410) Here again sacredness, as an odour from her mortified flesh, meshes with her erotic desires, her body in the mirror

is not yet fully lost. Secluded in a cave, with long hair covering her nakedness<sup>19</sup>, Carter's Magdalene (the one from de la Tour's painting) represents the penitent Lilith: her body is neglected, wrecked, but not entirely abandoned. Her speech remains incomprehensible, a demarcation line between limited human language and unlimited/ uncontrolled communication between the semiotic and symbolic structures.

Carter had already examined the not-mother's body in an earlier story: "Black Venus"<sup>20</sup> (1985). Alluding to Greco-Roman pre-Christian religious prototypes of the feminine sacred, Carter's Venus appears as a half-prostitute, half-sacred site of *métissage*. Drawing on the ambiguous figure of Jeanne Duval, one of Baudelaire's lovers, Carter pursues the subject of female identification with strangeness, victimization and cultural incompatibility, "as if the fatal drama of the primal fruit-theft must recur again and again, with cyclic regularity" (Carter 1996, 231). As a concubine, a "woman who makes free use of her attractiveness - adventuress, vamp, femme fatale," Jeanne evokes de Beauvoir's "disquieting type" of woman, who keeps "an ancient fear... alive" (de Beauvoir 1993, 201). Jeanne's fate ironically draws on biblical traces of Eve, who preferred knowledge to virtue (Carter 1996, 231), and of Jezebel, a foreign prostitute<sup>21</sup>. But she also goes beyond these traces, and creates her own paradigm of un/belonging.<sup>22</sup>

Re-writing de Beauvoir's concept of the seductive adventuress, the Sphinx deeply anchored in the poet's fantasies<sup>23</sup>, Carter portrays her as an object of phallocentric desire, a witch to be tamed, "deprived of history" (Carter 1996, 238), and also of trance, heresy, disorder.

Nobody seems to know in what year Jeanne Duval was born, although the year in which she met Charles Baudelaire (1842) is precisely logged and biographies of his other mistresses... are well documented. Besides Duval, she also used the names Prosper and Lemer, as if her name was of no consequence. Where she came from is a problem;

books suggest Mauritius, in the Indian ocean, or Santo Domingo, in the Caribbean, take your pick of two different sides of the world. (Her pays d'origine of less importance than it would have been had she been a wine) (1996, 237)

Jeanne is "the pure child of the colony. The colony – white, imperious – had fathered her" (1996, 238). She knows nothing but the omnipresent Law of the Father, her "mother went off with the sailors" (1996, 238). Upon her arrival in Paris, she continues her colonized life as a muse at the service of the poet. Her body dances in the silence of "a kept woman" (1996, 241), chained to her "Daddy's" fancies:

After she's got a drink or two inside her, however, she stops coughing, grown a bit more friendly, will consent to unpin her hair and let him play with it, the way he likes to. And if her native indolence does not prove too much for her – she is capable of sprawling, as in a vegetable trance, for hours, for days, in the dim room by the smoky fire – nevertheless, she will sometimes lob the butt of her cheroot in the fire and be persuaded to take off her clothes and dance for Daddy who, she will grudgingly admit when pressed, is a good Daddy, buys her pretties, allocates her the occasional lump of hashish, keeps her off the streets. (1996, 233)

Is this why she keeps on dancing as "the goddess of his heart," his "ideal" Siren, prostituted, mute? Is it the Freudian (little boy's) suppressed desire, as de Beauvoir suggests, that she wishes to conform to, that makes her keep on dancing? Or, is this perhaps the classical dichotomy (woman-as-matter versus man-as-soul) that assigns her to the position of an object/ fetish? Carter's text suggests both: the unresolved relationship between the fears and desires of the poet enchanted by Jeanne's controversial (simultaneously prostituted and unattainable) body, as well as her own wish to insult the Law she has conformed to.

This dance, which he wanted her to perform so much and had especially devised for her, consisted of a series of voluptuous poses one following another; private –room-in-a-bordello stuff but tasteful... He liked her to put on all her bangles and beads when she did her dance, she dressed up in a set of clanking jewellery he'd given her, paste, nothing she could sell or she'd have sold it. Meanwhile, she hummed a Creole melody, she liked the ones with ribald words about what the shoemaker's wife did at Mardi Gras or the size of some fisherman's legendary tool but Daddy paid no attention to what song his siren sang, he fixed his quick, bright, dark eyes upon her decorated skin as if, sucker, authentically entranced. (Carter 1996, 233)

It is the intersection of the poet's fascination and Jeanne's narcissism that designates her body as an object of desire.<sup>24</sup> The Freudian concept of fear of castration enters into a dialogue with the fascination with fear, an always suspended understanding of shifting positions, a continuous deferral of security that climaxes in orgasmic death, in the mouth of the *vagina dentata*. She

lay resplendently on the bed in a room morosely papered red and black; he liked to have her make a spectacle of herself, to provide a sumptuous feast for his bright eyes that were always bigger than his belly. Venus lies on the bed, waiting for a wind to rise: the sooty albatross hankers for the storm. Whirlwind! (Carter 1996, 239)

The 'essence' of foreign womanhood, as incarnated in the figure of Jeanne, recalls de Beauvoir's concept of the 'second sex', in which the female acts, not as a "subject, transcendence, creative power," but as "an object charged with fluids" (de Beauvoir 1993, 173). However, the fluids in Carter's text attain a transcendental signification: Jeanne's body as an object of desire has something permeable, 'porous' about it; it evokes subversion and the vulnerability of order. Jeanne's trance displays "the atrocious mixture of corruption and innocence" (Carter 1996, 235) that transmits its eroticism as an experience of the sacred.<sup>25</sup> She is Baudelaire's weird goddess, the archaic and yet 'denaveled' witch, suspended between his phallic orgasm and her om-phalic separation from the mother. Baudelaire's position in Carter's text belongs to the ethics/imperatives of the metaphysical tradition, as referred to by Irigaray in reference to Levinas's phenomenology of the caress. Like Levinas in Irigaray's analysis, Carter's figure of the poet "falls back within the boundaries staked out by the philosophical constitution of the masculine subject":

Although he takes pleasures in caressing, he abandons the feminine other, leaves her to sink, in particular into the darkness of a pseudo-animality, in order to return to his responsibilities in the world of men-amongst-themselves. For him, the feminine does

not stand for an other to be respected in her human freedom and human identity” (Irigaray 2000, 183).

Weird goddess, dusky as night,  
reeking of musk smeared on tobacco,  
a shaman conjured you, a Faust of the savannah,  
black-thighed witch, midnight’ child... (Carter 1996, 237)<sup>26</sup>

Drawing on Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil* (source of the above quotation), Kristeva refers to the “troubling porousness of women,” and proposes perfume as a metaphor of female repression.<sup>27</sup> She describes the female ego as “vaporous” and links “the fate of female eroticism to the fate of motherhood”:

... even though they are two distinct sides of the female experience; in any case , the vaginal body... imposes on woman an experience of the ‘interior,’ of ‘internal reality’ that does not allow itself be easily sacrificed by the prohibition, or represented by the codes resulting from the prohibition (language, images, thought, and so on). Whether mistress or mother, a woman remains a stranger to the sacrifice: she participates in it, she assumes it, but she disrupts it, she can also threaten it. (Kristeva, 2001 16)

The porousness of Jeanne’s dancing body is associated with some illegal, subversive, sacredness - that is, with heresy and sacrilege. Accentuating the connection between Jeanne’s *strange-ness*<sup>28</sup> and (the flowers of) evil as a specific reinforcement of her foreign status, Carter’s text suggests that Jeanne is indeed “a stranger to the sacrifice”. The odour (scent, perfume) emanating from her body fuses horror and desire into a fluctuating fantasy of pleasures and dangers that need each other as a supplement, as a necessary foil. However, it is not Jeanne who projects herself as a fantasy of Eve, in fact, she is void of Eve’s knowledge since “she never bothered to bite any apple at all. She wouldn’t have known what knowledge was *for*, would she? She was in neither a state of innocence nor a state of grace” (Carter 1996, 231). Jeanne does not initiate her projection, but she has learned how to sell it, how to utilize the fantasy, so that the poet “thinks she is a vase of darkness; if he tips her up, black light will spill out. She is not Eve but, herself, the forbidden fruit, and he

has eaten her!” (1996, 237). In a state of permanent cultural suspension, Jeanne is the incarnation of evil, “although she wishes to do no such thing” (1996, 237).

Carter’s Jeanne can also be associated with the Strange Woman of Proverbs analyzed by Claudia Camp in “Feminization and Divinization of Evil in Biblical Thought” (1985), and with Jezebel in Pippin’s interpretation of that figure in *Apocalyptic Bodies* (1999). As an extension of phallogentric fears and fascination, Jeanne’s ‘evilness’ feeds on the metaphysics of deficiency and the supposed uncleanness of her body. Her carnal sin is connected to the alienation of polluted, and therefore segregated, conditions (Douglas 1969, 97).<sup>29</sup> De Beauvoir’s female body as a punishable object of desire (incorporated into Pippin’s interpretation of the biblical Jezebel), could be used as a parallel to Carter’s configuration of Jeanne. Jezebel, as Pippin suggests, is constructed as a guilty body, the “dying other,” an exotic and dangerous femme fatale (1999, 186). Jezebel’s foreign status can become culturally acceptable, but her “uncontrolled” rebellious womanhood is not. In her accomplishments as an *acting* woman, Jeanne-as-Jezebel incorporates the Strange Woman, “institutionally legitimated as the other woman,” and “portrayed as an active creator of her own alien status” (Camp 1985, 322). Alluding to female impurity, Pippin concentrates on Jezebel’s dying body, calling it “dung,” “the ultimate impurity... Jezebel and her religion are excrement to be excreted” (1999, 38). In a similar environment of carnal pollution, Carter constructs her Venus as a future hag/ witch, destined for the unavoidable fate of a polluting and polluted body that will be punished, and will “rot”:

When she was on her own, having a few drinks in front of the fire, thinking about it, it made her break out in horrible hag’s laughter, as if she were already the hag she would become enjoying a grim joke at the expense of the pretty, secretly festering thing she still was. At Walpurgisnacht, the young witch boasted to the old witch: ‘Naked on a goat, I display my fine young body. ‘How the old witch laughed! ‘You’ll rot!’ I’ll rot, thought Jeanne, and laughed. (Carter 1996, 235)



Her body, infected and punished with syphilis (that in Carter's version is to be seen as one of Baudeliere's unspoken gifts to his "fleur du mal"), makes her conscious of physical borders, those inside her porous body and those on the outside:

she would have liked a bath... was a little worried about a persistent vaginal discharge that smelled of mice, something new, something ominous, something horrid. But: no hot water, not at this hour" (1996, 236).

These impurities of her body are, moreover, linked with the 'polluted' language of her granny, who spoke "Creole, patois, [she] knew no other language... knew it badly," and "taught it badly" to Jeanne. In turn, Jeanne

did her best to convert it into good French when she came to Paris and started mixing with swells but made a hash of it, her heart wasn't in it, no wonder. It was as though her tongue had been cut out and another one sewn in that did not fit well. (Carter 1996, 239)

Creole, projected as an unclean, bastard language of 'mixed' race people, is Jeanne's mother tongue. Its structure/ mixture cannot be "corrected," and will refuse to belong. Her two mouths are thus mixed too, interconnected in their inadequacy, alienation, estrangement, and bound to the stigma of pollution.

Alluding to the Strange Woman in Camp's analysis, Jeanne becomes a double target because of her status as a *métisse*. First, she is condemned as an adventuress who "breaks social boundaries" and "disrupts the stability of the family household" (Camp 1985, 312), then as "a foreign national, who introduces the dangers of foreign worship and of ramifications of power and wealth outside the community" (1985, 312). Carter speculates:

Maybe he found her crying because the kids in the street were chucking stones at her, calling her a 'black bitch' or worse and spattering the beautiful white flounces of her crinoline with handfuls of tossed mud they scooped from the gutters where they thought she belonged because she was a whore who had the nerve to sashay to the corner shop for cheroots or ordinaire or rum with her nose stuck up in the air as if she were the Empress of all the Africas. (Carter 1996, 238)

Jeanne is therefore a double stranger: "not a professional prostitute" but a cross-dresser, a

type of female drag queen: "Had she been a prostitute, the sage's depiction of utter evil would have been undercut, for the professional prostitute does have a place in a patriarchal world" (Camp 1985, 322). She, however, is positioned in a recognizable cultural structure, a stigmatized vacuum of foreignness conceptualized by Carter in terms of both race/ ethnicity (as black) and of gender (as Venus). To be a woman in the patriarchal structure, as Carter argues (echoing also Butler's argument), is "to be in drag," to "already exist in a duplicitous state of affectation" (Webb 2000, 210)<sup>30</sup>:

If in the carnival world, by putting on masks and being other than what we are, we transgress the order of the 'real' world, then what does this play-acting mean for women who, in the 'real' world, already exist in a duplicitous state of affectation. The idea of carnival seems to presuppose a monistic world: the experience of femininity contradicts this, implying that the 'real' world is itself a place of diversity, of masks and deception. (2000, 211)

To be Jeanne Duval, a strange, weird woman, is to expose this invisible, perfectly reenacted condition in a visibly disturbing un/belonging. It is to be "like a piano in a country where everybody has had their hands cut off" (Carter 1996, 231).

Moreover, according to Pippin's analysis of the biblical Jezebel in *Apocalyptic Bodies*, Jezebel "is a fantasy space" of a foreign culture and religion. She does not die, but becomes a vampire, a Lilith-like creature eternally activating her evil potential:

Jezebel returns eternally as vamp/ire, the phantom-ghost who roams time haunting both men and women. Jezebel is the vamp/ire that cannot be killed, who roams through other texts and times and women. She has a future in a different form; she is constantly re-formed in the image of male desire and fear. (Pippin 1999, 39)

Carter's heroine does not die either; she is a survivor figure, an ugly hag, "deaf, dumb and paralyzed" (1996, 242), a phantom of a survivor (while it is Baudelaire who dies in Carter's text):

He told his mother to make sure that Jeanne was looked after but his mother didn't give her anything. Nadar says he saw Jeanne hobbling on crutches along the pavement to the dram-shop; her teeth were gone, she had a mammy-rag tied around her head but you

could still see that her wonderful hair had fallen out. Her face would terrify the little children. He did not stop to speak to her. (1996, 242)

In a twist of irony, Carter's narrative does not stop either; it goes on to outwit Jezebel's curse, turning the curse (syphilis) into a blessing. With a little extra help, Jeanne-Jezebel will not rot forever, but, indeed, activate her potential as a crone. Skipping the mother-stage, she moves strategically to the stage of lost fertility (le Guin 1989, 3)<sup>31</sup>. For Carter and le Guin alike, the "loss of fertility does not mean loss of desire and fulfillment... The woman who is willing to make that change must become pregnant with herself, at last. She must bear herself, her third self" (1989, 5). Jeanne is willing, and starts to cooperate. A man "who called himself her brother" ("he might have been Mephistopheles, for all she cared") explains to her: "You can buy teeth, you know; you can buy hair. They make the best wigs from the shorn locks of novices in convents." She is "surprised to find out how much she was worth" (Carter 1996, 243):

Fifty francs for Jeanne, here, thirty francs for Jeanne, there. It all added up... Add to this the sale of a manuscript or two, the ones she hadn't used to light her cheroots with. Some books, especially the ones with the flowery dedications. Sale of cuff-links and drawerful upon drawerful of pink kid gloves, hardly used. Her brother knew where to get rid of them. Later, any memorabilia of the poet, even his clumsy drawings, would fetch a surprising sum. They left a portfolio with an enterprising agent. (1996, 243)

Jeanne thus can afford her final pregnancy and can emerge as the triumphant "newly born" crone. She can afford to un-colonize her mother country, her mother tongue, and her body. She does it finally to celebrate her cultural un/belonging, her existence as *la mestiza* who learned how to cope with contradictions.

In a new dress of black tussore, her somewhat ravaged but carefully repaired face partially concealed by a flattering veil, she chugged away from Europe on a steamer bound for the Caribbean like a respectable widow and she was not yet fifty, after all. She might have been a Creole wife of a minor civil servant setting off home after his death. Her brother went first, to look out for the property they were going to buy. (1996, 243)

In undoing the conceptual knots bequeathed by laws and prohibitions, the Black Venus and Mary Magdalene alike transcend their feminine sexuality as they move into a less gender-specific cronehood: Magdalene's nakedness is covered with hair, Venus dressed in decent black. One could say that their final metamorphoses are respectable, sanctioned, but they do not reach them without having first touched abasement, animality. Hidden at the edge of the world<sup>32</sup>, in a hermitage or a remote colony, their "internal experience" remains "a transgression of sexual prohibitions in *jouissance*, on the threshold of self-annihilation, of consciousness, and often on the threshold of death" (Kristeva 2001, 24):

Paradoxically, in evoking the divine – the absolute of spirituality – we evoke journeys to the opposite limit, where the human sinks into animality and nothingness. (2001, 24)

There the bodies do not stop dancing. This "exquisite lapse" of order retains the element of subversive denial: the absence of the physiological body hinting at the sacred that, in fact, "may not be the same as the religious" (Kristeva 2001, 27). In examining phallogocentric structures of institutionalized religion, imperialism and colonization as modes of specifically female alienation and debasement, Carter's implications meet with Kristeva's and Clément's concept of the borderline between "the animalistic and the verbal" as a specifically female type of sacredness; a pagan, illicit, and prohibited *jouissance* of the physiological and cultural cleavage. Ambiguously suspended between the poles of empowerment and marginalization, both Carter's figures, Mary Magdalene and Jeanne, slip across borders, excluded from dominant culture but forming their own sub-cultural paradigm of "cultural possibility" (Butler 1990, 77). This theme, although in different cultural contexts, will be pursued and further developed in the following literary analyses.

LOCATING THE HERETIC: TONI MORRISON'S *PARADISE* AND MARILYNNE ROBINSON'S *HOUSEKEEPING*

Perhaps by connecting the two, depression and hysteria, we will find a key – or rather, a fall. Women, exploited minorities, have the right to trances – or to hysterical attacks, depending on the vocabulary. But what is true in Africa is true of all situations of distress: magic, group worship, trance. And when you are exploited, you have the right to the depressive condition, that seems undeniably obvious. (Clément 2001, 174)

In her article “On the Politics of Domesticity,” Nancy Armstrong suggests that political power is closely associated with the modern household, rather than with the clinic believed by Foucault to provide “the proto-institutional setting” (Armstrong 1997, 918).<sup>33</sup> ‘Home’, overseen by a woman, actually precedes the formation of other social institutions, and as a locus of female authority and creativity it challenges the phallogocentric sphere of the public. As argued earlier by Douglas and de Beauvoir, a housewife is a transformer of natural products into cultural ones. Being responsible for preserving the boundaries between natural and cultural life, she shifts matter out of place into matter in place (Douglas 1969, 40)<sup>34</sup>.

With her fire going, woman becomes sorceress; by a simple movement, as in beating eggs, or through the magic of fire, she effects the transmutation of substances: matter becomes food. There is enchantment in these alchemies, there is poetry in making preserves; the housewife has caught duration in the snare of sugar, she has enclosed life in jars. (de Beauvoir 1993, 476)

However, when this process is disrupted by some illegal, culturally abject activity such as witchcraft, “the authority and identity of the housewife are put in question; she can no longer predict or control the processes of transformation required” (Purkiss 1996, 97). She becomes a witch, the symbolic anti-housewife figure, responsible for disorder, hysteria and other processes of contamination. Simultaneously, “witchcraft depositions reveal that the boundaries of the home were always being crossed,” while “the notion of the house as a

closed container, with resolutely maintained boundaries” is “at odds with the identity of the housewife as a member of the community” (1996, 98).

For Toni Morrison<sup>35</sup>, the concept of a subversive household (different from the models carefully designed by patriarchy) counters the traditional exclusion of women from the socio-political structures of power. This power, understood so far as a multiplicity of discourses produced by mechanisms operating in different (but all male-dominated) institutions, is undercut in Morrison’s *Paradise* (1998) with a discourse of distress, depression and hysteria. These emerge in the narrative as subversive forms of race and gender specific sub-cultural expression. The surfacing of the witch figure as a container for these forms is at once empowering and incompatible with the dominant discourse:

Something’s going on out there, and I don’t like any of it. No men. Kissing on themselves. Babies hid away. Jesus! No telling what else... I hear they drink like fish too... Bitches. More like witches... Before those heifers came to town this was a peaceable kingdom. The others before them at least had some religion. These here are sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church and I bet you a dollar to a fat nickel they ain’t thinking about one either. (Morrison 1998, 276)

According to Armstrong, once the household “changes into an impenetrable place of magic forces, escaping control of the authorities, every attempt will be made to destroy it” (1997, 918)<sup>36</sup>. In order to preserve its access and relation to power and knowledge, the dominant cultural discourse (community, clique) will persecute everything that disturbs and shifts the boundaries of that relation. This is precisely the case in Morrison’s narrative, in which the conservative Afro-American community called Ruby cannot cope with the ‘newcomers’ who inhabit an abandoned Convent at the edge of their settlement.

