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H(a)unted Heroines: Gender, Madness, and the Demonic

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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

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Editorial

1 **H(a)unted Heroines**, the fourth issue of **gender forum**, investigates the interface of gender and concepts of normality, dealing with both the hunted women in depictions of 17th century witchcraft trials and the haunted women of contemporary novels and plays. Covering a range of periods, literary genres and cultural backgrounds, the target essays in **H(a)unted Heroines** provide a broad insight into contemporary approaches to questions of gender, witchcraft and madness.

Performing the Demonic: Witchcraft, Skepticism and Gender Constructions in Michel de Montaigne's "De la force de l'imagination" and "Des Boyteux."

by Kirsten Kramer, University of Cologne, Germany

Abstract:

In both essays, the textual representation of the processes that govern communal attitudes is accompanied by the narrative enactment of the fashioning of male selfhood and identity which concentrates on sexual psychopathology and is deeply rooted in the Renaissance discourse of sexuality and gender identity. In Montaigne's apparently skeptical account of demonic agency the figure of the witch not only turns out to be an emblem that epitomizes central attitudes and practices structuring the field of cultural exchange but also serves as a model for the male subject's relation to woman, which leads to a reformulation of the narrative project underlying the writing process.

I.

1 The rise and development of the "witch craze," which for a period of more than two hundred years profoundly influenced the cultural economy of symbolic practices and institutional operations in European societies, coincides historically with the emergence of the early modern age. It is during the Renaissance that inherited popular beliefs relating to acts of "white magic" and healing or to deviant sexual practices combine to construct a phantasmal "witchcraft stereotype,"¹ whose multiple articulations affect the entire cultural field and eventually come to produce the very phenomenon they pretend to name or describe. Representing the site and the product of symbolic encounters which involve all cultural groups and authorities and which largely rely on the extensive accumulation and circulation of theological, juridical and medical knowledge, the witch craze of the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century appears to provide a public stage that presents "a dramatization of the social, religious, philosophical, and political wars of the period" (Certeau, "Discourse Disturbed" 245) and offers ritualized performances that parallel early modern theatrical practices in the field of art.²

2 In the essays "De la force de l'imagination" ("On the force of Imagination") and "Des Boyteux" ("Of the Lame or Cripple"), Montaigne's discussion of contemporary witchcraft

¹ For an account of the historical development of this "witchcraft stereotype," see Klaitz. On the phantasmal and imaginary dimension inherent in the historical controversy concerning witchcraft and demonic or supernatural agency, see particularly Closson.

² Certeau's comparison of the "diabolical scene" (245) with early modern theater refers in particular to a series of possessions which appeared in France in the years 1610-1630, but applies equally to earlier instances of possession which reveal similar structural elements. For an analysis of sorcery and possession which metaphorically links early modern witch trials or persecutions with the theatrical genre of "comedy," see Foucault, "Médecins" 122.

beliefs, witch prosecutions and court trials of his own day assumes the form of a thoroughgoing skeptical critique that embraces both ruling popular assumptions associated with supernatural agency and learned treatises which set out to confirm these. In explicitly or implicitly responding to views revealed in numerous demonological tracts, Montaigne seeks to establish the principle of skeptical doubt, to speak in defense of the victims and sets out to disclose the hidden presuppositions underlying the very constitution of a learned discourse of witchcraft.

3 Inspired by the essayist's famous assertion of an essential consubstantiality between author and text, more recent Montaigne criticism, however, has increasingly focused on the ways in which the literary texts reflect and enact a forming of the self and an acquisition of gender identity.³ Upon closer examination, Montaigne's preoccupation with issues related to the discourse of witchcraft and demonology indeed appears to be inextricably linked with the constitution of the self through the act of writing. In both essays, the textual representation of the processes that govern communal attitudes is accompanied by the narrative enactment of the fashioning of male selfhood and identity which concentrates on sexual psychopathology and is deeply rooted in the Renaissance discourse of sexuality and gender identity.