If they stayed to themselves, that’d be something. But they don’t. They meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families. We can’t have it, you all. Can’t have it at all. (Morrison 1998, 276)

The suspicious and polluting Convent “in some desolate part of the American West” (224) was always already “entitled to special treatment” (1998, 233), since previously it was inhabited by “Catholic women with no male mission to control them”. Those who have come now to inhabit the abandoned mission are “obviously not nuns, real or even pretend, but members, it was thought, of some other cult” (1998, 11). In fact, the newly arrived women are homeless, exploited, and hysterical daughters, and mothers (to be). In finding a ‘temporary’ lodging in the Convent (where they “stop by to recover”), they cross a borderline between ‘what is out there where they come from’ (the oppressive paternal structures) and what is ‘inside’. The unknown inside of the Convent reverses the patriarchal norm by expelling it to the ‘outside’, excluding it from its ‘center’. The ‘inside’ promises shelter and rest, it speaks a different language, neither inviting nor rejecting but strategically ignoring and thereby coping with the ‘outside’.

Over the past eight years they had come. The first one, Mavis, during Mother’s long illness; the second right after she died. Then two more. Each one asking permission to linger a few days but never actually leaving. Now and then one or another packed a scruffy little bag, said goodbye and seemed to disappear for a while – but only for a while. They always come back to stay on, living like mice in a house no one, not even the tax collector, wanted, with a woman in love with cemetery. Consolata looked at them through her bronze or gray or blue of her various sunglasses and saw broken girls, frightened girls, weak and lying. (1998, 222)

Consolata, “the woman in love with cemetery” and the last “legitimate” resident of the Convent, is also depicted as a ‘confused’ woman who suffers from depression and extensive consumption of alcohol. As a nine-year-old, and already no longer a virgin, she was “rescued” by the Mother, an ambitious missionary, from the severe conditions of her life in Mexico, and brought to the Convent. There, in the environment of another phallogentric structure, she has been taught to reject “the ordinary female condition as impure” (Warner 1990, 77). For thirty years “she offered her body and her soul to God’s

Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself" (Morrison 1998, 225). As a "typical Christian conundrum, oppressive and liberating at once," (Warner 1990, 77) the Convent becomes her home, her element, and a structure that she is never to abandon but rather to transform. Defined (in a postcolonial context) by a cultural transgression "supremely incompatible with the proper order" (Balibar 1995, 190), Consolata represents an intermediary figure, introducing from the very beginning her "strangeness," her "irony," and her "latent atheism" into the "paternal cult". She is a foreign national, a dutiful nun, a passionate lover, a depressed woman, and finally a 'witch' composed of cultural splits and fissures. Negotiating as such between the 'phallus' and the *omphalos*, she is at odds with the notion of a housewife who resolutely maintains the boundaries of home. On the contrary, she opens up her household to the chaotic and disorganized 'outside': the lesbian, the bad mother, the hysteric, all types of women stigmatized as 'out of control'. Suspending the sublime model of the virginal life, Consolata 'runs' the Convent in a permanent erasure of the nun in herself, in a disabling state of being non-mother, no-body. If she seems strange, it is because of her alienation, her acknowledgment of the unbridgeable gap between self and the other, self and the 'outside'. Separated from the two people she loved, first from her lover and then from the Mother, Consolata gradually succumbs to melancholy and drinking. Repelled by her own "sluglike existence" (that of a menopausal crone), she seems to tolerate the other women's "resignation, self-pity, mute rage, disgust and shame" (Morrison 1998, 250). Their experiences connect them, and blurring the border between them and her, they tell a common story of cultural displacement.

Other than Mavis, who had been there the longest, it was getting harder and harder to tell one from another. What she knew of them she had mostly forgotten, and it seemed less and less important to remember any of it, because the timbre of each of their voices told the same tale: disorder, deception and, what Sister Roberta warned the Indian girls against, drift. (1998, 221-222)



As drifters and 'witches', Morrison's women 'oscillate' in an oppressive atmosphere between normalcy and the asylum. Silently breaking the rules and silently being condemned, they end up like Cixous's heretics "in confinement," in isolation, and eventually "in death" (Clément and Cixous 1986, 8). The longer they dwell among themselves, the more intense their bodies become, and the less 'coordinated' their physical behavior. These are anxious women, disillusioned and disinterested in 'proper' housekeeping:

Not only did they nothing except the absolutely necessary, they had no plans to do anything. Instead of plans they had wishes... They spoke of men who came to caress them in their sleep; of men waiting for them in the desert or by cool water; of men who once had desperately loved them, or men who should have loved them, might have loved, would have. (Morrison 1998, 222-223)

The women's "dwelling" and their bisexuality expand thus into an unbalanced, hysterical condition, and increasingly threaten to break out beyond control; the women are the "go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings" (1998, 156). While for them the gradually collapsing Convent symbolizes security, for the town nearby it is a haunted house, horrifying precisely because it contains secrets in *disruptive excess*. The Convent's "kitchen is bigger than the house in which either man [from the town] was born" (1998, 5). In the cell-rooms there is no 'proper' furniture, and hammocks replace beds.

strange things [are] nailed or taped to the walls or propped in a corner. A 1968 calendar, ... a letter written in blood so smeary its satanic message cannot be deciphered; an astrology chart; a fedora tilted on the plastic neck of a female torso... the series of infant booties and shoes ribboned to a cord hanging from a crib in the last bedroom they enter. A teething ring, cracked and stiff, dangles among the tiny shoes. (1998, 7)

Viewed from Ruby's phallogentric perspective, and contested, the Convent goes astray, transgresses and transforms into a coven, a den of non-structure, and "a carefully planned disguise for what [is] really going on" (1998, 11). It is a place at the edge of culture, a locus of subversive intention, with no "cross of Jesus," no men, no language (1998, 7). Both the

Co(n)ven(t) and its inhabitants are culturally formless, symbolically embracing the boundless body of the witch, her ability to transform into other bodies, or to change shape and disappear. It frightens by invoking uncertainty about the witch's 'true' identity, her intention and her course of action: "Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside" (1998, 39). As a metaphor for unspoken female desire/ *jouissance*, the Convent's 'inside' epitomizes an impenetrable maternal womb. The sphere is ambiguously polluted, seductive, suspending "the notion of the house as a closed container" (Purkiss 1996, 98). Its self-contained, maternal (omphalic) character echoes the earlier days of the Convent, when self-sufficient nuns

took steps to keep up the property and to incur debt the foundation could not meet... They made sauces and jellies and European bread. Sold eggs, peppers, hot relish and angry barbecue sauce, which they advertised on a square of cardboard covering the faded blue and white name of the school... Pecan saplings planted in the forties were strong in 1960. The Convent sold the nuts, and when pies from the harvest were made, they went as soon as posted. They made rhubarb pie so delicious it made customers babble, and the barbecue sauce got a heavenly reputation based on the hellfire peppers. (Morrison 1998, 242)

The luring, transformative capacity of the Convent increases after the collapse of the missionaries, and in offering shelter to the exploited it threatens to seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their 'proper' gender roles ("women whose identity rested on the men they married - if marriage applied" (1998, 187)). And it is above all the independent status of the Convent that endangers the carefully re-enacted center-edge hierarchy of the conservative Afro-American community. The road connecting the town with the Convent represents an umbilical cord connecting the phallic children with the maternal space of filth; it has an explicitly female character:

it was women who walked this road. Only women. Never men. For more than twenty years Lone had watched them. Back and forth, back and forth; crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost. ... out here where the wind handles you like a man, women dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians. (1998, 270)

Moreover, the unpredictable inside of the Convent “connect[s] all [the] catastrophes”: the stillborn babies, abortions, alcohol, wickedness and filthy music: “And in the Convent were those women” (1998, 11). Morrison goes on to narrate the story of their extermination, which happens as a result of the community’s fear of losing its masterfully attained racial/cultural identity. Perhaps, “somewhere else they could have been accepted... But not here. Not in Ruby” (1998, 157). Ruby is where

nine 8-rocks [handsome utterly black men] murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at least, abortionists at most); and (c) because they could - which was what being an 8-rock meant to them and was also what the ‘deal’ required. (1998, 297)

In the meantime, however, unaware of the 8-rock’s conspiracy, Consolata undergoes her own private metamorphosis. “Discovered” by Lone, the “practicing” woman from Ruby, she is introduced into the practice of “stepping into” people’s souls, with ease since Consolata is “gifted,” as Lone expected “from the start” (Morrison 1998, 245). Though finding it “repugnant” at first, Consolata soon discovers the usefulness and necessity of utilizing her ‘witchcraft’. Thus, while transgressing and transforming the paternal cult, she finally succeeds in finding “another sacred space” (Kristeva 2001, 64) and another “cultural possibility” (Butler 1990, 77) within the paternal. Nostalgia and depression, as Kristeva believes, “are indispensable” in this process, since it is “only in mourning the old seductions and beliefs of our ancestors, in exhausting their artificial spark in the accounting of a sober meditation, that we can move in the direction of new truths” (Kristeva 2001, 142). Consolata’s extensive mourning in the cellar indeed leads her out of depression and into the ‘discovery’ of some other conditions and states: “I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for” (Morrison 1989, 262). Although scared upon such an unexpected

transformation of the woman they learned to ignore, none of the inhabitants leaves the Convent.

There were nervous questions, a single burst of frightened giggling, a bit of pouting and simulated outrage, but in no time at all they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave. (1998, 262)

Confined to her household, Consolata transforms the place from within, and these (magic) transformations connect her with one of the most interesting aspects of the historical witch, the healer figure who actively participates in communal life. Her sacredness/ heresy “belongs to the private sphere, from which the rite stems, even if it is collective. Initiation, ritual, healing, love itself have to do with individuals” (Clément 2001, 176). In a ‘mixed’ language difficult to follow, a meditative trance rather than an organized grammar, she manages to formulate the message to her half-frightened, half-amused listeners:

My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him. When he fell away the woman rescue me from my body again. Twice she saves it. When her body sickens I care for it in every way flesh works. I hold it in my arms and between my legs. Clean it, rock it, enter it to keep it breath. After she is dead I can not get past that. My bones on hers the only good thing. Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wandering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true, like bones. It is good, like bones. One sweet, one bitter. Where is it lost? Hear me, listen. Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary’s mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve. (1998, 263)

In consolidating all the ‘abominable’ conditions of a neglected, dark and moist household, the cellar, where the wine is kept, becomes the central place of their meetings. It evokes the remoteness of the womb, as does any windowless room, closed container or other sealed, her(m)etic space. As the locus of Consolata’s erotic desires, it is a secret crossroads, a place of coming together of the broken, depressive, hysterical and the inarticulate, sublime, semiotic.

In the beginning the most important thing was to template. First they had to scrub the cellar floor until its stones were as clean as rocks on a shore. Then they ringed the place

with candles. Consolata told each to undress and lie down. In flattering light under Consolata's soft vision they did as they were told. How should we lie? However you feel... When each found a position she could tolerate on the cold, uncompromising floor, Consolata walked around her and painted the body's silhouette. Once the outlines were complete, each was instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight. (1998, 263)

The "predisposition for the sacred," as referred to by Clément, "better accommodates itself to naked rebellion, insurrectional heroism, the enthusiasm of the moment, in short, to the gaps in social time" (2001, 55) which tie in with the carnivalesque structure as a cultural practice of suspending the order. However, this suspension, associated with momentary "gaps in social time," has a different resonance in Morrison's text since in fact it refuses to be momentary, casual or orgasmic, and functions as a newly established order for the secret/sacred practices in the cellar. It also challenges the association of carnival with the overexcited body of a hysteric, since the sacred experience comes as a result of a cure (treatment) of the young women's pathological symptoms. Their desires, pains and sorrows intermingle with their newly established household, and the reversed "system of classification" (Kristeva 2001, 92) in which all are taken care of now.

In loud dreaming, monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. So, exhausted and enraged, they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again but knowing full well they will. And they do. (Morrison 1998, 264)

The carnivalesque carelessness of their orgasmic freedom is gone, but rather than returning to the phallogentric order, the carnival prevails as a politically powerful structure in which

the women sleep, wake and sleep again with images of parrots, crystal seashells and a singing woman who never spoke. At four in the morning they wake to prepare for the day. One mixes dough while another lights the stove. Others gather vegetables for the noon meal, then set out the breakfast things. The bread, kneaded into mounds, is placed in baking tins to rise. (Morrison 1998, 285)

As initiated by Consolata, household tasks and desire intermingle, connect and disconnect, in a trance, becoming a subversion, a sub-culture within the symbolic system of restrictions:

lovers join, their heads in the air and feet on the wall; proportions reverse, fruits and animals are gigantic and the minuscule elect can straddle them, penetrate them, become absorbed in them.... Nature and culture abolished, all bodies mingled: animals, fruits, and humans in the same intertwining. Flowers penetrate, fruits caress, animals open, humans are like instruments of this universal *jouissance*. (Clément and Cixous 1986, 22-3)<sup>37</sup>

Evoking images of the culturally abject and “an implacable enemy of the symbolic order” (Kristeva 1982, 70), Consolata (the newly born witch) interferes with patriarchal discourse, as does Cixous’s “newly born woman” who “finds ways out – *sorties*”:

Like many other women’s, her imaginative journeys across the frontier of prohibition are utopian, voyages out into a no place that must be a no man’s and no woman’s land... the newborn woman, transcending the heresies of history and the history of hysteria, must fly/flee into a new heaven and a new earth of her own invention. (Clément and Cixous 1986, xiv)

After all, it is the physical absence of *her* mother (her unknown identity), which contributes to the dream of presence (“a new earth of her own invention”), a dream that in fact should be taken literally, since its fulfillment lies within the ‘newly born’ limits of culture.

Female desire, intensified by the spiritual and bodily transformation of the Convent’s women, transcends here the stereotypes of race, but not necessarily gender. As in Morrison’s earlier works, in *Paradise* the racial identifications are ambiguous, exchangeable, releasing “the operations of race in the feminine” from obligatory references to skin color and its subsequent cultural connotations. In fact, as in “Recitatif”, a story by Morrison analyzed by Elisabeth Abel, the reader is never given any final opportunity to distinguish the women’s skin color (1997, 102)<sup>38</sup>. By “replacing the conventional signifiers of (racial) difference” and “by substituting for the racialized body a series of disaggregated cultural parts,” Morrison’s narrative “exposes the unarticulated (racial) codes that operate at the boundaries of consciousness” (Abel 1997, 102).

They shoot white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out there. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun. (Morrison 1998, 3)

Apart from Consolata's stated Indian origin, the indications as to which of the women is the white one, or what is the skin color of the others, are few and confusing, almost absent. Their absence directly challenges the Black community's obsession with a racial purity that is no longer "the sign ... they had taken for granted" but "a stain" (1998, 194), a historical repetition but 'in reverse'. The Convent's "impurity" is projected both as female and as not (entirely) black; it reopens and pollutes their grandfathers' wounds. The situation on the outside of the Convent (in Ruby) is entirely controlled by a racially 'pure' phallic structure, however, it is also threatened by the impure (both race and gender-related) elements emanating from the 'inside'. As in Creed's analysis of the horror set-up, "the house that offered a solace ultimately becomes a trap, the place where the monster is destroyed and/or the victim murdered" (Creed 1993, 56). For the nine men on the mission, the place constitutes the ultimate danger of annihilation, of being engulfed by the witch's monstrous and invulnerable womb. Its invulnerability "works to license violence against her, violence tinged with the terror of the maternal. Her hard body is a pre-text for violence against her invasive magical power, itself an extension of her body" (Purkiss 1996, 127). Inevitably, the subversive power of the Convent has to be challenged by the centralized power of Ruby; it has to be believed to be wrong in order to be destroyed. "I know they got powers. Question is whose power is stronger... They don't need men and they don't need God. Can't say they haven't been warned" (Morrison 1998, 276). The impenetrable 'inside' threatens life, and must therefore be "radically excluded" (Kristeva 1982, 2). Without their knowledge or their consent, the abject 'inside' (and the desire) that the 8-rocks plan to eradicate has always to some extent been present in their "clean and blessed" environment. In the brutal murder performed on the Convent's women, the men expel their anxieties to the margin/ edge of the community, and project a deeply familiar contradiction to everything they believe they stand

for. Their mission thus “devour[s] itself and become[s] the world they had escaped” (Morrison 1998, 292).

The ambiguous pleasures of paradise, which open for women after their death (as they become angels), emerge from the fertile, reproductive spaces of the Convent’s garden. This paradise offers another transgression of symbolic restrictions, in the form of the differently cultured (semiotic) realm of unspeaking Piedade, a transgression that calls to mind the Kristevan “sacred body of a woman, sacred because at the crossroads of love” (Kristeva 2001, 105). The garden serves as a locus of the specifically female sacred trance that becomes “order,” in direct contrast with the (dis/ordered) brutality of the men who leave the mission unconvinced of the results they have accomplished. However, as a space of refuge, Morrison’s posthumous paradise fails to protect women within culture. In transgressing into a semiotic pleasure beyond culture (and in fact beyond the body), the paradise ‘simply’ offers a return to the protective womb. As such it runs the risk of a “libidinal economy” appearing less as “a locus of cultural subversion” (Butler 1990, 80) than as “a futile gesture” (1990, 78), unable to solve the problem within the culture and its laws. Simultaneously, however, this after-life paradise originates from and maintains its firm connection with/in the Convent, where the women, just before being shot, undergo their final metamorphosis. This form of desire/ paradise, misunderstood or never taken into account by the self-victimized oppressors from the town, remains her(m)etic, sealed with a scar on the body, like the dark cellar/ womb whose meaning they cannot decipher. The sacred space of the cellar/ womb is left unarticulated, enclosed with other secrets kept behind the walls of the Convent. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Morrison’s sacred space (as a source of subversion) becomes culturally problematic, since, to quote Butler, it “cannot be maintained within the terms of culture” (Butler 1990, 80). However, it can also be posited as an attempt to



formulate another space (a libidinal space) within culture that so far has not been acknowledged as cultural.

The intricacies of the libidinal economy are further developed by Marilynne Robinson<sup>39</sup> in her novel, *Housekeeping* (1980), which depicts another form of subversive household structure. Robinson's version of the household is 'open', vulnerable, and susceptible, rather than carefully maintaining the boundaries that separate it from foreign elements. Located on the verge of a small settlement in Idaho, Robinson's *house* is as remote as the Convent, and neither built nor kept 'properly'. Its independence implies decay, constant transitions, and instability. *Housekeeping* traces the childhood of two orphaned sisters, Ruth (the narrator) and Lucille, who grow up "under the care" of their grandmother and subsequently of their aunt Sylvie. The increasingly striking absence of phallic interference, as well as the 'otherness' of the women's experience established from the beginning of the novel, emphasize their entrapment in a difference that is both legitimate and illicit. Almost entirely excluded, male characters are only referred to as those who have left, died or disappeared, including Ruth's grandfather who brought his wife to Fingerbone, built the house by himself, and "escaped this world years before [Ruth] entered it" (Robinson 1991, 3). One of the first images of the novel connects the house with the immensely deep, cold and dark water of the lake. The house has been built right at the edge of an abyss that persistently "claims" people, animals and even trains that cross the water on a bridge connecting the far ends of the lake. Also, Ruth's grandfather's life ends in a "black and sleek and elegant" train which

had pulled more than halfway across the bridge when the engine nosed over towards the lake and then the rest of the train slid after it into the water like a weasel sliding off a rock. (Robinson 1991, 6)

As Sprengnether suggests, "Robinson's use of biblical allusion and analogy expands the context of the novel in such a way as to depersonalize the dilemma of the two orphan sisters" (1990, 242). She proposes a connection between the derailment and the scene of the biblical Fall. The Fall "is responsible for memory and desire, a moment of separation (like the death of Ruth and Lucille's mother) which precedes the beginning of narrative" (Sprengnether 1990, 242). Ruth believes that "memory is the sense of loss, and loss pulls us after it" (Robinson 1991, 194). The vanishing under the lake's surface, repeatedly echoed in her narrative, evokes the engulfing womb of the phantasmatic mother that, according to Creed, is "crucial in the formation of subjectivity" (1993, 25).

The women live in their grand/father's house, "cut free from the troublesome possibility of success, recognition, advancement. They had no reason to look forward, nothing to regret. Their lives spun off the tilting world like thread off a spindle, breakfast time, supper time, lilac time, apple time" (Robinson 1991, 13). Their attitudes and habits are not synchronized with the demands and calendars of the symbolic structure, but with a Kristevan "primal cartography of the body," the semiotic, that is

the precondition for language even though it depends on language, and which suffers and takes pleasures in an other logic, complementary to the logic of linguistic signs imposed and consolidated by paternal laws. (Kristeva 2001, 95)

Ruth, for example, describes her grandmother "as someone who had never really wished to feel married to anyone" (Sprengnether 1990, 239). After her husband's death, "she set out upon her widowhood, and became altogether as good a widow as she had been a wife" (Robinson 1991, 10). Her daughters, Molly, Helen and Sylvie

hovered around her, watched everything she did, followed her through the house, got in her way... Never since they were small children had they clustered about her so, and never since had she been so aware of the smell of their hair, their softness, breathiness, abruptness. It filled her with a strange elation, the same pleasure she had felt when any one of them, as a sucking child, had fasted her eyes on her face and reached for her

other breast, her hair, her lips, hungry to touch, eager to be filled for a while and sleep (1991, 10-11).

Once they leave home, they seem to be 'releasing' their bodies from entanglement in the umbilical cord; they depart for the world of the paternal and 'the symbolic'. Molly leaves for China as a missionary (Ruth does not know much about her), Helen and Sylvie "apparently" marry, Helen "in Nevada," Sylvie "someone named Fisher" (1991, 14-15). But their marriages do not last, and both sisters are soon on their own when the men disappear. As Helen believes, it is to their own advantage (1991, 52). Until her suicide, Helen lives with her daughters, Ruth and Lucille, in two shabby "rooms at the top of a tall gray building," while Sylvie becomes a transient.

As she narrates her story, Ruth seems to be subconsciously insisting on preserving the maternal genealogy initiated by the "spectacular derailment" of the train over the lake, and continuing since then. She repeatedly evokes the memory of her mother, and after her loss substitutes Sylvie, whose presence is undemanding; it requires no rituals, no regularity, and no sacrifice. In fact Ruth increasingly confuses Sylvie with her mother, and becomes herself "more the image of Sylvie every day" (Robinson 1991, 133). In the end, as Ruth explains, "it was as if I were her shadow, and moved after her only because she moved and not because I willed this place" (1991, 145). Her mother's solitude and Sylvie's detachment connect in her memory through the reversal of presence, warmth, and safety, in a transitory state of the "sacred" understood by Kristeva as "not 'religion,' not 'sacrifice,' not even 'value,' but, certainly, and through all that, a borderline" (Kristeva 2001, 134). Sylvie seems to live on this borderline; her life is built of sequences of expectations that make "the imposture burdensome and obvious," that cause her to abandon the symbolic order and to drift.

When did I become so unlike other people? Either it was when I followed Sylvie across the bridge, and the lake claimed us, or it was when my mother left me waiting for her, and established in me the habit of waiting and expectation which makes any present moment most significant for what it does not contain. Or it was at my conception. (Robinson 1991, 214)

Robinson configures Sylvie as a nomadic anti-housewife, in fact, as Sprengnether argues, a “deconstruction” of the traditional housewife and mother (1990, 242). Her housekeeping subverts the phallogentric house structure, since it is more like accumulating material without transforming it, as she collects tin cans, bottles and old paper. Her home is organic rather than organized, lethargic rather than energized, stigmatized by the cultural un/belonging of a border-crosser.

Sylvie talked a great deal about housekeeping. She soaked all the tea towels for a number of weeks in a tub of water and bleach. She emptied several cupboards and left them open to air, and once she washed half the kitchen ceiling and a door. Sylvie believed in stern solvents, and most of all in air. It was for the sake of air that she opened doors and windows, though it was probably through forgetfulness that she left them open...

Lucille and I still doubted that Sylvie would stay. She resembled our mother, and besides that, she seldom removed her coat, and every story she told had to do with a train or a bus station. But not till then did *we* dream that we might be taken from *her*. (Robinson 1991, 68)

Sylvie's habits are temporary aberrations that refuse to assure the transition from raw to cooked, and blur the borderlines between cleanliness and dirt, safety and danger, warmth and coldness. Sylvie's preference for suppers in the dark, consisting of cold finger food, usually unprepared and uncooked, connects with her desire “to disrespect the time of cooking, muzzle impatience, know how to defer” (Clément 2001, 108), to un-become civilized, cultural.<sup>40</sup>

Sylvie kept her clothes and even her hairbrush and tooth powder in a cardboard box under the bed. She slept on top of the covers, with a quilt over her, which during the daytime she pushed under the bed also. (Robinson 1991, 103)

Sylvie's habits offend the symbolic sense of propriety, and confuse the 'proper' with the inappropriate, or polluted. The lake, the inside of the house, the memories, and life itself are dark; they fascinate, and invite into their abysmal, devouring 'inside'. Sylvie, and then Ruth, who unlike her sister Lucille instinctively follows her aunt, are both seduced by the blackness of the water which is "perilously deep", reflecting "effects of cold, tedium, guilt, loneliness, and dread". They "let the darkness become coextensive" with the household as if with the 'inside' of the body: "the skull and bowels and bones" (1991, 79). Like Kristeva's notion of the sacred, Sylvie's sacred "has to do with odors, natural secretions, nail clippings, and finally with hair" that is dirty, unkempt, and loose. In her housekeeping, the "filth and the sacred are adjacent to each other" (Kristeva 2001, 91).

In summer we were seldom sent to bed before ten or eleven o'clock, a freedom to which we never became accustomed. We spent days on our knees in the garden, digging caves and secret passages with kitchen spoons for our dolls, mine a defrocked bride with a balding skull and Lucille's a filthy and eyeless Rise Red... There the wind would be, quenching the warmth out of the air before the light was gone, raising the hairs in our arms and necks with its smell of frost and water and deep shade. (Robinson 1991, 86)

In Ruth's memories of childhood, "the sacred participates in all the materials that ... Lacan categorized under the generic name 'object of desire,' that is, the detail, the partial, the piece of body that is not the whole of the body, and even its waste" (Clément 2001, 88). After Lucille's 'departure' (when she moves out to a 'normal' home), Sylvie initiates Ruth into the *uncanny* spaces of nature which stand for everything that the 'normal' home is not. She invites her to the coldness of the forest and the darkness of the water; they spend a night on the lake drifting in a desolate boat, and later in the morning return home on a freight train. Towards the end of this journey of rebirth, Ruth re-connects with her mother through Sylvie, and "becomes the voice of the uncanny" (Sprengnether 1990, 242). Her "otherness, what

makes her side with the wild ghost children of the forest, is inherent in the human condition, a separateness that reaches back into the womb, to the beginning of life itself" (1990, 242).

For I dreamed and dreamed that Sylvie and I were drifting in the dark, and did not know where we were, or that Sylvie knew and would not tell me. I dreamed that the bridge was a chute into the lake and that, one after another, handsome trains slid into the water without even troubling the surface. I dreamed that the bridge was the frame of a charred house, and that Sylvie and I were looking for the children who lived there, and though we heard them we could never find them. I dreamed that Sylvie was teaching me to walk under the water. To move so slowly needed patience and grace, but she pulled me after her in the slowest waltz, and our clothes flew like the robes of painted angels. (Robinson 1991, 175)

Half-real, half-imaginary, Ruth's journey connects with the Sabbath night when "witches do everything backward: kiss the ass of the diabolical Great Goat, force the Host into its anus, sacrifice a living child" (Clément 2001, 133). The journey represents a type of sacred rite "founded on filth" and unquestionably celebrating "our difficult – impossible – separation from that authority, the mother" (Kristeva 2001, 95). Simultaneously, the journey symbolizes the crossing of the boundary that so far kept them connected with the town. In crossing the boundary line, Ruth "makes the dirty turn into the tainted," and the dirt, as Kristeva suggests, "vanishes as such when it is transformed... it is no longer noticed" (2001, 93). As Ruth believes now, having "a sister or a friend is like sitting at night in a lighted house. Those outside can watch you if they want, but you need not see them" (Robinson 1991, 154). However, in their small town no more crossing will be tolerated. People have seen them, and made them "become conscious of Fingerbone all around us, if not watching, then certainly aware of everything we did" (1991, 200).

To leave one's body, whatever one makes of the journey, is simply to leave behind the rhythm of collective life, to stay awake instead of sleeping, go out when everything is closed. But it is also to pass into the sacred, and the inquisitors did not want any of that. (Clément 2001, 133)

Indeed, respectable 'ladies' start to pay them unexpected visits, "come by to leave the mittens and the cake and the casserole" (Robinson 1991, 181). A "hearing" will be organized, but Sylvie wouldn't know how to 'properly' defend her position. By the time the sheriff comes, the fragility of her household is "so great that the breach was inevitable." It is "futile to worry whether there was wisdom or sense in any particular scheme to save it. One thing or another would put an end to it soon" (1991, 188). With a growing sense of danger, both Sylvie and Ruth agree to a secret departure: "I could not stay, and Sylvie would not stay without me. Now truly we were cast out to wander, and there was an end to housekeeping" (1991, 209). Their night-time crossing of the lake over the rail bridge, preceded by setting fire to the grandfather's house, is a spectacular act of abandoning 'the symbolic'. Where they go now, "dogs wouldn't dare follow, and nobody'd believe them anyway. Nobody's ever done that. Crossed the bridge. Not that anybody knows of" (1991, 210). Crossing the thin and long bridge over the lake-abyss clearly alludes to the backward (return) journey along the umbilical cord to the maternal womb. However dramatic in its finality, this journey is not a tomb ride (back to the semiotic) as is eventually the case in Morrison's *Paradise*, but a survival journey. In fact, their crossing also involves a reversal of the return, a type of rebirth, and can be posited as an enactment of a spontaneous, unpredictable, and disorganized 'passage' of separation from the confining spaces of the town from/as an overprotective womb/mother. The successful crossing of the bridge also implies a transformation of Ruth's body (sensitive to cold and hunger) into a transient, 'heretic' body that finds pleasure in absence, lack, and physical discomfort: "It's not the worst thing, Ruthie, drifting. You'll see. You'll see" (1991, 210). After the crossing, Sylvie and Ruth are beyond the pale, they fall into cultural prohibition, un/belonging, and in/visibility. In undoing their 'homework' of 'proper' care (either of household or

children/family), they are unprepared to re-enter the phallogentric structure and, like Morrison's protagonists who find refuge in the Convent, they transcend the structure by *drifting* in it. In fact, Sylvie and Ruth are those who one day, in a different time and space, could be those knocking at the Convent's door.

Through their titles, both *Paradise* and *Housekeeping* deconstruct the traditional concepts of home as a 'stable' phallogentric structure and of the mother as a 'traditional' housewife into sites of cultural subversion. In both narratives, the physical absence of the patriarchal mother indicates the actual absence of the patriarchal household: in *Paradise*, the Convent's household collapses after the Mother's death; in *Housekeeping*, the household collapses under Sylvie's care. The 'newly born' household, a condition that gradually supplements the absence of the patriarchal mother, has the transitory and indefinite character of a trance, another kind of drifting that also allows an exit from the world of phallic order, although with different consequences. In both narratives, the witch (as the non-mother and the transient) epitomizes this absence of (proper, patriarchal) identity, and transforms it into a sacred/heretic site of transgression of constructs unfitting the corsets of patriarchal order. These wild, untamed women refuse to be constricted/ restricted, and, similarly to the characters in the next two Polish narratives, they choose to leave when their marginal spaces are threatened.



THROWN OUT INTO DIASPORA: OLGA TOKARCZUK'S *DOM DZIENNY, DOM NOCNY*  
AND KRYSZYNA KOFTA'S *ZŁODZIEJKA PAMIĘCI*

Published in 1998, the same year as Morrison's *Paradise*, both *Dom dzienny, dom nocny* (The Day House, the Night House)<sup>41</sup> by Olga Tokarczuk and *Złodziejka pamięci* (She is a Thief of Memories)<sup>42</sup> by Krystyna Kofta<sup>43</sup> expand the concept of a subversive household, as referred to in the analysis above, into a transnational dis/order that abolishes the borders between domestic (national) and foreign structures. The notion of foreignness, evoked in these texts as a contingency of disorder and confusion, implies a need for a new classification, a new arrangement, in fact, a new order of signification that permeates the structures of the (national) home. "To impose the new order," Clément believes, "one must permit a fierce resistance, an extreme anger, a revolt of pride, to come into oneself" (2001, 29). Both narratives introduce women who demonstrate such types of resistance, pride and anger, but they also reveal, in a Kristevan sense, their "troubling porousness" and their *difference*.

According to Szczuka, and other poststructural feminist critics in Poland, Olga Tokarczuk represents "the most important contemporary myth-writer, searching for literary images of religious, unconscious and archetypal structures in spaces of 'minor' and borderline plots" (Szczuka 2001, 20).<sup>44</sup> Marta, Tokarczuk's figure of the crone-witch in *Dom dzienny, dom nocny*, blurs a boundary line between the usual and the unusual, or feasible and unfeasible forms of behavior ascribed to an elderly woman living in a cottage all by herself. According to the narrator, who is Marta's nearest neighbour, Marta has "nothing to say about herself," and she acts "strangely," unpredictably, out of context:

As if she had no history. She only liked to talk about other people... also about those who probably did not exist at all – later I found some proofs that Marta liked to make things up. Also about places which she put people in, like plants. (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>45</sup>

In winter, Marta's cottage resembles Sylvie's in *Housekeeping*. It is dark, moist and cold, while its mysteriously "fragile" inhabitant (her hair is "all silver," her skin is "dry and wrinkled," she is missing some teeth) simply disappears "like everything else here" (1998, 9):

Out of the window in the long room, I can see Marta's house. For three years now I have been wandering who Marta was. She was always saying different things about herself. Every time we spoke she mentioned a different year of birth. (1998)<sup>46</sup>

In summertime Marta frequently visits the narrator, but seems to be distant, neither listening nor worrying about the consequences of her own talking. She is indifferent, even somehow cruel at times, for instance when she feeds her cocks, and then kills and devours them all at once, over two autumn days (Tokarczuk 1998).<sup>47</sup> In her extravagant habits, Marta confuses the binaries of day and night, warmth and coldness, life and death. In integrating polarities, she undermines the structure of traditional concepts of the time, amount, or degree that is 'proper' and 'well balanced' (day is for work, night is for rest, hens are kept for eggs, etc.), and develops her own sovereign logic within this traditional structure. In a metaphorical extension of night into winter, Marta "sleeps" through winter, and like everything else about her, Marta's hibernation is extreme, death-like, crossing the border into the 'forbidden' and unthinkable. Her resting body lies in the dark cellar, carefully stored in the midst of apples and potatoes, suspended in time and language. Half animal, half human, Marta "wakes up around March" and gradually returns from her womb-like winter retreat to her "day house" routines. Again, the passage along the umbilical cord seems to be reversible. It connects and redefines the ambiguous spaces of the semiotic chora within the cultural (or at least, culturally recognizable) structure:

First she sensed the cellar – its moist and safe scent, the scent of mushrooms and moist hay. This was the reminiscence of summer. Her body was awakening from a long dream, until she found out that her eyes were open... And so on, piece after piece, she called into life her entire body... (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>48</sup>

Marta's peculiar way of coping with the seasons undermines the stability of her household

as well as her (human) body, which would 'normally' need to be constantly taken care of, whatever the season. On the contrary, dismantling the permanence and continuity of a 'kept' household, Marta reveals some 'supernatural' and incomprehensible capacities of adjustment to the conditions on the 'outside' (that takes care of itself):

I didn't understand Marta and I still don't when I think about her. But what would I need to understand Marta for? What would I gain from a clear discovery of her manners, or the sources of her stories? Why would I need her autobiography, if Marta had a biography at all? Perhaps there are people without biographies, without a future or past, who appear to others in a sort of permanent present? (1998)<sup>49</sup>

With all the vagueness of her physical body, of her origin and her 'substance,' is she 'real' or imagined (by the narrator)? Is she a "ghost" of the pre-Oedipal mother, a phantom of the "speaking subject" emerging from culturally forbidden semiotic spaces?<sup>50</sup> How does she articulate her presence, if the semiotic (as discussed in Chapter 2) does not speak or read 'the symbolic'?

Marta's language can be associated with a negative "female plotting," defined by Kazimiera Szczuka (in a Polish context) as the "weaving, intriguing, or gossiping" of an uneducated, "simple" woman, very often a housewife (Szczuka 2000, 69-70). In spreading gossip about other people, Marta is spreading silence about herself. Instead of plotting, she is un-plotting her story, and negating herself as the "subject". "After all, to plait, or to weave," in Szczuka's association with female modes of speech, "indicate time spent in an uncreative manner", time that elapses, that goes by unproductively. This type of "plotting" is often linked with the semiotic: incomprehensible or incomplete utterances, such as babbling, jabbering, talking nonsense, characteristic of marginalized but culturally present linguistic spaces: baby talk, or language appropriate to a mentally disordered, delirious or sclerotic person (Szczuka 2000)<sup>51</sup>. In Tokarczuk's text, the "female plotting" is moreover linked with women's hair, since Marta, earlier a wig-maker, continues to preserve some of her tresses

and occasionally wears them when she visits the narrator: "Whenever I asked her to tell me something about herself... she changed the subject, turned her head towards the window, or simply continued to cut the cabbage or plait her own or not-her-own hair" (Tokarczuk 1998).<sup>52</sup>

In occupying this double position, Marta, the incongruent and un/speaking "subject", calls to mind Anzaldúa's crossroads, the cultural borderlands that, for Butler, are interlaced with dialogical sites of language.

Anzaldúa's notion of crossroads is no longer the notion of the subject, certainly not a subject who stands outside of language. My position is that subjects are constituted in language, but that language is also the site of their destabilization. (Butler 1995, 135)

Marta's (and the narrator's) village represents in itself a crossroads, and therefore, destabilization, of cultures. 'Real' or imagined, it is a small settlement in the vicinity of Wambierzowice and Nowa Ruda, a Polish territory adjacent to the German and Czech borders, fusing culturally different historical traces. The inter/national dynamics of its location reconstitute tradition as a fluid concept, inscribed into constant transformations of culture. Collecting and writing down the different stories of people inhabiting this ambiguous territory, the narrator projects herself as a "dispersed" figure, a cultural negotiator maintaining her integrity "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa 1997, 79). In fantasizing about Marta, the narrator evokes the 'porousness' of her own homeland, and attempts to keep up with its configurations and changes that are simultaneously acknowledged and not acknowledged. She suggests, for example, different types of death for Marta (Tokarczuk 1998, 128), and then also her resurrection, alluding to the reversibility of the journey along the umbilical cord discussed earlier. Marta, in fact, can be seen as a negotiator between the phallic and the *omphalic*, mediating (or "denaveling," to use Bronfen's term), between the 'symbolic

castration' that denies her the ability or right to speak the symbolic language and the 'real incision' that draws/lures her back to semiotic unspoken pleasures. In depicting Marta's negotiation "with her entire past and present" (1998, 10), Tokarczuk herself becomes a gossip-writer who, according to Sobolewska, closely resembles an inventive but ambiguous fortune-teller whose predictions develop into the intrinsic model of her narrative, a metaphoric picture of her own methodology (1992, 196). Resembling both fortune-teller and gossip-writer, Marta (and Tokarczuk as her creator) are thus involved in a carnivalesque plot, configuring marginal, apparently trivial and inconsequential fables or legends that in the end, however, manage to threaten the dominant cultural discourse and, as Clément states, "impose a new order" (2001, 29). Marta's fabrications (wig- and myth-making) connect with the 'transcultural' stories told by Lissie in Alice Walker's narrative, as well as le Guin's concept of the menopausal crone who finally becomes "pregnant with herself," who bears "her third self" (1989, 5), revealing her creativity and resourcefulness. As a "creatively" speaking subject, she represents "a kind of crossroads of identification," or rather of identifications that, according to Butler "are carried by language" (1995, 135): "I should have known where Marta came from. Why she wasn't there for us in winter, why she appeared again in spring time" (Tokarczuk 1998).<sup>53</sup> Hinting at unspoken territories, Marta is a "ghostly apparition," a site of recurring subversion that introduces a new 'plot' (both as an intrigue/subversion and a development of a story), and disrupts the traditional order (killing all cocks at once).