4 The convergence of apparently unrelated perspectives, however, demonstrates vigorously that for Montaigne identity and selfhood, far from denoting stable categories or points of reference, represent mutable products of a pre-existing set of discursive codes and institutional practices that organize and regulate the cultural field. Viewed from this perspective, Montaigne's essays situate themselves within the tradition of a literary "fashioning" or construction of the self which, in the early modern period, implies the author's submission to authorities operating in the cultural environment while simultaneously compelling him to engage in the antagonistic confrontation with figures that embody a strange and threatening "other."⁴

5 Taking into account the early modern subject's involvement in the intricate interplay of historically interrelated processes of cultural exchange or "negotiations" which impose constraints and yet open up the space for individual "improvisations" and performances,⁵ my analysis of Montaigne's essays will focus on the equivocal ways in which the demonic occurs in the texts. I will argue that in Montaigne's apparently skeptical account of demonic agency

³For a choice of gender-oriented analyses of Montaigne's essays, see the literature quoted in Section III below.

⁴For a detailed account of Renaissance techniques and modes of literary self-fashioning, which, however, focuses on English literature and does not take into account the narrative genre of the essay, see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*. For a critical discussion of Greenblatt's description of literary self-fashioning, with reference to early modern Spanish poetry, see Teuber, "'Vivir quiero'" 179-189.

⁵For a concise description of culture which relies on the notions of "constraint," "mobility" and "negotiations," see Greenblatt, "Culture."

the figure of the witch not only turns out to be an emblem that epitomizes and condenses central attitudes and practices structuring the field of cultural exchange but also serves as a model for the male subject's relation to woman, which deeply affects the literary fashioning of the self and ultimately leads to a reformulation of the narrative project underlying the writing process.

II.

6 In "Des Boyteux," written in 1585, Montaigne's discussion of witchcraft appears as part of a general skeptical investigation into the epistemic status of allegedly monstrous or miraculous actions and events. Montaigne's polemic critique challenges in particular the fatal habit of ascribing supernatural causes to unpropitious yet natural facts and events, which either transgress the pattern of ordinary experience or escape the narrow scope of human knowledge and reasoning and should consequently be left to the judgment of God alone (see 1026/316).⁶ In perfect accordance with the author's skeptical attitude, his accounts of contemporary witch cases and court trials ironically insist on the striking discrepancy between the presumed demonic power of accused persons and their low social status as well as lack of education, which turns them into privileged victims of the fantasies generated by the force of the imagination. The story about a young villager who counterfeits the voice of a spirit and is joined in his activities by a "fille de village, du tout stupide et niaise" (1029; "a country maiden who [...] was seely and harmesle" 320) significantly ends with a mocking remark about the "visions et mouvements si niais et si ridicules qu'à peine y a-il rien si grossier au jeu des petits enfans" (1029; "visions and strange gestures, so foolish and ridiculous that there is scarce anything more grosse and absurd used among Children in their childish sports" 320-321); the description of one of the witches who confess their "evil deeds" ("une vieille entre autres, vrayment bien sorciere en laideur et deformité, tres-fameuse de longue main en cette profession" 1032/"an olde beldam witch, a true and perfect sorceresse, both by her ugliness and deformity" 324) in a similar vein ascribes these confessions to insanity which should be cured by "helleborum" rather than by "hemlock" (1032/324),⁷ and in "De la force de l'imagination," written in 1572, the essayist explicitly points to the role of the imagination in the formation of popular superstitions:

⁶Quotations of passages from "De la force de l'imagination" and "Des Boyteux" are taken from Montaigne, *Les Essais*. English quotations are to *The Essays*.

⁷ This observation on the insanity of witches and magicians seems to approach the position taken by J. Weyer and other physicians in the learned debate over witchcraft. In his treatise *De praestigiis daemonum et incantationibus et veneficiis* (1563), which was responded to by Bodin's *Démonomanie* (1580), Weyer claims that the alleged witches' visions and hallucinations are due to insanity or to a melancholic disposition. While for Weyer, however, insanity is still linked to diabolical intervention, Montaigne, by contrast, radically denies the possibility of supernatural agency. On Weyer's position see Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses." For a brief account of the Weyer-Bodin controversy, see also Closson 42-43.

Il est vray semblable que le principal credit des miracles, des visions, des enchantemens et de tels effects extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l'imagination agissant principalement contre les ames du vulgaire, plus molles. On leur a si fort saisi la creance, qu'ils pensent voir ce qu'ils ne voyent pas. (99)

(It is very likely that the principall credit of visions, of enchantments, and such extraordinary effects, proceedeth from the power of imaginations, working especially in the mindes of the vulgar sort, as the weakest and seeliest, whose conceit and beleefe is so seized upon, that they imagine to see what they see not. 98)

If Montaigne takes great care to play down the allegedly miraculous power of witches, magicians and healers whose cure is aided by their patient's irrational beliefs, it should be noted, however, that he lays much more serious emphasis on the fact that it is the learned discourse of witchcraft and demonology which brings about factual accusations, court trials and ensuing murderous prosecutions: "Les sorcieres de mon voisinage courent hazard de leur vie, sur l'advis de chaque nouvel auteur qui vient donner corps  leurs songes" (1031; "The witches about my country are in hazard of their life upon the opinion of every new authour that may come to give their dreames a body" 322).