In the end, it is Marta who draws the narrator's attention to a peculiar statuette in a wayside shrine, and who "comes up" with the story of the medieval, sacred/heretic and transcultural figure of St. Vigilance, a popular saint venerated by people on both sides of the Polish-German border, and known also as Wilgefortis [Wilga], Święta Troska, or

Kummernis von Schonau<sup>54</sup>.

On the cross was a woman, a girl, in such a tight dress that her breasts under the paint cover appeared naked... There was a small shoe sticking out under the dress; the other foot was bare, and this is when I realized that a similar statuette was in the wayside shrine on the road that led to Agnieszka. That one had a beard though, that's why I always thought that it was Christ in an exceptionally long robe. The inscription underneath read: "Sanc. Wilgefortis. Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat," and Marta said that it was St. Vigilance. (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>55</sup>

Her life story, written down by a German monk, Paschalis, "under the patronage of the Holy Ghost and the superior of the Benedictine Cloister"<sup>56</sup>, can be read as an account of a "sacred transvestism" (Clément 2001, 31), and as an example of the heresy of a body that abandons gender and posits an experience of the sacred outside of any religious structure. As a site of cultural transgression, Kummernis's body performs a gender spectacle, deviating from patriarchal control and order. Born as a daughter, Wilga was already "born somehow imperfect" in the eyes of her father, a knight and a devoted warrior (Tokarczuk 1998, 54). Her female body, as if trying to compensate for this 'inaccuracy,' develops, under the care of Wilga's beloved stepmother, into an ideal of femininity: "Those who saw her admired the miracle of creation in silence" (1998, 55). The constant absence of her father, who was participating in the crusades, and the unexpected loss of her stepmother who dies of a haemorrhage, contribute to a gradual decline of Wilga's home in Schonau. Shortly after his second wife's death, the father gives all his other daughters away in marriage. Wilga, the youngest, is temporarily sent to a Convent (1998, 56). The nuns, as Paschalis relates,

accepted the girl with joy, since it soon became evident that her physical beauty corresponded to her spiritual beauty, and was even surpassed by it... when standing close to her, one felt a pleasant warmth, and even a dark chamber appeared full of light, and her speech was exceptionally wise for her age, and her judging was mature. Her slim body discharged a balsamic scent, and roses were found in her bed, although it was winter. Once, when she was placed before a mirror, an image of the face of the Son of God appeared on its surface and remained there until the next day. (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>57</sup>

Wilga genuinely enjoys her life in the Convent, a refuge that eradicates her "second," unwanted sex. Subconsciously identifying with a creature "beyond sex," she attempts to resolve the dilemma of a Christian woman caught in the dichotomy of Eve-versus-Mary<sup>58</sup>. This dichotomy is particularly strongly projected in the Polish tradition of female patriotism which draws on the model of 'Maryja' (Mary) whose miracles save fortresses and convents surrounded by enemies, such as the Convent of Częstochowa which was under the patronage of the Black Madonna<sup>59</sup>. Wilga follows and identifies with the Virgin, "who triumphs where the first Eve failed, who refuses where the first Eve was tempted" (Warner 1990, 245). While participating in her "novitiate", a "preparation time for giving oneself to the Master,"<sup>60</sup> she imagines herself as the bride of the divine Son, 'void of' her physical body, and joined with him in "the moment of ecstatic union" (Warner 1990, 129)<sup>61</sup>.

But the father was relentless and did not want to hear about giving his daughter away to the nuns for good. There, he believed, she would have become something separate, unutilized as if fallow. In giving her away in marriage to Wolfram von Pannewicz, he would almost give her to himself, in other words, to the male kind that he represented through God, so as to rule and watch over the creatures of God. (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>62</sup>

Wilga's persistent refusal to leave the convent transforms her virginity into a rebellion that nullifies the Law of the Father, as well as (his) God, as "an effective instrument of female subjection" (Warner 1990, 49). In attempting to resolve the dichotomy of (negative) Eve versus (positive) Mary, Wilga demonstrates that what is at stake is her relationship to the law. Like Cixous's model of Eve in "Extreme Fidelity," Tokarczuk's figure "is not afraid of the inside, neither her own, nor that of the other" (Cixous 1994, 134). Her relationship to the law mirrors in fact "her relationship to the inside, to penetration, to touching the inside":

I saw myself as an incrustated treasure box. I was opening the lid, and there was another treasure box inside, all in coral, and inside another one, all in pearl. And so impatiently I was opening myself, without yet knowing, where I was going, until finally in the smallest treasure box, at the bottom of all the others, I saw your image, alive and colorful. Immediately I banged down all the lids, so as not to lose you, and since then I

am at peace with myself, I even love myself, because I carry you inside... I am always pregnant with you... (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>63</sup>

Wilga's pregnant 'inside' is linked to her 'unpolluted' body, always imprisoned within the *parthenos*, a Christian shield against physiological and psychological contamination that now turns into a weapon against the Father's will. Virginity, "one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations" (Kristeva 1986, 163), becomes a cynical armor for her female sovereignty, her right to choose between the two sanctified modes of marriage:

So the father told her: With your body you belong to the earth, and there is no other master than me. To that his daughter replied: I have a different Father in heaven and He is preparing a different bridegroom for me. These words made the baron angry and he said: I am the master of your life, He is the Master of your death. (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>64</sup>

Given no choice, Wilga escapes to the woods, and abandoning both the secular and the religious order, lives in a cave as a hermit, a version of Mary Magdalene, the embodiment of Christian repentance. There she spends her days in meditation and fasting. Like St. Catherine in Kristeva's commentary, Wilga

undoubtedly draws great satisfaction from that mind game, by mortifying herself. But the same game builds up her moral being... and her capacity to overcome every privation, every ordeal, beginning with disgust – the oral ordeal. Catherine refuses to get married, devotes herself to Jesus, and stops eating. The fast begins at age sixteen – she allows herself only bread, raw vegetables, and water. (Kristeva 2001, 118)

Soon, however, some villagers discover Wilga's ability to "work miracles" (Tokarczuk 1998, 59), and she becomes popular as a powerful and beneficent ascetic. Known as "Kummernis," (the German word 'Kummer' means grief, sorrow, and mourning) she "heals the maladies of the soul and sufferings coming from the emptiness of the heart"<sup>65</sup>, and is frequently called "to those who were dying to guide their souls through the labyrinths of death" (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>66</sup>. The word of her fame spreads and, as Paschalis's account continues, Kummernis is eventually kidnapped by her father and imprisoned (1998, 63). Forced to marry Wolfram, she seeks refuge in meditation, concentrating on the figure of Christ, the redeemer. Paschalis' story reaches its climax precisely



here, when Wilga's father opens the door of her cell to finally make his daughter fulfil her earthy duties:

Kummernis stood in a windowless chamber, but it was not the woman whom everybody knew. Her face was covered with a silky beard; her loose hair was falling down her arms. Two naked girlish breasts stuck out of her torn low-necked dress. Her dark but soft eyes followed the people's inquisitive faces and stopped at the baron. The maidens began to make the sign of the cross and knelt down one after the other. Kummernis, or whoever it was, raised her hands, as if she wanted to clasp all of them to her breast. She said quietly: My Master saved me from myself and bestowed his beard upon me. The same evening the baron ordered the chamber to be walled up with the monster in it. Wolfram mounted a horse and left without a word. (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>67</sup>

Following this passage, one could conclude that Tokarczuk wants us to believe that in order to achieve her goal, Wilga has to outwit the Law of the Father, she has to sacrifice her feminine body, mark it with some negation of the "feminine," commit a cultural slip towards sacrilege, heterodoxy, deviation. Her metamorphosis into a hybrid figure, a gender-crosser, connects her with the mystic tradition of "moving from one sex to the other" mentioned by Clément as "common currency in the history of mysticism" (2001, 31). The oddness of Wilga's experience lies, however, in the fact that "the mystic does not stop at that difference: he passes, that is his act. He passes beyond... And, although one has the right to scream, to stammer, or to sing, it is forbidden to articulate. To fix the sacred outside the instant is sacrilege" (Clément 2001, 31). In fixing "the sacred outside the instant," Kummernis, like Consolata in Morrison's story, commits a heresy, reaches the limits of logic, and passes to an 'other logic' (Kristeva 2001, 35)<sup>68</sup> that connects the saint with the heretic, the Virgin with the witch.

In imposing a new order, Tokarczuk's Virgin incorporates Kristeva's link between the sacred and the feminine. Her sacredness is bound to sacrifice: "to succumb to duty, to immolate oneself for a tyrannical ideal, with all the jouissances that mortification procures, but all the uneasiness as well, even unto death" (2001, 120). Kristeva sees the Virgin as a

“combination of power and sorrow, sovereignty and the unnameable” (2001, 60). Moreover, in her commentary on Saint Teresa of Avila, Kristeva refers to the sacred as involving “a suggestion of disbelief” (2001, 37), as well as a familiarity with “the ‘other’ logic”. Like Teresa’s, Kummernis’s “intense and evasive body” (above all, her face covered with the miraculous beard that continues to grow) turns her “religious experience” into “a confrontation with abjection” (2001, 37). Her experience with “the sacred” is different from paternal religion, since it takes place in a dimension that, as Clément writes, “eclipses time and space” (2001, 31). The sacred

*passes in a boundlessness without rule or reservation, which is the trait of the divine, while the religious installs a marked access road, with meditations provided for the difficult cases ... it erupts in its time, or rather in its instant, since its nature is to turn the order upside down.”* (2001, 30)

Although sentenced to death, Kummernis continues to ‘rewrite’ the female model of Eve by her distorted (“upside down”) femininity. Shortly before her execution, Kummernis, as a creature that is half Jesus, half Eve, re-enacts simultaneously two scenes of temptation, Eve’s in Eden, and that of Jesus in the desert. She resists the seductive promises of the devil who appears several times in her cell and speaks to her in the Name of her/the Father:

‘You could have loved and been loved,’ [the devil] said. ‘I could have,’ she replied. ‘You could have carried a child in your womb, you could have heard it from within, and then you could have given it to the world,’ he said. ‘Betrayed it to the world,’ she said. ‘You could have bathed, fed and caressed it. You could have watched it grow; its soul and body becoming so much like yours. You could have given it to your God...’  
(Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>69</sup>

Her dialogue with the devil “permit[s] a fierce resistance,” and allows Kummernis to “come into [her]self” (Clément 2001, 29); to ‘resist,’ Clément believes, “would be the word befitting the sacred” (2001, 53). As an extension of the father, the devil represents the symbolic order of the ‘community’ that, like the Cloister, can be a site both of support and oppression. The devil explains:

‘Your stubbornness here, in solitude, with a face of a stranger instead of your beautiful appearance, makes no sense. You are not Him. He poked fun at you and now he does not care about you. He forgot about you, went to create worlds... left you to face the stupid folk who will want you to be sanctified or burnt at the stake just the same.’  
(Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>70</sup>

Kummernis’ s resistance against this community is a revolt that blurs the demands of secular and religious institutions. Her crossing of the gender boundary, in this strongly religious context, suggests more than suspension of her sex: in involving the figure of Christ as actively participating in Kummernis’ transition, and therefore sabotaging the patriarchal order, Tokarczuk destabilizes the religious system of signification as a constant and solid monologic structure. Kummernis, as a border-crosser, thus opens a new “system of classification” in which the binarisms, man-versus-woman, God-versus-Satan, are devalued, no longer symmetrically oppositional, but outwitted (like Kummernis’s father), insecure (is Kummernis a heretic or a saint?), fluctuating and altogether weakened by the charisma of the “mother” in her virginal body.<sup>71</sup> The authority of the “mother,” several times signaled by the ‘presence’ of Kummernis’s breasts, is ultimate in the final scene with the devil:

‘Look at me,’ said the devil. She clasped him harder to her breast. She caressed his smooth skin gently. Then, Kummernis took out her breast and positioned the devil to suck it. The devil struggled out of her embrace and disappeared immediately.  
(Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>72</sup>

In re-enacting the role of the nursing Madonna, Kummernis brings into play the “one natural biological function” that, as Warner argues, “was permitted the Virgin in Christian cult – suckling” (1990, 192). According to Warner,

from her earliest images onwards, the mother of god has been represented nursing her child. But the milk of the Virgin has not been a symbol of a constant, fixed content, and its varying and often extraordinary shifts of meaning contain a microscopic history of Christian attitudes to the physicality of the female (1998, 192).

In her attempt to nurse the devil, Kummernis transfers the Madonna’s milk into a fluid charged with semiotic power, neither directed against nor supporting the Father, but an all-

encompassing, pro-maternal power of life. This particular fluid is conceptually connected to Irigaray's *fluid* "which is not a solid ground/earth or mirror for the subject" but which "flows," "is mobile", and arouses phallogentric fear (Whitford 2000, 28). Like Kristeva's Virgin in "Stabat Mater", Kummernis "obstructs the desire for murder or devoration by means of a strong oral cathexis (the breast), valorization of pain (the sob) and incitement to replace the sexed body with the ear of understanding" (1986, 181). Designating maternal power as "the spasm at the slipping away of eroticism [that] is translated into tears," Kristeva suggests that we "should not conceal what milk and tears have in common: they are the metaphors of non-speech" (1986, 174). The mother's breast has the final word in Kummernis's conversation with the devil, who takes flight from it as if from holy water.

Referring to the "excessive spiritualization of the mother - goddess" (1986, 163), Kristeva draws our attention to the Virgin's body, affected neither by sex nor death, but by life: "Death [comes] through Eve but life [comes] through Mary" (1998, 165)<sup>73</sup>. In the process of subject formation, Kummernis connects and disconnects with these two figures, with death and life, with the demonic sexual rites of witches and the "excessive spiritualization" of her body. Which one will win (the witch and death or the saint and heavenly life) is to be verified by her father who carries out her crucifixion: "If God is in you, you should die like God" (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>74</sup>. Kummernis's violent death hence resembles the death of Jesus and makes her a beloved local saint. The eccentricity of the female martyr, deriving in fact from her peculiar gender, speaks, however, against her official sanctification.

Paschalis, who devoted years to composing Kummernis's biography, also personifies an in-between gender. With the beautiful face of a girl, "he was born [like Wilga] somehow

imperfect, because as long as he remembered, he did not feel well within himself, as if he made a mistake at birth and picked out the wrong body, the wrong place and time” (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>75</sup>. Paschalis’s dilemma is his gender confusion, which he attempts to resolve by inhabiting the “pleasant spaces” of the same female Convent in which Wilga once lived. Kummernis’s biography, at first his only excuse to stay among women (who make him feel like one), gradually becomes the object of his intense although “unclear” desires; Kummernis herself, although long dead and very distant, becomes a messenger of a new type of eroticism. Later, on his journey to the Pope, where Paschalis is sent to plead for Kummernis’s sanctity, he meets with a prostitute who helps him to determine his gender identity as drag. The “very process of subject-formation requires a preemption of [his] sexuality, a founding prohibition which at once prohibits a certain desire, but also a prohibition which becomes itself the aim of desire” (Butler 1995, 245). Indeed, Paschalis’s prohibited sexuality “becomes an odd form of preservation, a way of attaching the desire to the law that prohibits it, a way of eroticizing the law which would abolish eroticism” (1995, 245). In attaching his desire to the law, Paschalis follows Kummernis; as gender-crossers, both have realized that the act of crossing “only works through compelling eroticization” and through “making the law and its prohibitions into the final object of desire” (Butler 1995, 245). Kummernis with her bare breasts and beard, and Paschalis in a dress and stockings borrowed from a prostitute, are compellingly eroticised, but therefore also alienated and rejected. Paschalis, for instance, is told by the bishop that his account “is not finished”; like his sexuality, it is unclear, heretical:

‘It is not finished, son... or this’: ‘No matter what I do – it is love for you, and loving you, I have to love myself, because what is alive in me, what loves – is you’. ‘This sounds really heretical’... Paschalis understood that everything was lost and took the last argument out of his pocket - a wooden cross with a half-naked body of a woman with the face of Christ. ‘You can buy it everywhere’, he said. ‘Believers go on

pilgrimages to Elmendorf to receive her blessing.' What a tasteless oddity, the monk made a wry face. (Tokarczuk 1998)<sup>76</sup>

Paschalis's identity as being in drag is distinguished by a movement towards the other that, in a Levin Asian sense, is "a practice of reversal in which the 'inside' and its supposed unity and stability is precisely what is fled from ('evaded')" (Gibson 1999, 41):

Indeed, drag is the instant in which the present of gender is doubled up and divided from itself, in which the contemporaneousness of gender is fissured. By that token, drag is also an ethical representation of the 'truth' of gender. (1999, 41)

Paschalis not only fails to persuade the bishop in Glitz (not to mention the Pope whom he never encounters) that the thoughts and conduct of Kummernis were in conformity with Catholic doctrine, but, apparently, he allows himself to be subjugated by a heretic woman. This woman, in the multicultural context of Marta's story, resembles Anzaldúa's figure of *la mestiza* who continually walks out of one culture (gender, nationality) into another, because paradoxically she is "in all cultures at the same time" (1997, 77). As a type of *mestiza*, conscious of crossing borders, Kummernis represents an un/belonging woman, both the heretic (poison) and the sacred (remedy), whose cultural vulnerability begins with gender (trouble), with the 'porousness' of her body and its *disruptive excess* of femininity. Like Carter's Mary Magdalene, Morrison's Consolata, and Robinson's Sylvie, Kummernis translates the abject into a sacred disorder that shatters the dominant order while introducing "a new one... the mystic order, the trance, the transcendence" (Clément 2001, 113). Displaying a similar capacity to negotiate her status, she transgresses her identity, going beyond the cultural stigma of female "imperfection," not beyond culture itself, however, since her cultural identity is no longer "a fixed essence... lying unchanged outside history and culture" (Hall 1996, 213). Nor is it "a fixed origin to which we can make final and

absolute return" (1996, 213), as is demonstrated by the narrator in Kofta's *Złodziejka pamięci* (1998), to which we will now turn.

In Kofta's novel, the traditional concepts of home and community are in fact suspended in continual returns to a past which needs to be "retold, rediscovered, reinvented" (Hall 1991, 58), reconstructed "through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth" (1996, 213). The grandmother, Sabina, one of the central figures in the narrative, strategically ventures into the cultural margin, in supplying her granddaughter Bogna (Kofta's narrator) with new identifications and new inconsistencies that continue to confuse her already unstable, provisional identity.

Grandmother Sabina... minor witches could have been trained by her; I remembered well what my father said. When I first saw this fragile woman proudly standing in her black dress down to her ankles, my mother had to repeat: say hello, this is grandmother Sabina, come on, Bogienka, what's wrong? (Kofta 1998)<sup>77</sup>

Bogna, a writer attempting to reconstruct the ambiguous past of her family, lives in Warsaw with her husband, (who is temporarily away on an extended research leave in the U.S.), her son, and her lover. In fact, she represents a typical female protagonist in contemporary Polish women's writing. According to Ewa Kraskowska in "O tak zwanej 'kobiecości' jako konwencji literackiej" (About so-called 'Femininity' as a Literary Convention) (2000),

the most important element of female writing is that the protagonist (or several protagonists) constitute the opposite of the stereotypical literary heroine. In fact, with all her everyday dilemmas and fate, which mirror many other biographies of women, she represents an anti-heroine; apparently there is little substance in her for a novel. She cannot be too young. Practically speaking, the typical protagonist of the female text is in her forties... her age connects with the specificities of a female process of identification and the crises involved in this process. (2000)<sup>78</sup>

In Kofta's narrative, which recounts the process of Bogna's identification, two "traditions" intermingle: that of the symbolic structure, weak and hybrid in itself since it is represented by Bogna's culturally suspended and altogether suspect father, and that of her

grandmother, Sabina Schönmyth, the alienated, marginalized woman labelled as a witch. In imposing “an imaginary coherence on [her] experience of dispersal and fragmentation” (Hall 1996, 212), Bogna imagines herself collecting and storing various fragments of past conversations and moments, even those that, as her mother assures her, she cannot possibly remember. As if through the prism of her mother’s memory, Bogna returns to the earliest moments in her life, in an attempt to disrupt the strange silence surrounding her origin. In trying to ‘fix’ (identify with) a culturally different construct, she begins to understand, however, that its morphology will always be different. In knowing then that “any absolute return to a pure set of uncontaminated origins ... [is] irreversible” (Hall 1996, 246-7), she also knows that her origin has always been “contaminated”:

It is a beautiful September day. The sun is shining, and thus life seems to be normal. A woman is pushing a stroller in a street. German soldiers look at her. The thoughts and the woman and the soldiers converge in one point, in a question mark, when will the war be finally over. A small girl in a round hat is sitting in the stroller talking all the time. She is commenting on everything she sees. A German soldier asks the woman about the age of the child. She will be one year old in December, the mother answers in fluent German. The soldier shakes his head in disbelief. The girl doesn’t stop talking, asking and answering herself. People turn their heads and laugh, as if there was no war. (Kofta 1998)<sup>79</sup>

In her reconstructive and deconstructive re-membling, the homeland evokes an enormous pressure of cultural obligations and inconsistencies; it appears in vague references to patriotism, returns, and denials of German identity, and obliges her “to re-read the binaries as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, destined to trouble the here/there cultural binaries for ever” (Hall 1996, 247). German and Polish traces mutually re-organize and re-shape each other, displacing the center/periphery within the other and within herself. Bogna’s grandparents and parents were German citizens of Polish decent, who, like many other Polish families, returned to an independent Poland around 1920. Their diasporic consciousness “lives loss and hope as a defining tension” (Clifford 1997, 257). In post-war communist Poland, her father is not only still



German but also a remnant of the dispossessed capitalists. Bogna recalls her father saying, “[p]atriotism is when you come back to the worst place” (Kofta 1998, 114), but she never understood his claims to “Polishness,” since for him “it was no return, [he] was born in Berlin” (1998, 116). The mutually permeating positions of two antagonistic cultures, two traditions, and two languages haunt her memory, and it is the memory she has been continuously stealing from her parents in her desperate need to know who she was. Caught in a continuous process of cultural translation, she is the one who finally breaks through the cultural invisibility of her family, and starts recalling all the painful words she listened to or overheard as a child. For her sixth birthday she receives *The Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, and, under the big imprint of the title in Polish, she discovers smaller letters saying: translated from the German. Instead of being grateful, she is horrified.

It seemed as if we were all German. Not only the wolf was German, but also grandmother, perhaps like Sabina Schönmyth. Red Riding Hood and Cinderella were also two small German girls. The stepmother and her daughters were German all right, because they had awful characters, like the German witch who locked Jack and Jill in a gas chamber. All are German. The Wegners, the Schönmyths, the father, the mother, and myself, we’re all German. I was in despair, I solemnly... promised myself that I would never learn German. (Kofta 1998)<sup>80</sup>

In claiming the memory of all those who have passed away, a middle-aged Bogna invites them back to life as ghosts, apparitions, reminders of the past and of her loneliness that “consists of what she desires and what she simultaneously rejects” (Kofta 1998, 36).

My desire is aroused continually, it lures, tempts, promises fulfilment. It appears again and again in strange moments... suddenly, as a coffin black as coal with little golden twigs. I feel pain. My left hand is stiff with pain. The shooting pain behind my sternum intensifies. (1998)<sup>81</sup>

Her mother’s ghost pays her regular visits, and is usually accompanied by her grandmother, Sabina Schönmyth. Her father appears separately, “it is difficult to figure out what is happening there” (1998)<sup>82</sup>. In order to constitute herself as a subject, Bogna lets them “drag

behind [her] everywhere,” an easy task since “she has inherited this precarious pleasure of being in contact with ghosts from her grandmother Schönmyth” (1998)<sup>83</sup>. Lying in bed with her lover, who is twenty years younger than her, Bogna sees her grandmother’s ghost passing above their naked bodies. An image of the other bed, that of the dying grandmother, “intermingles with the lovers’ mattress” (1998)<sup>84</sup>. This “precarious pleasure” links with Bogna’s earlier fascination with incomprehensible German words; both relate to her curiosity to make some sense out of her peculiar identity that is nowhere to be grasped except in reference to other members of her family, her private mafia, as she believes:

My father’s name was Wegner, but just like grandfather Franciszek, he considered himself the truest, the most Polish of all Poles, although he went to schools in Berlin. To German schools, you must admit, Bernard, my mother used to respond, when he reproached her for the church Sunday school. He explained over and over again that the Wegners lived in Berlin, because there was no Poland anyway. But as soon as it became independent, grandfather Franciszek immediately began to wind up his business and moved his company Wegner & Sohn to his country. He packed up, liquidated everything, sold the factory buildings, but he took the Singers along, they were the best. He also took two German seamstresses for the beginning, so that they could teach Polish dressmakers how to sew properly. (Kofta 1998)<sup>85</sup>

This world of multiple discourses constitutes for the narrator a confusing static interference around the symbolic and increasingly phallogocentric structure of her universe. During the early stage of her linguistic discoveries there is no language to face up to her father’s strong, though not always rational, talk. In particular, his hatred of Sabina Schönmyth, Aniela’s mother, is irrational, underscored by class and gender prejudice as well as his own confused identity and fear. It is his personal ‘witch-hunt,’ a way of refocusing his own diaspora. In conversations with her father, Bogna gradually learns to answer back, using words of a refined quality, and inventing words to refresh their context. She refuses in the end to listen to her father reciting the dreadful “King Olch” poem, and “covers her ears,

since all she can hear is “hajlihajlohajlihajlo,” an echo of documentary propaganda films she watched with her school in the theatre.

I saw that my father had stopped now and rebukes me, wags his finger at me, because my behaviour was not up to the Wegners' level. Only Schönmyth children, uncouth village yokels, were so badly behaved... You said yourself, father, that Szotka returned to die in Hitler's country. (Kofta 1998)<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, the penetrating (not-quite-her-own) memory of Jews, Hitler, and Stalin is partly responsible for Bogna's recurring states of serious depression, resulting from her past and present inability to defend herself against massive historical trauma as well as against her own private distress.

Although I didn't want it, I understood more and more. My inquisitiveness, untameable but well hidden, made me catch the meanings of foreign words immediately. Angry with myself, I called myself 'Niemra', I showered slander on myself, deutsche Schweine, but my German dictionary was expanding with new concepts. (Kofta 1998)<sup>87</sup>

Finally I start to cry, I feel surrounded... they are everywhere, I hear Hitler's language around me, and in addition it is also my parents, my father and mother, who are speaking German, when they want to keep things they say secret. (1998)<sup>88</sup>

Bound to the processes of silencing and naming, Bogna starts to figure out some patterns in the always shifting borders between allies and enemies. Besides Hitler and Stalin, the political paradigms of good and evil she “brings home” from school, gradually a new figure begins to fascinate her: the evil woman in Jewish folktales told by her neighbor, Pandavid, who miraculously survived the war hidden behind a wardrobe, and who spoke Polish beautifully, much better than they (Kofta 1998, 96). In these tales, “a woman was always a messenger of Satan. But reb [Rabin] Urele or reb [Rabin] Szolem appeared to clarify all the uncertainties” (1998)<sup>89</sup>. Bogna likes these tales, they seem to provide her with a (still vague) key to the structure they all occupy. As she realizes now, she is split between two opposed universes: that of her mother, Aniela Schönmyth, and her father, Bernard Wegner, who, only by mistake, were brought into one homogenizing context of

displacement. Her mother, "the mystery of permanent indecisiveness" (1998, 256), is even less visible than her father. Aniela's family, distributed on both sides of the border and bearing the names Schönmyth, Szejnmit, or Szyjmit, is continually ridiculed and humiliated by her husband. Her marriage is a disappointment, making scarcely any difference between the taste of alienation and that of oppression. Coming from a poor family, a home full of "always crying children," Aniela dreams about a peaceful place, like a cloister. But then she "gave up her childhood plans," decides to "marry rich" (1998, 117), and succumbs to a different type of silence in which her desires remain unspoken and forbidden. Plunged into this puzzling phenomenon, Bogna remembers her parents always stubbornly defending their families against each other, her father in words, and her mother in tears. And although a provisory, strategic balance has been established between her parents, there is no balance between them and Sabina. Bogna's need to identify reasons for her mother's as well as her grandmother's degradation is evident, penetrating.

I knew that my mother would allow nobody to humiliate her as my father did. My mother was no Cinderella. My father did just what she wished; he married her, because she was beautiful. (1998)<sup>90</sup>

She imagines remembering the womb, and craves for its enclosed space of prelinguistic safety. She sleeps with a cover over her head, or submerges herself in the cooling water of the bathtub, desperately attempting to recreate the moisture and warmth of her mother's body and to leave her present body on the outside:

I left a woman locked in a cube of restlessness on the outside. She fled away like a soul from a dead body. I breathe through my bronchi, lightly, with relief. I am dangling. I am not afraid of being old. It can be like a caress devoid of eroticism, a pure pleasure of unconscious babyhood, a return to the hot springs, an existence without a convulsive shudder. (1998)<sup>91</sup>

Bogna also remembers the mirror as the stage of sudden anger, jealousy, anxiety, and separation from her mother's body. Her desire to return to the semiotic chora is accentuated

by her constant struggle against depression. Cunningly changing forms and appearances, depression is sometimes a woman-vampire who salivates at her sight full of devouring desires (1998, 47). Sometimes it is her godmother, a gloomy fairy-tale figure who touched her right hand at her birth with her poisoned magic wand (Kofta 1998, 27). Emerging thus in Bogna's fantasies both as a castrating/ abject figure (vampire) and a 'sacred' form of the 'feminine' (godmother), depression 'performs' on her (body) a different ritual (baptism), a sacred/secret sacrilege, like the Sabbath of the religious discourse. When the priest uttered his Christian formula, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost," the godmother/depression whispered into her ear: "you will carry the second name after your godmother who loves you and will always be there for you; then she kissed my forehead with her burning lips" (1998)<sup>92</sup>. As if following Irigaray's suggestion, the 'proper' naming of a child appears thus in Kofta's text as a secondary replacement of

the most irreducible mark of birth: the *navel*. A proper name, even a forename, is always late in terms of this most irreducible trace of identity: the scar left when the cord was cut. A proper name, even a forename, is slipped on to the body like a coating – an extra-corporeal identity card. (Irigaray 2000, 39)

Echoing Irigaray's and also Bronfen's interpretations of the navel as "a willfully unexplored part of the human body, an obscene detail that fascinates even as it repels" (Bronfen 1998, 3), Bogna's depression harks back to a different type of discourse; that of "the scar left when the cord was cut". In exploring this scar, she negotiates and revises her identity in relation to her father, her mother, and in particular her grandmother who, like the depression-ghost of the archaic mother, refuses to disappear, even when dead.

Color my cheeks and lips a bit, I look death-like today – says grandmother, her hair is combed, she looks at herself in the mirror with a silver handle. Such a mirror belonged to Snow White's stepmother in my German tale about Dwarves. The mirror answered the question who was the most beautiful in the world. I felt sorry for my grandmother, just as I always felt sorry for the stepmother. The mirror was very mean. (1998)<sup>93</sup>

In her struggle against these *omphalic* memories, Bogna craves for “a cold composure, even death,” but she also knows that these are “illusory hopes”, and that to imagine death to be composure is “a self-deception” (1998)<sup>94</sup>. Death, as she learns from her grandmother, is a type of life; the border between death and life is at once permeable and intangible, like the borders between nations.

Sabina Schönmyth dragged the dead behind her always and everywhere. Day and night, untiring, the procession followed her. The dead gave her no breathing space. She believed in an after-life, but not the same way the parish-priest wanted it in the small church nearby next to the bus-loop. (1998)<sup>95</sup>

Sabina’s resistance against the ‘proper’ community is a revolt that blurs the demands of secular and religious institutions. Like Consolata in Morrison’s text, or Kummernis in Tokarczuk’s, she is always already slipping across borders. Suspended in Bogna’s memory between the ‘weird’ mother (of her own mother), the “other” woman (forbidden to be visited), and the witch (as referred to by her father), Sabina associates with the symbolic structure of Bogna’s childhood but does not identify herself with it. She dwells rather on the edge of an apparent communal integrity, creating her own complex diaspora, a paradox of un/belonging. Caught in the impossibility of adjusting to the dominant culture, and of explaining her difficult historical situation, she continues to live in a double suspension of identity, in a female syndrome of being in a minority. Consequently, she does not even make an effort to fight for what remains unavailable to her in the phallocentric culture, namely “a concrete cultural possibility that is refused and redescribed as impossible” (Butler 1990, 77). Discouraged rather in defining a distinctive but legalized position in the context of her displacement, Sabina creates her own heretical fraction, a conspiracy against the rationality and plausibility of the dominant discourse.

Grandmother Sabina appeared to me as a terrible but fascinating person from bad fairy tales. Such creatures had snakes and toads in their service, ate worms and were evil to

all who came into their clutches. But they had power and were strong. That's why, when I first saw grandma... smiling and with her hair neatly bound at the back, with a parting in the middle... I wondered whether I could give her my hand without fear that she would tear it off. (Kofta 1998)<sup>96</sup>

Stigmatized as a "foreigner" and a monstrous figure with a desire for evil, and later re-inscribed by Bogna as a "fragile apparition," Sabina fuses into a dialogical, carnivalesque, but also "sacred" structure. Her house, "a one room hut built right after the war from the bricks of the ruined house of the Schönmyths" (1998)<sup>97</sup>, is a crossroads of the symbolic and the semiotic, a secret/sacred place of refuge for the mother and of pleasure and fascination for Bogna: "Everything was planned in such a way that it would not be possible to assign somebody else to live there, which in those days happened quite often. The walls of her room were upholstered with wine-red velvet" (1998)<sup>98</sup>. There, according to Bogna's father, "she had three husbands and drank vodka for breakfast!" (Kofta 1998, 168). For Aniela, however, returning to her mother's house is like giving in to a female authority, while being relieved of her own.

Do you recognize grandma Sabina's hut? She's waiting for us... the hut built of red German brick, soaked, according to father, in Polish blood. When I approached the door, my mother beside me, I quickly licked the brick. It was hard to tell what was its taste, but surely not blood-like. (Kofta 1998)<sup>99</sup>

In Sabina's hut, Bogna meets Szotka, Sabina's even more 'weird' sister, who "could not say a single Polish word properly, but "murmured some German names of long forgotten relatives" (1998)<sup>100</sup> that Bogna resembled: "If only my father knew who taught me German! Our trips there were our sweet secret, between mother and daughter" (1998)<sup>101</sup>.

Interestingly, neither Szotka nor Sabina are, according to Bogna, "truly German" (Kofta 1998, 160); they do not play her father's game of 'authenticity'<sup>102</sup>. Sabina's refusal to belong is that of a 'dangling' woman (like Marta in Tokarczuk's story), who realizes that there is no access to identity, except by way of continuous questioning and redefining of

provisional structures. As if 'added' to the Polish landscape, she represents Irigaray's 'other woman,' "a woman 'without common measure' who cannot be reduced to the quantifying measurements by which she is domesticated in male systems, who exceeds attempts to pin her down and confine her within a theoretical system" (Whitford 2000, 28). To ignore her (the way Bogna's father ignores her) implies not a lack of knowledge but awareness of her presence as 'the other' and a simultaneous will not to name 'the other' except by an insult. In knowing this, Sabina demonstrates both her "resistance, pride and anger" and a "troubling porousness," which alludes to her "ghostly" body, a site of transitions and foreign elements:

... in a cover of permanent mourning, in transparent black stockings through which her bones were shining, she was an intermediary state between life and death. She walked gently on the pavement. Old shoes were slightly distorted... She was afraid of wind, because everyday she was lighter, her flesh and bones were drying out and losing weight. At some point she will finally fly off, and her permanent widow's veil, the expression of plural memory of all her husbands and other men, since my father was sure, she had lovers; well, the veil will be flowing in the sky for some time, and then rise shattered by the wind of memories. (Kofta 1998)<sup>103</sup>

It is from her grandmother, whose "natural state was motherhood alternating with widowhood" (1998 257), that Bogna learns not to be afraid of what Cixous refers to as "the inside, neither her own, not that of the other" (1994, 134). Bogna's relationship to the law and to her own (difficult) husband also becomes a "relationship to the inside" (Kofta 1998, 134). Bogna admits that she "loved grandmother Schönmyth because of her gift of true life and congenial dying. I loved her a lot, because I believed that I resembled her" (Kofta 1998)<sup>104</sup>. During one of their forbidden visits (passages) to Sabina's house, Bogna finds out that Leonek, her cousin and her first erotic encounter in childhood, 'visits' Sabina (as a ghost) after his premature death to inform her of what he and Bogna were once doing under the table. Sabina is amused; she

laughs and speaks German to my mother. Then Polish to me, early beginnings, you have my temperament, your mother is as cold as a fish. – Be quiet, mother, says Aniela,



and makes the sign of the cross between her breasts, as if she wanted to chase away the devil. (1998)<sup>105</sup>

In her desire to identify herself with the eccentric figure of her grandmother (Kofta 1998 249), Bogna associates her continual deviations from normative structure, with the “porous” nature of Sabina, that is un/fixed, dialogical, associated with the “ghost” of the pre-Oedipal mother, a phantom of the “speaking subject” chasing Bogna’s biography:

... well then, Bogienka, will you remember your grandma Sabina? – my grandmother asks, sitting up in her bed. She takes three gold wedding rings off her fingers. She is holding them on her palm, and gives me a sign to come closer. She takes my hand and gives me one of the gold circles. She gives the other two to my mother. (1998)<sup>106</sup>

Accentuating the presence of continuity, rather than structure and relationship (to the Law), Kofta’s narrative connects the fates of all the female characters. The importance of continuity stands in direct relation to the mother as a holy and secret figure, “the goddess with her divine daughter that was always missing in the Holy Trinity” (1998 296). As a child, Bogna often re-enacts the role of this figure:

I used to stand motionless with a doll wrapped in a cloth, which I clasped to my breast. I knew it was a blasphemy, but every time I did it, I felt so clean and holy, with that beautiful American doll with real hair and eyes made of glass. (1998)<sup>107</sup>

Continuity, in a speechless and even prelinguistic form, appears in a loose, irregular connection with the kinship structure, or law, and seems to be deposited and memorized in ‘female’ types of ritual:

I straighten up the lace of the pillow under my mother’s heavy head, like an old experienced woman watching over a dead body. Many times I have seen women sitting at their neighbors’ coffins, who obviously could not return this gesture. Every next woman was guarding the one who passed away before her. Continuity, not relationship. They, too, are stored in my memory. I hear their voices now, I know what to do, how to conduct myself. Come on, children, come on, yea, do it all the way I do it. (1998)<sup>108</sup>

This continuity, representing the transitional sequence of virgin daughter, fertile mother, and wise/dangerous crone, suggests that sacredness and the “women” in Kofta’s narrative

converge at the point that could be referred to as a disordered unity, a type of unexplored, and perhaps inexplicable climax, a *jouissance* of the navel.

The unity consisting of phases, old age, maturity, childhood. All three in one small room, in harmony and peace. Grandmother resigned, reconciled with death, belongs to the past; mother, reconciled with life, represents the present time; I am owned by the future. (1998)<sup>109</sup>

The female trinity becomes a paralinguistic key, translating for Bogna the otherwise indigestible identifications of her childhood into a type of hybrid identity, “porous” but also pleasant, of woman as a sovereign rather than as unspoken-for territory:

Every child is born of a woman, like a little god, like a divine son or a divine daughter... The conception is always immaculate, because no reasonable and logically thinking woman, takes seriously the connection between what one allows a man to do in bed and the birth of a child. (1998)<sup>110</sup>

Her belief in the ‘immaculate conception’ is particularly significant in the context of her latest discovery that Bernard Wegner was not her natural father, and that there should be yet another German figure ‘messing up’ her biography. All she knows, however, is that “that German was an SS-man” (Kofta 1998, 320), “a tall blond man in a black leather coat” (1998, 330) that she once saw in a photograph carefully hidden at the bottom of her father’s wardrobe. Although she feels tired by her own personal unreality<sup>111</sup>, she holds on to the memory as a source of female knowledge, knowledge associated with continuity, rather than oppositions that fall into a system of “cohesive, yes, yes, no, no, this is bad, this is good. Monolithic like paranoia” (1998)<sup>112</sup>. While absorbing her newly discovered non-digestible context, Bogna’s writing about herself becomes a transgression of memories, a violation of her internal borders, which helps her to appropriate the world for herself, even as an act of cultural dispossession.

Both Tokarczuk’s and Kofta’s narratives speak about processes of cultural identification as transgressive and paradoxical sites of un/belonging. Although beliefs in

coherent identities (which these texts repeatedly question) are imaginary, these processes of identification are not (as such) imaginary, but rooted in the vulnerability of the characters and/or narrators entrapped in their stigmatized hybridities. It would be more precise to say that their contested identities transgress the culturally privileged discourse of tradition, passing into sites of new identifications either with the institution (law, religion) itself, or with other subjects, by the intermediary of their common desire to abolish the institution. In unplotting their biographies, these female protagonists resort to a conceptual fluidity of home and community that is at once enabling and paralyzing. "Composed of distances, relationships, analogies, and non-exclusive oppositions" (Kristeva 1980, 78), both narratives can be seen as textual "polylogues" (1980, 78) with an inherently subversive (carnavalesque) structure that contradicts itself, as it builds new relations and new resistances to culture. This structure, as a distinct and dislocating experience, turns stigmatized identities into a "different legality," that is, into a provisional, performative, and strategically feminist structure in process.