7 The insistence on the pernicious influence exercised by cultural authorities implicitly recurs in Montaigne's reference to the famous Martin Guerre trial (see 1030/322).⁸ Confronted with contradictory testimonies in the case, the court was about to declare innocent the impostor Arnaud du Tilh, who had been on trial for impersonating Martin Guerre. When the crippled Martin Guerre suddenly reappeared, Arnaud du Tilh, who finally confessed his crime, was found guilty and sentenced to death. Montaigne himself had attended the public sentencing and read the 1561 edition of Coras's Arrest Memorable, which offered an ambivalent account of the legal case. In "Des Boyteux," Montaigne's observations about the Martin Guerre case confirm on the surface once more his skeptical position, as they condemn the death sentence in mysterious cases that resist human understanding, and recommend following the example of the Areopagites who were said to defer the final sentence in ambivalent cases (see 1032/322). Following the narrative of the villagers' imprisonment, and preceding the critique of the learned discourse of demonology, the short allusion to the public sentencing of Arnaud du Tilh, who was accused of having invoked evil spirits, includes once more a critique of the legal practices that govern contemporary witch persecutions. It has been suggested, however, that Montaigne's reference to the court trial also implicitly points to the imprisonment and lynching of judge Coras, who was known to sympathize with the Protestants, and that, in general, his protests against court trials link Protestant heresy to witch

⁸ For a detailed account of the development of the legal case and Montaigne's reactions to it, see Davis. See also Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis."

heresy. They mirror the decisive discursive shift by virtue of which in the sixteenth century accusations of "maleficia" were increasingly supplanted by more disquieting accusations of heresy which underscored the witches' pact with the devil and which had for the first time been dogmatically theorized in the enormously influential *Malleus Maleficarum* (Horowitz 87-88).⁹ We may infer from the link Montaigne establishes between heretical Protestants and sorcerers that his skeptical stand enables him both to disclaim the epistemic status of supernatural or demonic intervention and to unmask the appearance of witchcraft as a primarily discursive phenomenon which emerges at the center of the contemporary theological debate taking place between Protestants and the Catholic League. Rather than presenting magicians and sorceresses as a threatening force at the margins of a disabused society, Montaigne surreptitiously traces out the demarcation lines of a heterogeneous social field relying on intricate processes of cultural exchange which enact antagonistic confrontations between opponents belonging to rival camps. In the essayist's narrative account, then, the phenomenon of witchcraft or demonic agency proves to be produced or constructed by the efforts of the same learned authorities that set out to annihilate it.¹⁰

8 It is important to note, however, that Montaigne is far from ascribing visions and fantasies only to those who lack the degree of education and learning necessary to distinguish fiction from truth. In the description of the young villagers' counterfeiting the voice of a spirit, it is significant that the startling term "imposture" is used to characterize the attitudes of the alleged sorcerers (1029/320). As the title of the essay and numerous further allusions suggest, Montaigne's use of the term in the context of an account of witchcraft practices refers to Ambroise Paré's popular treatise *Des monstres et prodiges*, whose author recurs to the same term to designate demons and evil angels abusing their power, as well as witches or magicians who are misled by the slyness of the devil (Paré 81-83 and 91-92).¹¹ In Montaigne's text, to be sure, the term is stripped of its diabolical connotations, but it still denotes the self-delusory force of the visions and fantasies that eventually lead to the villagers' imprisonment. Yet the

⁹On the importance of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which was prefaced by a Bull of Pope Innocent VIII, see also Closson 16-17.