## RECAPITULATION: THE WITCH AS A TRACE OF CULTURAL UN/BELONGING

Throughout all the narratives discussed here, the 'witch' figure emerges as a trace of both heresy (historical stigma) and sacred disorder (cultural provisionality), as a type of transcendence and/or trance of identity that goes beyond oppositions. Simultaneously reinforcing and loosening their subordination (of gender, class, and nationality), Carter's figures of Magdalene and Jeanne experience this cultural transcendence in the form of a sacred disorder. The sacred alludes, in Carter's stories, to specifically 'feminine' traces of a *jouissance* that crosses a forbidden border (towards the body, eroticism, sensuality, sacrifice), becoming a hybrid and culturally undecidable structure of the Other. A sacred/heretic space associated with the Kristevan semiotic chora, *jouissance* as transcendence becomes central in Morrison's *Paradise* and Robinson's *Housekeeping*. As 'the imaginary', culturally abject and suspect transient, 'witch'-women interfere in these narratives with a patriarchal discourse that projects them as intruding figures corrupting the 'proper' patriarchal Daughters (of the Law). Their porous and stigmatized bodies illustrate the illegal simultaneity of the sacred and heresy (sacrilege), as proposed by Kristeva and Clément. Morrison's Consolata, defined by her transcultural constitution, is at odds with the notion of the housewife as resolutely maintaining the boundaries of her home/convent. Like Carter's figures, she experiences a religious lapse, exposing a heresy in finding an other sacred space in the paternal cult: the self-'pregnancy' that transcends her cronehood. Sylvie's habits, in Robinson's text, also offend the symbolic sense of order and propriety, confusing the 'proper' with the inappropriate, foreign and polluted. The lake, the inside of the house, and memories of the maternal, entice the narrator into abandoning the symbolic order for the abysmal, devouring 'inside'/womb of the transient mother. Tokarczuk's and Kofta's narratives project their 'witch' figures as the immediate results of a cultural and national

identity crisis. In their bordering and intermingling with each other, the split and multiple identities of Marta, Kummernis, or Sabina are as hybrid as those of the *la mestiza*. But they are also radical in their un/belonging, in their persistent identification with and by an unspoken desire to transcend a hostile, dominant structure.

Revising the reminiscence (trace) of the historical 'witch' as a hybrid and culturally undecidable structure, these narratives allude to the inaccessible logic of the other. The Other is not perceived here as a symmetrical opposite to sameness (as in the *herstorical* narratives), but as a system of incommensurability. Whereas in the radical feminist construction of the 'witch' discussed in Chapter 1 there are still traces of opposition, with nature and 'femininity' on one side and culture on the other, the witch figures discussed here blur the nature/culture boundary, and appear as an inconsistency, an anomaly, standing between the inside and the outside, order and chaos, female and male. As argued before, gender, as a cultural category of sex, no longer makes sense in these representations, and "must also designate the very apparatus of production" of meaning (Butler 1990, 7). Finally, the restriction imposed on deviance and an assumed lack of cultural heritage allows a type of sub-culture to emerge, a sub-culture providing the potential for a conceptual shift that Rajchman addresses in reference to history:

The potential for such movement and critical experimentation within society shows that history is not linear or progressive, any more than it is circular or cyclical. It shows that if history is a 'web', it is one with many gaps and holes which allow it to be constantly rewoven in other ways, and that it thus always carries with it the sort of 'in-between' time and spaces. (Rajchman 1995, ix)

It is precisely this ambiguous location of "'in-between' time and spaces" that emerges, in the narratives discussed, as a subversive form of un/belonging, a complex mediation of gender, ethnicity, and social positioning, a strategic wavering between incongruent cultures and philosophies. In conveying their own historical reminiscence of a cultural split (in culturally

distinct contexts), the figures of women discussed here negotiate their positions not in a quiet act of introspection, but in a painful re-member-ing that requires a plural consciousness, and fluency in using several systems of cultural understanding. Simultaneously, in a decisive contrast to the narratives of the 'herstorical' and 'archaic' witches analyzed in previous chapters, these narratives evoke an awareness that (cultural) transformations are never complete, and their protagonists 'survive' only as border-crossers and markers of new cultural territories.

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<sup>1</sup> "And one of the privileged names of tradition, in contemporary societies, is precisely 'culture'. In reality there are no identities, only identifications: either with the institution itself, or with other subjects by the intermediary of the institution" (Balibar 1995, 187).

<sup>2</sup> Creed writes: "The ultimate in abjection is the corpse. The body protects itself from bodily wastes such as shit, blood, urine and pus by ejecting these things from the body just as it expels food that, for whatever reason, the subject finds loathsome. The body ejects these substances, at the same time extricating itself from them and from the place where they fall, so that it might continue to live" (1993, 9).

<sup>3</sup> As Kristeva argues, it is always "a system of classifications, and not the substance itself" that decides whether something or someone is abject, filthy, sacred or not (2001, 92).

<sup>4</sup> "This carnivalesque cosmogony has persisted in the form of an antitheological (but not antimystical) and deeply popular movement. It remains present as an often misunderstood and persecuted substratum of official Western culture throughout its entire history... Within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of the author emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as [wo]man and mask" (Kristeva 1980, 78).

<sup>5</sup> Butler calls Kristeva's concept of subversion a "doubtful" strategy. Kristeva's theory, in her understanding, "appears to depend upon the stability and reproduction of precisely the paternal law that she seeks to displace. Although [Kristeva] effectively exposes the limits of Lacan's efforts to universalize the paternal law in language, she nevertheless concedes that the semiotic is invariably subordinate to the Symbolic, that it assumes its specificity within the terms of a hierarchy immune to challenge" (Butler 1990, 80).

<sup>6</sup> Bronfen writes: "Although it is often prominently displayed in sculptures of the human body and frequently a significant detail in paintings of the nude, it yet remains an oversight. Most dictionaries of subjects and symbols of art, or motives and themes in literature and folklore, will ignore the navel or merely include a cursory entry mentioning its multifarious usage as trope for conceptualizations of the center. Nor has the navel been privileged theoretically in psychoanalytically informed semiotic and cultural studies of the body, as have other body parts such as breast, penis, vagina, eye, nose, or foot" (Bronfen 1998, 3).

<sup>7</sup> Anzaldúa's influential essay "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness" (1987) "sketches out the consciousness of the 'mestiza,' the Chicana living in the borderlands that link the southwestern United

States with Mexico, the product of 'racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination'. For Anzaldúa, the space that exists between and within opposing worlds is a creative space, where *la mestiza* can revel in the strength and the ambiguities that result from the 'struggle of flesh, [the] struggle of borders, the 'cultural collision,' she embodies' (Warhol 1997, 742).

<sup>8</sup> I refer to Jean-François Lyotard's work *The Postmodern Condition* (1984).

<sup>9</sup> As Butler argues, the notion "of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality." However, the relation between the "imitation" and the "original" is more complex "than the critique generally allows" (1990, 137).

<sup>10</sup> As Warner suggests, Mary Magdalene "was created from unrelated stories in the image of an earlier mould, itself cast in a Judaic tradition. She fits into the theme of the harlot, like Gomer, the faithless wife of Hosea, who prefigured Israel's stormy union with Yahweh (Hosea 1:2-3); like Jezebel, who was eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:30-7) and like Rahab (Joshua 2 *passim*) who appears in Matthew's genealogy as an ancestress of Christ (Matthew 1:5) (1990, 232).

<sup>11</sup> The first version of "Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene" appeared in *FMR Magazine* in February 1992. Here quoted in *Burning Your Boats. Collected Short Stories* (1996).

<sup>12</sup> Exploring the questions that arise at the intersection of the feminine and the sacred, Clément and Kristeva do not provide any definitions of "feminine" sacredness, however, the very intersection, the coming together of these two cultural constructs creates chains of valid associations between faith, sexuality, the female body and the senses.

<sup>13</sup> The Virgin Mary is the only Christian woman conceptualised both as a holy virgin and a holy mother. The concept of a parthenogenetic virgin birth releases the Madonna from hysterical experiences. In Warner's understanding, the Roman Catholic Madonna does not menstruate (she is not fertile), her physiological integrity in pregnancy and *post partum* is astonishing, her birth pains are never mentioned and her virginity is never violated. There is no split in her body between the virgin and the mother.

<sup>14</sup> As Warner observes, the love goddesses of the Near East and of classical mythology, such as Venus, Ishtar, Astarte, and Anat "are entitled virgins despite their lovers, who die and rise again for them each year" (1990, 47). Moreover, the goddess Aphrodite "was sometimes surnamed *Porne*, or Courtesan... This facet of human personality could not be represented by the Virgin Mary, however beautifully and youthfully and enticingly she is portrayed. Her unspotted goodness prevents the sinner from identifying with her, and keeps her in the position of the Platonic ideal; but Mary Magdalene holds up a comforting mirror to those who sin again and again, and promises joy to human frailty. Although the Virgin is both the bride of Christ and of mankind, Mary Magdalene when she mourns and lays out Christ's body usurps that role, leaving the Virgin of Sorrows a more restricted maternal character" (1990, 235).

<sup>15</sup> Mary Magdalene may also be seen as a penitent Lilith; if she fulfils the third function (the aspect of the crone) of the archaic goddess, she does it with the exception of one significant aspect, that of the terrible mother, the active Lilith practically silenced by Roman-Catholic mythology.

<sup>16</sup> As Haskins relates, according to the Apocryphal Gospel of Philip, Magdalene was the companion of Jesus, who "loved [her] more than all the disciples, and kissed on her mouth often" (63.34-35) (Haskins 1993). Warner observes, moreover, that the suggestion of "love between Christ and Mary Magdalene had been celebrated by the Gnostics in the second century. The apocryphal *Gospel of Mary* portrays her as a supreme initiate into Christ's mysteries and the teacher of the other apostles; while the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*, which sees the union of man and woman as a symbol of healing and peace, dwells on the relationship of Christ and the Magdalene, who, it says, was often kissed by him. Analogous mythology is on the increase with the contemporary interest in the historical life of Jesus. *Jesus Christ Superstar* pictures her as a harlot, reformed through her love of Jesus. An avant-garde scholar, William Phipps, speculates in a serious book, *Was Jesus Married?*, that Mary Magdalene may have been his wife" (1990, 229).

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<sup>17</sup> I have referred to this concept in connection with Sissa's and Padel's theories in my reading of Maitland's "Cassandra".

<sup>18</sup> As Haskins relates, "Mary from Magdala is mentioned among the women who followed Jesus and who 'had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities'. According to Luke, Jesus exorcised seven devils out of her (8:2). Magdalene's 'seven devils' "were a focus for speculation amongst early Christian commentators; the link with the 'evil spirits and infirmities' ascribed to some of the women may well have led to their identification with the seven deadly sins. It has been suggested that Mary [Magdalene] was the best known of the women because her 'healing was the most dramatic', as the seven demons may have indicated a 'possession of extraordinary malignity'. However, nowhere in the New Testament is demoniacal possession regarded as synonymous with sin. That Mary [Magdalene]'s condition might have been psychological, that is, seen as madness, rather than moral or sexual, seems never to have entered into the considerations of the early biblical commentators" (1993, 14).

<sup>19</sup> Haskins observes: "That the woman apparently wears her hair loose is another sign of her fallen status, as only prostitutes wore their hair thus in public. Loosening the hair was also one way of disgracing a suspected adulteress; a good Jewess allowed none but her spouse to see her hair unbound, and by loosing it in public she gave grounds for mandatory divorce" (1993, 18).

<sup>20</sup> "Black Venus" first appeared in *Next Editions* in 1980. Here quoted in *Burning Your Boats. Collected Short Stories* (1996).

<sup>21</sup> While referring to Jezebel as a biblical model of a foreign woman/ prostitute I will narrow her image to that suggested by Pippin in *Apocalyptic Bodies* (1999) and link Pippin's interpretation with that offered by Claudia Camp in *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (1985).

<sup>22</sup> Carter's Venus reminds us of Wittig's Eve, who appears in *Les Guérillères* as a naked woman walking among the fruit trees in an orchard. Her beautiful body is black and shining, while her hair consists of thin moving snakes that produce music at each of her movements. Like Medusa, the key figure in Cixous's writing ridiculing Freud's idea about female castration, Carter's Venus is, however, enslaved.

<sup>23</sup> I refer to de Beauvoir's concept of "the complexity of woman" as a locus of male delight in her role as "a wonderful servant who is capable of dazzling him – and not too expensive. Is she angel or demon? The uncertainty makes her a Sphinx... "Who are you, whence come you, strange Sphinx? And there is still no end to dreaming and debating on the feminine mystery. It is indeed to preserve the skirts, petticoats, veils, long gloves, high-heeled shoes: everything that accentuates the difference in the Other makes her more desirable" (1993 203).

<sup>24</sup> De Beauvoir's *hetaira* incorporates seduction; "she is beyond all others flesh and spirit, idol, inspiration, muse. The whole life of a hetaira is a show; her remarks, her parroting, are intended not to express her thoughts but to produce an effect" (1993 601).

<sup>25</sup> The connection between eroticism and sacredness has been explored by Kristeva and Clément in *The Sacred and the Feminine*. Kristeva observes, among other things, that "what is experienced as 'sacred' is a translation of eroticism into more noble terms" (Kristeva 2001, 23).

<sup>26</sup> Baudelaire's poem is quoted in Carter's text: "Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits, // Au parfum mélangé de musc et de havane, // Oeuvre de quelque obi, le Faust de la savane, // Sorcière au flanc d'ébène, enfant des noirs minuits, (*Les Fleurs du Mal*, Charles)" (1996 244).

<sup>27</sup> For Kristeva, "a woman – with or without the trance – is the daily demonstration of that more or less catastrophic or delicious distillation of flesh within the mind, and vice versa. Psychoanalysis will say that woman, who is capable of giving life, is a subject, to be sure, but a subject whose repression remains very problematic. Rather she is subject to generalized vapors" (Kristeva 2001 16).

<sup>28</sup> While interpreting the sexual behavior of the Strange Woman, Camp re-evaluates "the relationship of strangeness to exogamy and foreign cults" (1985, 317-18) and links the "strange woman" with "the wife of another", that is, with an adulteress, and, in a broader sense, a "deviation, faithlessness, and the unknown"; she "represents all one must utterly avoid" (1985, 311).



<sup>29</sup> As Mary Douglas observed in *Purity and Danger*, evilness lies in transitional, non-definable states and conditions. It emanates insecurity and danger, which in (religious) rituals are controlled by separating the trespasser from the old status, segregating her/him temporarily and then declaring her/his entry into the new status.

<sup>30</sup> In "Seriously Funny: *Wise Children*," Webb analyses Carter's understanding of the 'real' and drag / fantasy (2000, 210-211).

<sup>31</sup> In *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (1989), le Guin classifies the "barren childhood" as the first "waiting room" to "fruitful maturity" that will be followed by "the barren old age, another waiting room" (1989, 3). She questions the concept of fruitfulness/ fertility as "the only meaningful condition for a woman" (1989, 5).

<sup>32</sup> I am referring to le Guin's concept of the crone as the third (and most fulfilling) self in the final stage of a woman's life, as developed in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*.

<sup>33</sup> Drawing on Foucault's "all encompassing" idea of order (discourse, power, discipline), Armstrong disapproves of his lack of concern "with the history of gender," or "with the role of writing (for and about women) it played in the history of sexuality." Foucault, according to Armstrong, "ignores the domestic domain in the development of the institutional culture," and "neglects to theorize the power of the modern household as a cultural prototype." Moreover, he "opens the category for political power extending the cultural discipline only so far as institutions came to be dominated by man (one could say, historically, because these institutions were dominated by male representatives." To correct Foucault's category, Armstrong's article, "Some Call it Fiction: On the Politics of Domesticity," emphasizes the "continuities between home and state" (1997, 918).

<sup>34</sup> In Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, pollution (or uncleanness) occurs as disorder, and the process of its elimination is understood as "a positive effort to organize the environment". Pollution is associated with matter that is *out of place*, and "must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained" (1969, 40). In consequence, a "polluting person is always in the wrong... developed some wrong condition or ...crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger" (1969, 113).

<sup>35</sup> Born in Lorain, Ohio in 1931, Toni Morrison belongs among the best-known contemporary African-American women writers, next to Maya Angelou, Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker. She graduated from Howard University in 1953, and earned her master's degree in English from Cornell University two years later. She then taught literature at the Southern University and at Howard University until 1965, when she moved to New York and became a publisher's editor with Random House while continuing to take seminars and to teach. In 1971-2 she was an Associate Professor at the State University of New York. She is married with two sons. Her style is dense, allusive, idiomatic, witty but often shocking in the intensity of the subject matter. Her earlier novels explore Afro-American efforts to survive the cultural, economic, and social tensions within their communities. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) tells the story of a young Southern black girl, who develops a delusion that she has blue eyes, is raped by her father, and descends into madness. *Sula* (1973) traces the lives of two black women (Nel and Sula) from their growing up together in a small Ohio town, through their sharply divergent paths of womanhood, to their ultimate confrontation. While Nel chooses to stay in the place of her birth, to marry, raise a family and become a pillar of the tightly knit black community, Sula, rejects all that Nel has accepted. She escapes to college, submerges herself in city life, and when she returns to her roots, it is as a rebel, a mocker, a wanton sexual seductress. Both women must suffer the consequences of their choices; both must decide if they can afford to harbor the love they have for each other; and both combine to create an unforgettable rendering of what it means and costs to exist and survive as a black woman in America. The best-selling *Song of Solomon* (1977), which won the US National Book Critics' Circle Award, tells of black Northerners trying to trace their family history back through the era of slavery. The Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Beloved* (1987; filmed 1998) "is written in bits and images, smashed like a mirror on the floor and left for the reader to put together" (Review by Erica Bauermeister). At the center of this hypnotic novel is desperate Sethe, who escaped from slavery, but haunted by its heritage, prefers to murder her children rather than see them return to slavery. Morrison's recent novels include *Jazz* (1992), a story of a triangle of passion, jealousy, murder and redemption, of sex and spirituality, of slavery and liberation, (that develops the story told in *Beloved*), and *Paradise* (1998) to be discussed here. She has also published a study of African Americans in US literature, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, becoming the first black woman writer to receive the prize (Macmillan 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Purkiss writes: "Moralists and writers of domestic conduct books stress that the virtuous wife must 'keep house': this means both staying home and doing housework.... The physical boundaries of property become identified with the social boundaries of propriety. As well as remaining within the boundaries of the household and ordering its contents, woman was represented as guarding its resources from overflowing or escaping into the general economy" (1996, 98).

<sup>37</sup> In *The Newly Born Woman*, Clément and Cixous allude to the imagery of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* as depicted by Hieronymous Bosch. This most unconventional Triptych (c.1500; Prado, Madrid) depicts the history of the world and the progression of sin. Beginning on the outside shutters with the creation of the world, the story progresses from Adam and Eve and original sin on the left panel to the torments of hell, a dark, icy, yet fiery nightmarish vision, on the right. *The Garden of Delights* in the center illustrates a world deeply engaged in pleasures which, in Clément's text, are devoid of sinful connotations and reformulated as *jouissance* of forms.

<sup>38</sup> In analyzing Morrison's "Recitatif," Abel emphasizes the ambiguity and/or interchangeability of racial roles (Twyla - Roberta relationship), an ambiguity that "discloses the operations of race in the feminine." The reader is unable to identify which is the black woman and which is the white (Abel 1997, 102), and thus it is not the stereotyping itself, but rather the suspension of identification that makes the story so controversial.

<sup>39</sup> Marilynne Robinson (born in 1944) was educated at Brown University and the University of Washington. Her first novel *Housekeeping* (later filmed by Bill Forsyth) earned its author the 1982 Ernest Hemingway Foundation award for best first novel, a 1982 Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, a PEN/Faulkner fiction award nomination and a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize. Robinson has also published several nonfiction works, including the thought-provoking and controversial *Mother Country: Britain, the Nuclear State, and Nuclear Pollution* taking Sellafield, a nuclear reprocessing plant in Great Britain, as a metaphor for twentieth-century genocide which is, according to Robinson, a rather routine, day-to-day, and thoroughly 'democratic' destruction of the planet by current industrial magic (encouraged, or at least condoned, by almost everybody), which threatens to terminate everything on earth in the quite foreseeable future. Most recently, Robinson published a collection of essays *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (1998) brilliantly addressing subjects that have become the territory of specialists - religion, history, the state of society, and *Puritans and Prigs* (1999). Robinson lives in New England.