¹⁰ This is also confirmed by Montaigne's critical allusions to the persecution of skeptical opponents of the belief in demonic agency, which goes along with the persecutions of witches and magicians: "Je vois bien qu'on se courrouce, et me deffend on d'en doubter, sur peine d'injures execrables. Nouvelle façon de persuader" (1031; "I see that men will be angry, and am forbid to doubt of it upon paine of execrable injuries. A new manner of perswading" 323). Montaigne's narrative description of antagonistic cultural encounters anticipates to some extent the 'genealogical' approach that prevails in twentieth-century accounts of the historical phenomenon of witchcraft and demonology. An instructive example for such a genealogical analysis is provided by Michel Foucault, who outlines the changing role of the medical discourse on witchcraft in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France in describing the strategic shifts inherent in the power struggle going on between the Church, the Royal power and regional parliaments. See Foucault, "Médecins".

¹¹ On Montaigne's references to Paré's treatise, see also Horowitz 83.

same self-delusion and folly that turns the young people into victims of justice also characterizes both the learned judge who sets out to condemn the accused and the crowd who assist the trials and approve of their murderous outcome: "Ces pauvres diables sont à cette heure en prison, et porteront volontiers la peine de la sottise commune; et je ne sçay si quelque juge se vengera sur eux de la sienne" (1030; "The poore seely three Divels are now in prison, and may happily e're long pay deere for their common sottishnesse, and I wot not whether some cheverell judge or other will be avenged of them for his" 321).

9 This hint at the omnipresence of folly bridges the social distance separating unlearned sorcerers and erudite judges and suggests very strongly that social relations on the whole are deeply pervaded by illusory beliefs and superstitions which organize and structure communal life. This is more obvious still in a number of passages in which Montaigne discusses in a more general way the limits of human knowledge and the deficiency of reasoning as such. In the paragraph which follows the anecdote of the villagers and immediately precedes the description of another court trial, the essayist uses the equivocal term "inquisition" to describe the progress of human knowledge: "L'admiration est fondement de toute philosophie, l'inquisition le progresz, l'ignorance le bout" (1030; "Admiration is the ground of all Philosophy; Inquisition the progresse; Ignorance the end" 321). Yet the same act of reasoning which, in Montaigne's view, bears a close affinity to the violent practices of the inquisitors, previously revealed itself to build simultaneously upon the very hollowness and "inanity" that also inhabits the witches' dreams and fantasies (1027/316) and leads Montaigne to the natural conclusion that "demonic" folly and "inquisitorial" reason, fiction and truth are inseparably bound up with each other:

La vérité et le mensonge ont leurs visages conformes, le port, le goust et les alleures pareilles: nous les regardons de mesme oeil. Je trouve que nous ne sommes pas seulement lâches à nous defendre, mais que nous cerchons et convions à nous y enferrer. Nous aymons à nous embrouiller en la vanité, comme conforme à nostre estre. (1027)

(Truth and falsehood have both alike countenances; their port, their taste, and their proceedings semblable. Wee behold them with one same eyes. I observe that we are not onely slow in defending our selves from deceit, but that we seeke and sue to embrace it. Wee love to meddle and entangle our selves with vanity, as conformable unto our being. 317)

What is striking, then, in Montaigne's account of the witch craze of his own day is the fact that he does not simply view sorcerers and magicians as the victims of communal scapegoating, of exclusionary practices which marginalize the weak and the defenseless. In Montaigne's representation of witchcraft, quite on the contrary, the figure of the witch turns

out to be an object and an agent in the process of cultural exchange and negotiations; she appears both as a victim and a central representative of a "demonized" social order which fatally succumbs to the omnipresent play of hollow fantasies and delusions.

10 This is confirmed by a short episode appearing at the end of "De la force de l'imagination" where Montaigne retells a story of the healing of a merchant suffering from the "disease of the stone." In contrast to the extraordinary and miraculous healing of a crippled patient narrated in "Des Boyteux," here the reader is confronted with a perfectly ordinary disease which does not necessarily involve the patient's belief in the efficacy of otherwise absurd healing practices. Having ordered and thoroughly tested the enemas necessary for the cure, the patient, however, undergoes a rather peculiar procedure:

Apportez qu'ils [les clisteres] estoyent, il n'y avoit rien obmis des formes accoustumées: souvent il tastoit s'ils estoyent trop chauds. Le voylà couché, renversé, et toutes les approches faictes, sauf qu'il ne s'y faisoit aucune injection. L'apotiquaire retiré apres cette ceremonie, le patient accommodé, comme s'il avoit veritablement pris le clystere, il en sentoit pareil effect à ceux qui les prennent. (104)

(Which [the glisters] being brought him, no accustomed forme to them belonging was omitted, and would often taste whether they were too hot, and view them well, and lying along upon his bed, on his bellie, and all complements performed, only injection excepted, which ceremony ended, the apothecarie gone, and the patient lying in his bed, even as if he had received a glistre indeed, he found and felt the very same effect which they doe that have effectually taken them. 104 f.)

What is emphasized in the anecdote is the fact that the efficacy of the cure relies entirely on the strict observation of a purely formal procedure ("formes accoustumées"), a sanctioned ritual or simulation which necessitates the patient's imagination or mental commitment and eventually brings about the same effect the actual application of the medicine would have entailed. The characterization of the patient, whose profession indicates that he is actively engaged in the exchange of money and goods, suggests that the anecdote, far from being an arbitrary example, allegorizes the central mechanisms which regulate cultural relations and, in fact, secure the very functioning of the social order. The delusions generated by an all-pervasive imagination assume the form of superstitious belief and of the blind submission to rituals which, in "Des Boyteux," reveal themselves to be at the center of the contemporary field of cultural practices that enact and uphold the early modern witch craze.

11 If, in Montaigne's view, the witch craze of his own day proves to be the product of superstitious beliefs and if, at the same time, the act of reasoning itself relies on the "inanity" of delusory fantasies, how then are we to account for the position and the critical gesture of the writing subject who ironically challenges the social practices observed in his time and seeks to reveal the absurdity of dogmatic positions which legitimize public sentencings? In

persistently questioning the contemporary habit of establishing causal connections between facts or events which cannot be sufficiently explained by reason or experience, the essayist quite ostentatiously adopts the gesture of the Pyrrhonian skeptic who radically denies the reliability of human judgment or sense knowledge and deliberately refuses to articulate truth.¹² Positing both the pragmatic acceptance of social norms, traditions and values provided by the cultural environment and an ethical attitude which relies on the subject's indifference towards reality, Pyrrhonian skepticism presupposes an external viewpoint from which the skeptical subject views the surrounding world.¹³ In "Des Boyteux," Montaigne's critical account of contemporary beliefs in demonic or supernatural agency, indeed, appears to claim the same privileged position for the writing subject that characterizes the epistemic viewpoint of the Pyrrhonian skeptic. The description of the all-pervasiveness of a delusory imagination whose operations involve the entire cultural field and affect all processes of social exchange, however, strongly suggests that it is precisely this external viewpoint guaranteeing the independence of his observations which cannot be adopted by the writing subject. To account for this paradox underlying the narrative account and to recover its significance with regard to the essayist's project, we need to turn to the essay "De la force de l'imagination," which offers another variant of Montaigne's preoccupation with witchcraft and demonic agency.

III.

12 In "De la force de l'imagination" the relationship between witchcraft and the operations of the imagination is primarily viewed from a different angle. Starting out from a demonstration of the force of the imagination, Montaigne's text focuses in particular on gender relations and on instances of male sexual impotence which relate to the issue of diabolical agency in that they are organized around a discussion of the popular belief in the "nouements d'aiguillettes," according to which sorcerers are invested with the power "d'empescher la loy de Mariage ordonné de Dieu" ("to prevent the law of marriage ordained by God to be accomplished;" Paré 100).

13 It has been argued that in Montaigne the constitution of masculine or feminine identity appears to be the result of an internalized set of culturally coded mental inclinations rather than the corollary of a fixed biological determination (see Kritzman *passim*). In "De la force

¹²For a brief account of the role of Pyrrhonian skepticism in "Des Boyteux," with reference to earlier criticism on the essay, see Horowitz 90-91.

¹³ For a comprehensive description of the presuppositions underlying the philosophical system of Pyrrhonian skepticism, see Hossenfelder. For a substantial analysis of Montaigne's famous "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" ("An Apologie of Raymond Sebond"), in which fundamental techniques of Pyrrhonian skepticism are adopted and transformed, and for an extensive discussion of earlier Montaigne criticism on this issue, see Kablitz.

de l'imagination," the essayist, indeed, establishes a close link between the acquisition of sexual identity and the activity of the imagination. Accordingly, he concludes the first narrative example relating to a factual sex change operation with an explicit hint at the force of desire which has brought about Iphis's change of sex narrated in Ovid: "Et par vehement desir de luy et de sa mere, 'Iphis acquitta garçon les voeux qu'il avait faits étant fille" (98-99; "And through a vehement desire of him and his mother. [...] Iphis a boy, the vows then paid, Which he vow'd when he was a maid" 97). Foregrounding the force of mental representations, the episode obviously functions as an early illustration of the central thesis the entire essay seeks to prove: "'Une imagination forte produit l'événement' [...]" (97; "A strong imagination begetteth chance" 95).