<sup>40</sup> As Butler observes, "Lévi-Strauss' structuralist anthropology, including the problematic nature/culture distinction, has been appropriated by some feminist theorists to support and elucidate the sex/gender distinction: the position that there is a natural or biological female who is subsequently transformed into a socially subordinate 'woman,' with the consequence that 'sex' is to nature or 'the raw' as gender is to culture or 'the cooked' (1990 36-37). I draw here on Clément's reference to Lévi-Strauss in *Mythologiques*: "to become a man means to eat cooked food. The raw is natural, the cooked is cultural, and the first gesture proper to the human race is that of lighting fire" (2001, 108).

<sup>41</sup> Tokarczuk's *Dom dzienny, dom nocny* was published in Polish in 1998 and translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones as *House of Day, House of Night* (London: Granta, 2002). In the following analysis, I provide my translations of the selected fragments. Unless otherwise stated, all italics are the author's and all ellipses mine.

<sup>42</sup> Kořta's *Złodziejka pamięci* was published in Polish in 1998. All translations are mine, the original is provided in the endnote. Unless otherwise stated, all italics are the author's and all ellipses, mine.

<sup>43</sup> Krystyna Kořta (born 1945) is an established Polish writer, contributing to the largest women's magazine "Twój Styl" ("Your Style"). Her drama *Pępowina* (The Umbilical Cord) appeared recently in a collection of essays *Eastern Promise. Seven Plays from Central and Eastern Europe* (1999). Kořta graduated in Polish Philology from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She has published the following novels: *Wizjer* (Peephole) (1978), *Wiory* (Shavings) (1980), a novel set in the 'schizophrenic' Stalinist years of the 1950s in Poland, *Pawilon małych drapieżców* (The Pavilion of Small Beasts of Prey) (1988), *Ciało niczyje* (No One's Body) (1988), and *Złodziejka pamięci* (She is a Thief of Memories) (1998) which I selected for discussion here. Kořta is also the author of the collection of stories: *Człowiek, który nie umarł* (The Man Who Did Not Die) (1990) as well as of the controversial *Wychowanie seksualne dla klasy wyższej, średniej i niższej*. (Sexual Education for the Upper, Middle and Lower Classes) (2000), illustrated by Andrzej Czeczot. With Małgorzata Domagalik (a popular TV and newspaper journalist) she published a best-seller under the title *Harpie, piranie*,

*anioly* (Harpies, Piranhas, Angels) revealing that women in Poland still live in a ghetto of myths, stereotypes and, on the surface, unalterably 'feminized' habits. This, not necessarily a straightforward feminist novel, invites into controversial dialogue between sexes. *Krótką historią Iwony Tramp* (A Short Story about Iwona Tramp) was released in 2001 as a first Polish novel on the internet. In 2002, Kofta published an extended version of her earlier novel *Chwała czarownicom* (Glory to the Witches) in which she introduces her heroine as an alienated contemporary writer whose spontaneous, intuitive, and extremely controversial acts wander across various social, religious and cultural taboos and well-defined boundary lines of what is an accepted behavior of a daughter, wife and a woman in the Polish society today.

<sup>44</sup> In *Kopciuszek, Frankenstein i inne. Feminizm wobec mitu* (Cinderella, Frankenstein, and Others. Feminism and Myth), Szczuka analyzes various poststructural feminist developments, placing Tokarczuk among such authors as Emma Tennant, Jeanette Winterson, and Angela Carter.

<sup>45</sup> "Było tak, jakby Marta po prostu nie miała nic do powiedzenia o sobie. Jakby nie miała żadnej historii. Lubiła mówić tylko o innych ludziach... także o tych, którzy najpewniej wcale nie istnieli – potem znalazłam dowody, że Marta lubiła zmyślać. I o miejscach, w których tych ludzi zasadzała jak rośliny" (Tokarczuk 1998, 10).

<sup>46</sup> "Z okna długiego pokoju widać dom Marty. Od trzech lat zastanawiałam się, kim jest Marta. O sobie zawsze mówiła co innego. Za każdym razem podawała inny rok urodzenia" (Tokarczuk 1998, 9).

<sup>47</sup> "Czasem myślałam, że Marta nie słucha albo jest nieczuła jak ścięte, martwe drzewo... nawet jakaś okrutna, nie raz i nie dwa, jak na przykład wtedy, gdy tuczyła te swoje koguty, a potem zabiła je i zżarła, wszystkie naraz, w ciągu dwóch jesiennych dni..." (Tokarczuk 1998, 12).

<sup>48</sup> "Mogło być tak, że budziła się w marcu. Leżała najpierw bez ruchu i nawet nie wiedziała czy ma otwarte oczy – i tak wszędzie było ciemno... Najpierw poczuła zapach piwnicy – wilgotny i bezpieczny, zapach grzybów i mokrego siana. Ten zapach przypominał lato. Ciało wracało ze snu długo, aż w końcu odkryła, że ma otwarte oczy... I tak po kolei, częściami budziła całe ciało, powoływała je znowu do życia..." (Tokarczuk 1998, 12).

<sup>49</sup> "Nie rozumiałam Marty i teraz jej nie rozumiem, gdy o niej myślę. Ale po co mi zrozumienie Marty? Co miałyby mi dać jasne odkrycie jej zachowań, źródeł, z jakich płynęły jej wszystkie opowieści. Co dałaby mi jej biografia, jeżeli Marta w ogóle miała jakąś biografię? Może są ludzie bez biografii, bez przyszłości i bez przeszłości, którzy zjawiają się innym jako wieczne teraz?" (Tokarczuk 1998, 12).

<sup>50</sup> I return to Sprengnether's references to the pre-Oedipal mother and her concept ("effect") of the "spectral," ('spectre' is related to 'spectacle,' 'speculation,' and 'suspicion,' while its immediate source is the Latin spectrum, meaning, simply, an appearance" (Sprengnether 1990 5)) which I have earlier linked to the Derridean concept of a *ghost* that "can no longer be distinguished, with the same assurance, from truth, reality, living flesh, etc" (Derrida 1991, 130).

<sup>51</sup> Echoing Felman's and Irigaray's deconstructions of mad (hysterical) female speech in "Przędki, tkaczki i pająki. Uwagi o twórczości kobiet" (Spinners, Weavers, and Spiders. Remarks about Women's Writing) (2000), Szczuka specifically refers to aphorisms and generally adopted axioms in the Polish language, such as women's ability to "grind" or to "mince" with their enormous tongues, or to "wag" their tongues and gossip. I provide my own translation of the selected quotations, and the original is provided in the endnote. "Mielenie jęzorami", 'strzępienie języków po próżnicy' czy, w sympatyczniejszej wersji, 'kobiece ploteczki' oznaczają czas spędzony nietwórczo, przeciekający przez palce. Upodobanie do ple ple jest prostackie, typowe dla 'bab z magła'. Ciekawe skądinąd, że baby z magła zawsze 'maglują gębami' plotki, a kucharki czytają romanse. Pleść to tyle, co mówić rzeczy bez znaczenia. Plecenie bliskie jest gaworzeniu, bredzeniu... i majaczeniu czyli stylom ekspresji dzieci, ludzi nawiedzonych gorączką, chorobą, szaleństwem albo dotkniętych demencją – wszak 'plecenie trzy po trzy' to mowa sklerotyków" (Szczuka 2000, 70).

<sup>52</sup> "Wszystkiego musiałam się domyślać i zdawałam sobie sprawę, że fantazjuję na jej temat. Tworzę Martę z całą jej przeszłością i terażniejszością. Bo kiedy tylko prosiłam, żeby opowiedziała mi coś o sobie... ona zmieniała temat, odwracała głowę do okna albo po prostu milkła i w skupieniu kroїła kapustę czy plotła te swoje-cudze włosy" (Tokarczuk 1998, 10).

<sup>53</sup> "Mogłam się domyślać, skąd wzięła się Marta. Dlaczego nie istniała dla nas zimą, a pojawiała się wczesną wiosną" (Tokarczuk 1998, 266).

<sup>54</sup> This saint is a fictitious narrative figure.

<sup>55</sup> "Na krzyżu wisiła kobieta, dziewczyna, w tak obcisłej sukience, że jej piersi wydawały się pod warstwą farby nagie... Spod sukni wystawał bucik, druga stopa była bosa i po tym poznałam, że ta sama figurka wisi w kapliczce przy drodze do Agnieszki. Tamta miała jednak brodę, dlatego zawsze myślałam, że to Chrystus w wyjątkowo długiej szacie. Pod spodem było napisane "Sanc. Wilgefortis. Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat", a Marta powiedziała, że to jest święta Troska" (Tokarczuk 1998, 53).

<sup>56</sup> "Żywot Kummernis z Schonau, spisany z pomocą Ducha Świętego oraz przełożonej zakonu benedyktynek w Klosterze przez Paschalisa, mnicha" (Tokarczuk 1998, 54).

<sup>57</sup> "Siostry przyjęły dziewczynkę z radością, szybko bowiem okazało się, że piękno cielesnemu odpowiada piękno duchowe, a nawet je przewyższa... gdy staowało się przy niej, biło od niej wielkie miłe sercu ciepło i nawet ciemna izba wydawała się jasna, a w jej mowie była niespotykana na ten wiek mądrość i dojrzałe były jej sądy. Jej wątłe ciało wydzielalo balsamiczny zapach, a w jej pościeli znajdowano róże, choć była zima. Kiedyś, gdy postawiono ją przed lustrem, na jego powierzchni pokazał się wizerunek twarzy Syna bożego i utrzymywał się tam do następnego dnia" (Tokarczuk 1998, 57).

<sup>58</sup> The Judeo-Christian concepts of the virgin and the mother are suspended between the virginal body and its self-destruction (transformation) in pregnancy. Legalized sets of rules govern the historical female body: if a virgin, a woman must remain so until she marries, otherwise, she is a harlot. If a wife-mother, she must obey her husband and remain faithful, otherwise, she commits adultery, often penalized by death. If she chooses to retain her virginity, her only refuge is becoming a nun, and she must experience the vocation as becoming the bride/servant of the great Father. Whatever she is, she remains imprisoned in the polluted body of Eve.

<sup>59</sup> The 'Black Madonna' (a famous painting in the Jasna Góra monastery, Częstochowa) is generally believed to be dark because of the soot residue that 'discolors' the painting. The soot is the result of centuries of votive lights and candles burning in front of the painting. In *The Temple of My Familiar*, Alice Walker ironically comments on the presence of the Black Madonna in the Polish context. She ascribes this presence to the long erased traces of the African Goddess in people's memories, and to their cultural unawareness: "If I am not mistaken it is only in Poland that Our Black Lady, the Great Mother of All – Mother Africa, you will – is still openly worshipped. Perhaps that is why it is said of the Poles that they are none too bright" (1989, 223).

<sup>60</sup> "Zaczął się nowicjat, czas przygotowania do oddania się Panu" (Tokarczuk 1998, 57).

<sup>61</sup> "Nuns are not the only brides of Christ, for the sacrament of the first Holy Communion is treated with great solemnity in Catholic countries" (Tokarczuk 1998, 128).

<sup>62</sup> "Lecz ojciec był nieubłagany i nie chciał słyszeć o oddaniu córki mniszkom. Tam stałaby się bowiem czymś osobnym, nie zagospodarowanym jak ugór. Wydając ją za Wiframa von Pannewicz, wydałby ją niejako sobie, to znaczy rodzajowi męskiemu, w którym przez Boga miał udział, aby władać i mądrze rozporządzać stworzeniem Pana" (Tokarczuk 1998, 58).

<sup>63</sup> "Widziałam siebie jako inkrustowaną szkatułkę. Otwierałam wieczko, a tam była jeszcze jedna szkatułka, cała z koralu, a w niej jeszcze inna, cała z masy perłowej. I tak niecierpliwie otwierałam siebie samą, nie wiedząc jeszcze, do czego to prowadzi, aż w najmniejszej szkatułce, w najmniejszym pudełeczku, na dnie wszystkich innych, zobaczyłam Twój obraz, żywy i barwny. I natychmiast zatrzasnęłam wszystkie zamknięcia, żeby Cię z siebie nie utracić, i odtąd jestem w zgodzie ze sobą, a nawet pokochałam siebie, bo noszę Cię w sobie... Zawsze jestem Tobą ciężarna" (Tokarczuk 1998, 115).

<sup>64</sup> "Rzekł więc jej: Ciałem należysz do świata i nie masz innego pana oprócz mnie. Powiedziała mu na to córka: Mam innego Ojca w niebie i On mi innego szykuje Oblubieńca. Baron rozeźlił się na te słowa i rzekł: Ja jestem panem twojego życia, On jest panem twej śmierci" (Tokarczuk 1998, 58).

<sup>65</sup> "Kummernis leczy chore dusze i cierpienie płynące ze spustoszości serca" (Tokarczuk 1998, 60).

<sup>66</sup> "Wołano ją także do umierających, żeby prowadziła ich dusze przez labirynty śmierci" (Tokarczuk 1998, 61).

<sup>67</sup> "W pozbawionej okna komnacie stała Kummernis, lecz nie była to kobieta, którą znali wszyscy. Jej twarz porośnięta była jedwabistą brodą, rozpuszczone włosy upadały do ramion. Z rozdartego dekoltu sukni wystawały dwie nagie dziewczęce piersi. Spojrzenie ciemnych, lecz łagodnych oczu przesuwano się po twarzach ciekawskich i w końcu zatrzymało się na baronie. Dziewki zaczęły czynić znak krzyża i klękały jedna po drugiej. Kummernis, czy ktokolwiek to był, podniosła ręce, jakby ich wszystkich chciała przytulić do piersi. Rzeka cichym głosem: Pan mój mnie wybawił od siebie samej i obdarzył swą brodą. Jeszcze tej samej nocy baron kazał zamurować potwora w komnacie. Wolfram wsiadł na konia i nie żegnając się z nikim, odjechał" (Tokarczuk 1998, 65).

<sup>68</sup> Kristeva refers to "an 'other' logic" in her commentary on Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) who "always guided by love" knew "that the journey is possible but that 'comprehension' or 'representation' remain forever imperfect... she holds a reserve that confers flexibility and energy on her. A subtle conqueror, she is so because she feels and communicates her limits" (Kristeva 2001, 35).

<sup>69</sup> "Mogłabyś kochać i być kochana, powiedział. Mogłabym, odpowiedziała. Mogłabyś nosić w swoim łonie dziecko, słyszeć je od wewnątrz, a potem wydać na świat, powiedział. Wydać światu, rzekła. Mogłabyś je kapać, karmić, przewijać, pieścić. Mogłabyś patrzeć, jak rośnie, jak podobne w ciele i duszy do ciebie się staje. Mogłabyś je ofiarować swojemu Bogu..." (Tokarczuk 1998, 66).

<sup>70</sup> "Twój upór tutaj, w samotności, z cudzą twarzą zamiast twojego pięknego oblicza nie ma sensu. Nie jesteś Nim. Zrobił ci żart i już go nie obchodzisz. Zapomniał o tobie, poszedł tworzyć światy.... Zostawił cię wobec głupiej gawiedzi, która równie dobrze domagać się będzie twego uświęcenia, jak i spalenia na stosie" (Tokarczuk 1998, 66).

<sup>71</sup> "The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Virgin Mary appears both as the mother and the bride of God. Her role as the beloved in heaven diminished in the fifteenth century, when hymns of love were no longer sung to her by troubadours – the heretical poets of carnal love – but by the angels in heaven" (Warner 1990, 174).

<sup>72</sup> "Popatrz na mnie, rzekł tedy Diabeł. Przygarnęła go mocniej do swoich piersi. Czułe gładziła jego gładką skórę. Potem Kummernis wyciągnęła pierś i ułożyła Diabła do ssania. Diabeł szarpnął się i znikł tak samo, jak się pojawił" (Tokarczuk 1998, 66).

<sup>73</sup> As suggested by Kristeva, "[t]he Orthodox Church, heir no doubt to a matriarchy that was more intense in Eastern European societies, emphasized Mary's virginity more boldly. Mary was contrasted with Eve, life with death (Jerome, *Letter 22* 'Death came through Eve but life came through Mary'; Irenaeus, 'Through Mary the snake becomes a dove and we are freed from the chains of death')" (Kristeva 1986, 165).

<sup>74</sup> "Skoro jest w Tobie Bóg, to umrzyj jak Bóg" (Tokarczuk 1998, 68).

<sup>75</sup> "Urodził się jakiś niedoskonały, bo od kiedy pamiętał, było mu w sobie źle, jakby pomylił się w narodzinach i wybrał nie to ciało, nie to miejsce, nie ten czas" (Tokarczuk 1998, 74).

<sup>76</sup> "To niedopracowane synu... Albo to: 'Bez względu na to co czynię – to jest miłość do Ciebie, a kochając Ciebie, muszę miłować siebie, bo to, co we mnie żyje, to co kocha – jest Tobą.' To już brzmi bardzo heretycko.... Paschalis zrozumiał, że wszystko przepało i wyciągnął z kieszeni swój ostatni argument – drewniany krzyżyk z półnagim ciałem kobiety o twarzy Chrystusa. 'Można to kupić wszędzie', powiedział. 'Wierni pielgrzymują do Albendorfu po jej błogosławieństwo'... 'Co za niesmaczne dziwactwo,' skrzywił się zakonnik" (Tokarczuk 1998, 161).

<sup>77</sup> "Babka Sabina ... u której pomniejsze czarownice mogłyby brać korepetycje, dobrze zapamiętałam co mówił ojciec. Gdy po raz pierwszy zobaczyłam kruchą, dumnie wyprostowaną kobietę w czarnej sukni do kostek, matka dwa razy musiała powtarzać: przywitaj się, to babka Sabina, no Bogienko, co się stało?" (Kofta 1998, 150).

<sup>78</sup> I provide my own translation of the selected quotations: "Najważniejszym elementem kobiecej powieści jest protagonistka (lub kilka protagonistek) będąca przeciwieństwem stereotypowej heroiny literackiej. W istocie, z całą swoją zwyczajnością i losem, który odzwierciedla biografie statystycznych kobiet, jest ona anty-heroiną, tak mało w niej na pozór materiału na książkę. Nie może być zbyt młoda. Na dobrą sprawę mogę stwierdzić, iż typowa bohaterka powieści kobiecej ma około czterdziestu lat i sama się nią od jakiegoś czasu czuje. Jej wiek

wiąże się ze specyfiką kobiecego procesu tożsamościowego i kryzysów mu towarzyszących” (Kraskowska 2000, 207).

<sup>79</sup> “Jest piękny wrześnieowy dzień. Świeci słońce, więc życie ma pozory normalności. Ulicą idzie kobieta z wózkiem. Niemieccy żołnierze przyglądają się jej. Myśli kobiety i żołnierzy są zbieżne w jednym punkcie, w znaku zapytania, kiedy wreszcie skończy się wojna. Na wózku siedzi mała dziewczyneczka w kapeluszu z rondem i przez cały czas mówi. Komentuje wszystko co widzi. Niemiecki żołnierz pyta kobietę o wiek dziecka. W grudniu skończy roczek, odpowiada matka płynną niemczyzną. Żołnierz kręci głową z niedowierzaniem. Dziewczynka nie przestaje mówić, pytać i odpowiadać samej sobie. Ludzie odwracają głowy i śmieją się, jakby nie było wojny” (Kofta 1998, 50).

<sup>80</sup> “Wtedy ogarnęło mnie przerażenie. Wydawało mi się, że wszyscy jesteśmy Niemcami. Nie tylko wilk był niemiecki, ale i babcia, może podobna do Sabiny Schönmyth. Czerwony Kapturek i Kopciuszek to także dwie małe Niemki. Macocha i jej córki, one mogły być Niemkami, bo miały wstrętny charakter, tak jak niemiecka Baba Jaga, która zamknęła Jasia i Małgosię w komorze gazowej. Wszyscy są Niemcami. Wegnerowie, Schönmythowie, ojciec, matka i ja sama też jestem Niemką. Byłam w rozpaczy, złożyłam... uroczystą... przysięgę, że nigdy nie będę się uczyła niemieckiego” (Kofta 1998, 162).

<sup>81</sup> “Pragnienie wciąż się odradza, obiecuje, mami ludzi spełnieniem. Pojawia się wciąż od nowa w dziwnych momentach... nagle, przy czarnej jak węgiel trumnie ze złotymi gałązkami. Czuję ból. Sztynnieje mi z bólu lewa ręka. Klucie za mostkiem wzmaga się” (Kofta 1998, 292).

<sup>82</sup> “Walka popiołów wciąż trwa. Duch matki nawiedza mnie sam albo razem z babką Schönmyth. Ojciec przychodzi oddzielnie, trudno zrozumieć co się tam dzieje” (Kofta 1998, 199).