14 This concise definition offered at the very beginning of the essay locates Montaigne's text within the context of Renaissance thought relating to the imagination. While Scholasticism primarily conceives the imagination as an intellectual faculty projecting inner images and transcending the data arising from mere sensual experience, sixteenth-century thought - building on medical and Neo-platonic writings as well as on occult philosophy - views it both as a corporeal faculty and as a dynamic materializing force whose images and phantasms may obtain the status of physical reality.¹⁴ The narrative example of Iphis's sex change, then, demonstrates that for Montaigne the imagination, indeed, seems to represent a materializing force which, in his text, even proves capable of bringing about the re-constitution of sexual identity.

15 However, cases in which the dynamic force of the imagination generates opposite effects are far more frequent in the essay. Most anecdotes narrated by Montaigne do not center on the productive force of the imagination but rather underscore its devastating influence on the minds of male individuals who, as a consequence, prove incapable of affirming their virility in the encounter with their female partner. Instead of giving rise to a sense of sexual pleasure, fantasies and mental dispositions generated by the imagination produce psychic tensions and provoke a loss of self-control, which most often, in the essay, results in temporary impotence. In focusing on this loss of self-mastery, Montaigne seemingly refers again to basic assumptions which inform the medical and demonological discourse of his own day. Yet he also indicates that there is a further frame of reference on which his narrative preoccupation with male sexuality relies:

¹⁴ For a detailed description of sixteenth-century accounts of the imagination see Dubois, *Essais* 13-34. See also Dubois, *L'imaginaire* 17-48. For an account of conceptualizations of the imagination in the field of medicine and demonology, see Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses". On the distinction between the internal, intellectual imagination and its external, corporeal counterpart, see briefly Closson 27-28.

On a raison de remarquer l'indocile liberté de ce membre, s'ingerant si importunement, lors que nous n'en avons que faire, et defaillant si importunement, lors que nous en avons le plus affaire, et contestant de l'autorité si imperieusement avec nostre volonté, refusant avec tant de fierté et d'obstination noz sollicitations et mentales et manuelles. (102)

Men have reason to checke the indocile libertie of this member, for so importunately insinuating himselfe when we have no need of him, and so importunately, or as I may say impertinently failing, at what time we have most need of him; and so imperiously contesting by his authority with our will, refusing with such fierceness and obstinacie our sollicitations both mentall and manuell. (102)

16 This observation marks the beginning of a lengthy passage in which the essayist mockingly defends the male member against the accusation of disobedience raised by the other organs of the body. The whole passage ironically recalls the theological argument formulated by Augustine in Book XIV of *De civitate Dei*. According to Augustine, the implantation of a sexual instinct in man represents the Divine punishment for the original sin of disobedience and functions as a sign which indicates the fallen nature of man. In Augustine's view, the shameful affection of lust not only exceeds all other psychic affections in intensity, but also provokes the disobedient movements of the penis which escape and counteract man's free will and therefore suspend his capability for self-mastery (see Saint Augustine, vol. 2 45-47).

17 Montaigne, to be sure, eliminates the theological context and hilariously subverts the Augustinian line of argument by refusing, at first, to attribute to the male organ the exceptional status assigned to it in *De civitate Dei*. Yet the passage quoted suggests that for Montaigne, too, the sexual instinct implies a loss of self-control which is not only due to the temporary impairment of the natural functioning of the male member but can equally be ascribed to the unruly erection of the penis which powerfully resists any voluntary effort of self-mastery.¹⁵ Thus, instead of affirming phallic power, potency, if provoked by the force of the imagination, can on the contrary turn out to be but a variant of its opposite, sexual impotence. This affinity of sexual strength and weakness is evoked in a short example in which the reader learns about an Italian king who, after having seen a bullfight and dreamt about it, experiences a strange physical transformation:

¹⁵ Eventually, this resistance leads to a division of man's will itself, which disintegrates into antagonistic forces struggling against each other: "Mais nostre volonté, pour les droits de qui nous mettons en avant ce reproche, combien plus vraysemblablement la pouvons-nous marquer de rebellion et sedition par son desreglement et desobeissance! Veut-elle tousjours ce que nous voudrions qu'elle vouldist?" (103; "But our will, by whose privilege we advance this reproch, how much more likely, and consonant to trueth may we tax it of rebellion, and accuse it of sedition, by reason of its unrulinesse and disobedience. Will shee at all times doe that which we would have her willingly to doe?" 103). For the intertextual reference, see Saint Augustine, vol. 2 45.

Et encore qu'il ne soit pas nouveau de voir croistre la nuict des cornes à tel qui ne les avoit pas en se couchant: toutesfois l'evenement de Cyppus, Roy d'Italie, est memorable, lequel pour avoir assisté le jour avec grande affection au combat des taureaux, et avoir eu en songe toute la nuict des cornes en la teste, les produisit en son front par la force de l'imagination. (98)

And although it be not strange to see some men have hornes growing upon their head in one night, that had none when they went to bed: notwithstanding the fortune or success of Cyppus King of Italie is memorable, who because the day before he had with earnest affection assisted and beene attentive at a bul-baiting, and having all night long dreamed of hornes in his head, by the very force of imagination brought them forth the next morning in his forehead. (96)

The horns that grow on Cyppus's forehead are not only outward signs that symbolize the genital and thus evoke sexual potency, but they also point to its reverse, sexual impotence, since it is ordinarily the impotent husband who is turned overnight ("la nuit") into a cuckold. In a similar vein, Montaigne observes that an excess of sexual desire, if combined with respect, may bring about the effect of impotence, an observation from which the essayist draws the paradoxical conclusion that potency requires a certain degree of impotence to fulfill itself:

J'en sçay, à qui il a servy d'y apporter le corps mesme commencé à ressasier d'ailleurs, pour endormir l'ardeur de cette fureur, et qui par l'aage se trouve moins impuissant de ce qu'il est moins puissant. (100)

I know some who have found to come unto it with their bodies as it were halfe glutted else-where, thereby to stupifie or allay the heat of that furie, and who through age, finde themselves lesse unable, by how much more they be lesse able. (99)

What these examples demonstrate is that biological potency does not necessarily entail masculine strength. Far from being a sign of masculinity, the uncontrollable erection of the male member, on the contrary, denotes an unsettling autonomy of the corporeal in that it inhibits the coincidence of the subject's desire or will and his physical capacities. Both potency and impotence are viewed as uncontrollable natural-unnatural movements of the penis which provoke fascination as well as anxiety.¹⁶ The recourse to the Augustinian view of

¹⁶ That the autonomy of the corporeal may arouse anxiety is suggested in a passage which immediately precedes the account of an ejaculation provoked by the imagination and in which only the physical responses to feelings of shame or fear are evoked: "Nous tressuons, nous tremblons, nous pallissons et rougissons aux secousses de nos imaginations et renversez dans la plume sentons notre corps agité à leur bransle, quelques-fois jusques à en expirer" (98; "Wee sweat, we shake, we grow pale, and we blush at the motions of our imaginations; and wallowing in our beds we feele our bodies agitated and turmoiled at their apprehensions, yea in such manner as sometimes we are ready to yeeld up the spirit" 96). Death is also evoked at the end of the humorous enumeration of "rebellious" movements of the body: "Joint que j'en sçay un [= un pet] si turbulent et revesche, qu'il y a quarante ans qu'il tient son maistre à peter d'une haleine et d'une obligation constante et irremittente, et le menne ainsin à la mort" (103; "Seeing my selfe know one [= a scape] so skittish and mutinous, that these fortie yeares keepes his master in such awe, that, will he or nill he, he will with a continuall breath, constant and unintermitted custome breake winde at his pleasure, and so brings him to his grave" 103).

sexuality and of the importunate obtrusion of the penis thus takes on a double meaning within the logic pursued in the text: On the one hand, the theological account serves as a model which enables the essayist to untie the neat cause-effect relation which traditionally links biological sex to cultural or symbolic gender;¹⁷ on the other, it announces a significant destabilization of the conventional gender role associated with masculinity.¹⁸