<sup>83</sup> “Włoką się za mną wszędzie. Odziedziczyłam tę wątpliwą przyjemność obcowania z duchami po babce” (Kofta 1998, 17).

<sup>84</sup> “Łóżko umierającej babki nakłada się na materac kochanków” (Kofta 1998, 16).

<sup>85</sup> “Ojciec nazywał się Wegner, ale tak samo jak dziadek Franciszek uważał się za najprawdziwszego, najbardziej polskiego ze wszystkich Polaka, mimo że chodził do szkół w Berlinie. Do niemieckich szkół, musisz przyznać, Bernard, mówiła matka, gdy wypominał jej niedzielną szkółkę kościelną. Tłumaczył mi aż do znudzenia, że Wegnerowie mieszkali w Berlinie, bo wówczas i tak Polski nie było. Ale jak tylko powstała, dziadek Franciszek od razu zaczął związać interes i przeniósł firmę Wegner & Sohn do kraju. Zwinął cały interes, zlikwidował majdan, sprzedał budynki fabryczne, ale singery wziął ze sobą, bo były najlepsze. Zabrał także na początek dwie niemieckie szwaczki, żeby poduczyły porządnego szycia polskie krawcowe” (Kofta 1998, 161).

<sup>86</sup> “Król olch był po prostu paskudny.... Zatkaliśmy uszy dłońmi, żeby zademonstrować, jak jestem głucha na całe to hitlerowskie gadanie. Widziałam, że ojciec przestał recytować i teraz... upomina mnie, grożąc palcem, bo to było zachowanie niegodne Wegnerów. Tak niegrzeczne mogły być tylko dzieci Schönmythów, nieokrzese wiejskie tłumoki, co to wyrastają potem na wariatów i wieszają się na drzewach, alkoholicy leczeni w szpitalach. - Sam tatuś mówił, że Szotka pojechała umrzeć do kraju Hitlera! - wołam oburzona” (Kofta 1998, 157-8).

<sup>87</sup> “Mimo, że nie chciałam, to jednak rozumiałam coraz więcej. Ciekawość całkiem nieposkromiona, choć skrętnie ukrywana, powodowała, że chwytalam znaczenia obcych słów w locie. Wściekła na siebie w duchu, nazywałam się Niemrą, obrzucałam wyzwiskami, deutsche Schweine, ale mój niemiecki słownik wzbogacał się o coraz to nowe pojęcia” (Kofta 1998, 233).

<sup>88</sup> “Wreszcie zaczynam płakać, czuje się osaczona ... są wszędzie, dookoła słyszę język Hitlera, a w dodatku jeszcze moi rodzice, ojciec i matka, rozmawiają ze sobą po niemiecku, jeśli pragną, by to co mówią, pozostało tajemnicą” (Kofta 1998, 112).

<sup>89</sup> “Kobieta zawsze występowała jako wysłanniczka szatana. Wreszcie zjawił się reb Urele albo reb Szolem i rozstrzygali każdą wątpliwość. Dla mnie te opowieści brzmiały jak baśnie z tysiąca i jednej nocy, ale podobały mi się znacznie bardziej” (Kofta 1998, 97).

<sup>90</sup> "Wiedziałam, że matka nigdy by na to nie pozwoliła, żeby ktoś oprócz ojca nią pomiatał. Moja matka nigdy nie była Kopciuszkiem. Ojciec zrobił tylko to, czego sobie życzyła; ożenił się z nią, bo była piękna" (Kofta 1998, 117).

<sup>91</sup> "Zostawiłam kobietę zamkniętą w sześcianie niepokoju na zewnątrz. Uleciała jak dusza z martwego ciała. Oddycham skrzelami, lekko, z ulgą. Wiszę. Nie boję się starości. Może być pieśczętą pozbawioną erotyzmu, czystą przyjemnością nieświadomego niemowlęctwa, powrotem do ciepłych źródeł, istnieniem bez konwulsyjnych dreszczy" (Kofta 1998, 33).

<sup>92</sup> "moja chrzestna matka, dotknęła mnie już przy urodzeniu swą zatrutą różdżką... Gdy kapłan wygłosił formułę, ja ciebie chrzczę w imię Ojca i Syna, i Ducha, szepnęła: będziesz nosiła drugie imię po matce chrzestnej, która kocha cię i pozostanie ci wierna; potem pocałowała mnie rozpalonymi ustami w czoło" (Kofta 1998, 27).

<sup>93</sup> "Pomaluj mi trochę policzki i usta, trupio dzisiaj wyglądam – mówi babka, już uczesana, przeglądając się w lusterku ze srebrną rączką. Takie lustro miała macocha Królowy Śnieżki, w mojej niemieckiej bajce o krasnoludkach. To lustro odpowiadało na pytanie, kto jest najpiękniejszy w świecie. Było mi teraz żal babki, tak jak zawsze macochy. Lustro było bardzo nieuprzejme" (Kofta 1998, 242).

<sup>94</sup> "Przeklęta depresja znów ślini się na mój widok. Chce mnie pożyć. Żeby tak osiągnąć zimny spokój, niechby nawet umrzeć, byleby nic nie czuć. Żłudne nadzieje, oszukiwanie się, że śmierć jest spokojem" (Kofta 1998, 47).

<sup>95</sup> "Sabina Schönmyth zawsze i wszędzie ciągnęła za sobą swych zmarłych. W dzień i w nocy, niezmordowanie, wlokła się za nią cała ta procesja. Zmarli nie dawali jej chwili wytchnienia. Wierzyła w istnienie życia pozagrobowego, chociaż nie całkiem tak, jak chciałby proboszcz z pobliskiej parafii małego kościółka przy pętli" (Kofta 1998, 212).

<sup>96</sup> "Babka Sabina wydała mi się straszną i pociągającą postacią ze złych baśni. Takie istoty miały na swoje usługi węże, ropuchy, odżywiały się glistami i każdemu, kto wpadał w ich pazury, robiły coś złego. Jednak miały władzę i były potężne. Dlatego też gdy pierwszy raz zobaczyłam babkę... uśmiechniętą, z porządnie zaczesanymi do tyłu włosami, z przedziałkiem pośrodku... zastanawiałam się, czy mogę podać jej rękę bez lęku, że mi ją oderwie. Pocałowała mnie w czoło i nie był to wcale śliski pocałunek wiedźmy" (Kofta 1998, 209).

<sup>97</sup> "w jednoizbowej chałupce z czerwonej cegły, zbudowanej od razu po wojnie ze starego zrujnowanego domu Schönmythów" (Kofta 1998, 168).

<sup>98</sup> "Był tam tylko jeden pokój, wnęka kuchenna, przepierzenie do mycia i [maciupka] toaleta... Wszystko zostało obmyślane w ten sposób, żeby nie można było babce nikogo dokwaterowywać, co w tamtych czasach było dość częste. Ściany pokoju obito ciemnoczerwonym aksamitem" (Kofta 1998, 213).

<sup>99</sup> "Poznajesz chałupkę babci Sabiny? Babka czeka na nas... chałupka z czerwonej niemieckiej cegły, nasączonej, według ojca, polską krwią. Kiedy podeszłam wówczas z matką blisko drzwi, szybko polizałam cegłę. Trudno powiedzieć jaki miała smak, z pewnością jednak nie smakowała krwią" (Kofta 1998, 206-207).

<sup>100</sup> "No podź tu do szotki! Podź do szotki, Bogusza! Brała mnie pomiędzy chude, twarde jak kamień kolana, zakryte szeroką spódnicą, głąskała po głowie, hacząc szorstkimi dłońmi moje włosy. Mruczała przy tym po niemiecku jakieś imiona dawno nie widzianych krewnych, do których byłam podobna" (Kofta 1998, 158).

<sup>101</sup> "Gdyby ojciec wiedział, kto uczył mnie niemieckiego! Wycieczki tam to była nasza słodka tajemnica, matki i córki" (Kofta 1998, 159).

<sup>102</sup> On the subject of authenticity, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan writes in *Diasporic Meditations. Between Home and Location* (1996) that it is "difficult to determine if the drive toward authenticity comes from within the group as a spontaneous self-affirming act, or if authenticity is nothing but a paranoid reaction to the 'naturalness' of dominant groups." "Authenticate to whom and for what purpose? Who and by what authority is checking our credentials? Is 'authenticity' a home we build for ourselves or a ghetto we inhabit to satisfy the dominant world? How does authenticity speak for itself: as one voice or as many related voices, as monolithic identity or as identity hyphenated by difference?" (1996, 211).

<sup>103</sup> "W pokrowcu wiecznej żałoby, w czarno przezroczystych pończochach, spod których połyskiwały piszczele, była stadium przejściowym pomiędzy życiem i śmiercią. Lekko stapała po płytach chodnika. Stare buty wykoślawiły się trochę... Bała się wiatru, bo co dzień stawiała się lżejsza, ciało i kości wysychały i traciły ciężar. Kiedyś wreszcie uleci, a wieczny wdowi welon u kapelusza, wyraz zbiorowej pamięci po wszystkich mężach i innych mężczyznach, bo że miała kochanków, mój ojciec był pewien... otóż welon będzie powiewał przez ułamek chwili na niebie, aż wzniesie się targany wiatrem wspomnień" (Kofta 1998, 217).

<sup>104</sup> "Kochałam babkę Schönmyth, za dar prawdziwego życia i pogodnego umierania. Kochałam ją mocno, ponieważ sądziłam, że jestem do niej podobna" (Kofta 1998, 330).

<sup>105</sup> "Babka śmieje się i mówi do matki po niemiecku. Potem już po polsku do mnie, wcześniej ci się zachciewa, wzięłaś po mnie temperament, twoja matka jest zimna jak ryba. – Niech mama się uspokoi – mówi Aniela, żegnając się małym krzyżykiem między piersiami, jakby chciała odpędzić diabła" (Kofta 1998, 221).

<sup>106</sup> "... no to co, Bogienka, będziesz pamiętała babcię Sabine? – pyta babka, siadając na łóżku. Zdejmuje trzy złote obrączki z palców. Trzyma je na dłoni, kiwa palcem, żebym podeszła. Bierze moją rękę i kładzie na niej jedno złote kółko. Dwa podaje matce" (Kofta 1998, 245).

<sup>107</sup> "Tu bawiłam się w tajemnicy przed wszystkimi w Matkę Boską. Stawałam nieruchomo z lalką w beciku, przytuloną do piersi. Wiedziałam, że to świętokradztwo, ale czułam się wtedy czysta i święta, z tą piękną amerykańską lalką z prawdziwymi włosami i szklanymi oczami. Bogini ze swą boską córką, której zawsze brakowało mi w Trójcy świętej" (Kofta 1998, 296).

<sup>108</sup> "Poprawiam koronkę poduszki pod ciężką głową matki, jak stara doświadczona kobieta czuwająca przy zwłokach. Nieraz widywałam baby przy trumnach sąsiadek, które przecież nie mogły odpłacić im tym samym. Każda następna czuwała przy poprzedniej. Ciągłość, a nie wzajemność. One także są w mojej pamięci. Odezwały się teraz, wiem, co robić, jak się zachować. Hejże, dzieci, hejże ha, róbcie wszystko to, co ja" (Kofta 1998, 255).

<sup>109</sup> "Trójca zmienna w czasie. Jednia stanowiąca fazy, starość, dojrzałość, dzieciństwo. Wszystkie trzy w jednym małym pokoju, w zgodzie i harmonii. Babka zrezygnowana, czyli pogodzona ze śmiercią, należy do przeszłości; matka pogodzona z życiem jest teraźniejszością; ja jestem własnością przyszłości" (Kofta 1998, 343).

<sup>110</sup> According to Warner, the Christian doctrine of the Immaculate Conception creates an incurable split between mortal women and the Virgin. The divine penetration by the power of the Spirit is a painless act that undermines the painful bodies of devirginized women; their pregnant bodies are visible, present; they speak, they even shout, in labor. Mary is barely a witness, not an active participant of the sacred rape performed on her body. She is and remains a silent receptacle in the hands of the Father. In her reference to the immaculate conception, Kofta attempts to bridge the gap between women and the Virgin Mary by merging their experience of a sacredness that is to be located beyond religious doctrine. "Każde dziecko rodzi się z niewiasty, jak mały bóg, jak syn albo córka boska.... Poczęcie zawsze jest niepokalane, bo przecież żadna rozsądna i logicznie myśląca kobieta, a taką była Aniela Wagner, nie bierze poważnie związku między tym, na co pozwala się mężczyźnie w łóżku, a urodzeniem dziecka" (Kofta 1998, 240).

<sup>111</sup> "Poczułam zmęczenie nierzeczywistością własnej osoby" (Kofta 1998, 321).

<sup>112</sup> "spójny, tak, tak, nie, nie, to złe, a to dobre. Monolityczny jak paranoja" (Kofta 1998, 341).



## CONCLUSION

Although the narratives analysed in this study are from different geographical locations and linguistic contexts, they reflect and reveal a similar dynamic of bringing together European and Northern American feminist stances. The differences between Kristeva's, Irigaray's and Butler's theoretical insights, as deployed in this study, reflect to some extent the differences between an Anglophone, mostly anti-psychoanalytical, stance and Western/Central European contexts that have been influenced in various ways by post-Lacanian theories. These divisions, frequently indistinct in themselves, do not entirely account for the diversity of (feminist) witches that emerge from the texts analyzed. Neither should the variable characteristics of patriarchy be underestimated, as they appear in the divergent ethnic, political and philosophical systems within Western cultures, as represented by the narratives discussed. Having highlighted the possible points of contention in the theoretical framework of my study, I would argue now that it is in the overall attempt to characterize the different representations of the witch figure as a culturally un/belonging woman that the narrative and theoretical analogies became apparent. Therefore, taking a border position between diverse theories has allowed me to explore a comparative approach that has brought the most prevalent standpoints together.

My turn towards a narrative was also a kind of theory, for I sought to treat fiction as a way of getting to new theoretical places, to which theory alone would not take me. While reading these various texts at least two observations repeatedly occurred. The first was that a clear distinction between a literary text (a narrative, a novel or fiction) and a critical (or theoretical) text is difficult to maintain and persistently displaces itself. And the second, a question, more than an observation, was that despite deconstruction of the category of

woman, might there remain some universal issues at stake and for whom? These 'universal issues', along with an attempt to call every text (literary or not) a cultural text, are broached in my analysis of the 'witch' as a network of identities, in which somehow, paradoxically, forms of local appropriation, opposition and resistance contribute to the conceptual dissemination of a phallogocentric archetype. As conveyed by the narratives, there are three prevailing configurations of the 'contemporary witch': (1) as a radical feminist (political) figure representing the culturally subjugated and victimized woman, and her subsequent *herstorical* reconfiguration into a sovereign, mythic and powerful superwoman; (2) as a problematic/dialogical figure, developing as a consequence of universalizing simplifications of her character, and collapsing into the archaic forms of the pre-symbolic mother and the phallic monstrous feminine; (3) as a borderline phenomenon suspending phallogocentric discourse in culturally subversive un/belonging territories, and opening heterogeneous spaces going beyond the accumulation of stigmas, but also beyond the 'natural' or mythic origin and maternal *jouissance*, and thus promising a cultural re-evaluation of the 'witch'.

Feminist configurations of the 'witch' as a *herstorical* fantasy and as an archaic mother marked a turning point in feminist philosophy by indicating new processes of responding to the phallogocentric nullification of 'woman' in culture (Irigaray's 'woman in exile'). The identity principle, in fierce opposition to the categories produced by the dominant culture, is crucial to these authors' work as a political practice. They fail, however, to provide a therapeutic treatment for the cultural denigration of the mother (as a gender role) and to establish a model of a/the woman taking productive rather than reproductive steps in transforming society. The narrative therapies conveyed in the first chapter as means to cultural healing and empowerment intermingle in the second chapter with the methods used by phallogocentric 'correcting' figures (doctors, hypnotists, psychoanalysts) and

unconscious returns to the pre-symbolic maternal chora, that have also contributed to women's exclusion from culture. The problem with Cixous's *écriture féminine*, Irigaray's *hysterical fantasmatic*, and Kristeva's concept of the semiotic is that they occupy a space already set up by patriarchy, and as such are far from defining an autonomous space for women within the prevailing phallogentric culture. In order to be listened to, or published, women (writers) have to master and adjust the language of the symbolic to the forms and expressions of female experience. Moreover, if gender, like any other cultural construct, is a shifting position, feminist reformulations of the 'witch' proposing ahistorical and static definitions of womanhood (femininity, and/or femaleness) point to the necessary limits of their identity politics. Similarly, the female hysteria valorised in French feminist psychoanalytic theory as a site of cultural transformation has been exposed as the historical entrapment of women on the outside of the symbolic structure, an agenda that, according to Baym and Butler, guarantees continued oppression. Consequently, the forms of cultural reformulation of 'woman' proposed in the first two chapters can lead to "psychosis and to breakdown of cultural life itself," and will be alternately posited and denied "as an emancipatory ideal" (Butler 1990, 80).

Bringing out the effects of these two different preceding contexts, namely the valorised (*herstorical*) rewritings of the 'witch' and the 'witch' as an archaic mother, the narratives in the third chapter offer philosophical encounters with cultural alterity. This alterity is formulated as a conflation of sacred and heretic spaces and as a position which necessarily challenges the traditional notion of a 'fixed' identity. However, this position makes sense only in reference to (or as a consequence of) the two previous positions. Emerging thus as a necessarily dialogical (paradoxical) figure, the 'witch' can be understood as a split identity, or as the Kristevan "speaking subject" negotiating between her

unconscious and conscious drives, between her repressed and released desires, between her condensation of maternal physiology and social displacement. Consequently, the 'witch' occupies a noncompliant but vulnerable position as a negotiator between patriarchy and resistance to it, between a system of phallogocentric (symbolic) functions and the 'unspoken' semiotic territories of the maternal and the sacred. Her transgression of identity, or her borderline status, emerges as one of the most interesting comparative elements of the cultures and theories discussed, and builds theoretical meeting points between Kristeva's, Irigaray's, and Butler's stances that all seek to destabilize specific codes of the cultural nullification of women.

Thus, in concert with Kristeva's dialogical structure that contradicts itself and Butler's strategies for subversion, the narratives discussed in the third chapter build relations and resistances to a phallogocentric order, posited within its cultural laws and restrictions rather than on the fantasmatic 'outside'. This cultural placement needs to be acknowledged in the end as constituting and contextualizing the discursive frame of these relations and resistances. However, it also needs to be defined as a borderline placement (in-between cultures, systems and identities), reflecting feminist attempts to dissociate the construct of 'woman' from the phallogocentric entrapments discussed in the first two chapters. The concepts of border transgression and subversion of cultural systems, traceable in all the texts analyzed in the third chapter, prove effective in this respect as they are both unsettled and unsettling, and parallel Clément's concept of sacred disorder. In un-veiling and de-naveling the 'woman' from the intimidating claims and metaphors of her cultural unbelonging, the witch as a hybrid and transgressive figure of the 'sacred heretic' intervenes in the phallogocentric order that both sponsors and censors this unbelonging. It is by not opting out of managing (in) culture that the 'witch' introduces a divergent type of thinking, one which

redefines her as relational, and situational, rather than sanctioned by traditional laws of patriarchal culture.

These reformulations of the 'witch' as a multiple site of strategic un/belonging, as proposed by the textual analyses in this study, converge with Irigaray's proposal of a "feminine fluidity" that could shift the social order. They reflect Kristeva's "different legality," associated with a provisional, carnivalesque, but also strategically feminist structure, as well as Butler's subversion of (Western) cultural foundations by undermining gender distinctions. Although representing different theoretical standpoints, different languages, and a range of cultural backgrounds, all the feminist texts discussed here contribute to the deconstruction and redeployment of a phallogocentric archetype of the witch-woman. What this coming together implies in the end is that transnational exchanges of feminist theories and narratives produce 'boundary work' – works 'on the edge' that reveal the witch as a set of constructs that is both contested and difficult to displace in contemporary representations of 'woman'. This recognition offers a point of departure for new political theorizing on woman's identity that rejects the Western epistemological dichotomies of subject/object, I/the other, or belonging and unbelonging as basic categories of identification. In conclusion, if it is not possible to eliminate the stigma of un/belonging in which women are invariably maintained within culture, it seems viable to reinvest the concept of un/belonging with strategic purpose of transgressing the confining territories of culture and therefore contesting its phallogocentric restrictions: to reinvest it with values undermining the very negativity of un- (cultural nothingness is already meaningful – filled with 'negative' substance) and to bring this un- into a strategically feminist dialogue with belonging.

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