18 If Montaigne's remarks about the disobedience of the penis and the corresponding narrative examples rely to a large extent on the Augustinian argument, it is still important to note that, in the essay, Montaigne primarily considers the destabilization of masculine gender from a radically different perspective. As we have seen, Augustine regards sexuality in general and the disobedience of the genital in particular as a defect inherent in man and constitutive of his fallen nature. Montaigne's examples suggest, on the contrary, that male fantasies of fear and anxiety as well as the unsettling experience of the uncontrollability of the penis do not at all originate in the internal psychic structure of the subject, but rather emerge as the product of an interaction with woman, a process of cultural exchange which is largely contingent upon the particular gender differentiation and valorization underlying the Renaissance discourse of sexuality. Thus it is no accident that in the example of Amasis and Laodice the phantasmal anxiety and ensuing impotence of the Egyptian king appear to be inextricably linked with the presence of his wife, whose disquieting character is evoked by the accusation the despairing husband raises against her:

[...] luy, qui se montroit gentil compaignon par tout ailleurs, se trouva court à jouir d'elle, et menaça de la tuer, estimant que ce fust quelque sorcerie. Comme és choses qui consistent en fantasie, elle le rejetta à la devotion [...]. (101)

[...] he that before had in every other place found and shewed himselfe a lustie gallant, found h imselfe so short, when he came to grapple with her, that he threatned to kill her, supposing it had beene some charme or sorcerie. (101)

19 Yet the ultimate reason for man's incapacity to control the movements of his member and to affirm his masculinity in the presence of woman is provided by another episode, in which Montaigne describes a miraculous sex change previously depicted in *Parés Des monstres et prodiges*:

Passant à Victry le François, je peuz voir un homme que l'Evesque de Soissons avoit nommé Germain en confirmation, lequel tous les habitans de là ont cogueu et veu fille, jusques à l'aage de vingt deux ans, nommée Marie. Il estoit à cett' heure-là fort barbu,

¹⁷ On the causal connection between sex and gender, see Butler 22-23.

¹⁸ The dissociation of symbolic gender and biological sex has also been described by Kritzman. Kritzman, however, does not take into account the reference to the Augustinian view of sexuality and the importunate obtrusion of the penis; he therefore fails to notice the destabilization of masculine gender which is focused on in the majority of the narrative examples quoted by Montaigne (see Kritzman 188-195).

et vieil, et point marié. Faisant, dict-il, quelque effort en sautant, ses membres virils se produisirent: [...]. (99)

My selfe traveling on a time by Vitry in France, hapned to see a man, whom the Bishop of Soissons had in confirmation, named Germane, and all the inhabitants thereabout have both knowne and seene to be a woman-childe, untill she was two and twentie yeares of age, called by the name of Marie. He was, when I saw him, of good yeares, and had a long beard, and was yet unmarried. He saith, that upon a time, leaping, and straining himselfe to overleape another, he wot not how, but where before he was a woman, he suddenly felt the instrument of a man to come out of him: [...]. (97)

If we read this tale as a complement to the narrative of Iphis, we may infer that in Montaigne's re-writing of Paré's episode the sex change transforming the girl Marie into the man Germain is due to a deliberate transgression of a culturally sanctioned and gender-oriented behavioral code, a transgression which reflects the desire of woman to become man. From this perspective, both narrative descriptions of sex change processes appear to be firmly rooted in the sixteenth century medical discourse of sexuality, which recurs to Galen's account of human anatomy and posits both an analogical relation between the human microcosm and the macrosocsm of the physical world and an inverted homological relation between male and female sexual organs. The assumption of an inverted homology, however, also bears the implication of sexual difference and gives rise to normative judgments which refer to the providential order of generation and conceive the female body as an imperfect copy of the male. The medical discourse of sexuality thus strongly relies on a gender hierarchization according to which the female, determined by weakness and defectiveness, is placed in an inferior position in relation to the male, which, in turn, is associated with strength and perfection.¹⁹

20 In proposing to implant once and for all the biological sign of masculinity in the female body, Montaigne's moral comment following the narration of the factual sex change spells out the gender implications inherent in contemporary accounts of sexuality and apparently confirms the author's belief in the Renaissance "patriarchal" code of gender asymmetry.²⁰

Ce n'est pas tant de merveille, que cette sorte d'accident se rencontre frequent: car si l'imagination peut en telles choses, elle est si continuellement et si vigoureusement attachée à ce subject, que, pour n'avoir si souvent à rechoir en mesme pensée et aspreté

¹⁹For an account of the late medieval medical discourse and the corresponding gender hierarchization, see Thomasset. - For a broader description of Renaissance discourses involved in acts of determining sexual identity, with reference to the implications underlying the contemporary discussion of the Marie/Germain case, Greenblatt, "Fiction" (on Montaigne, see 41).

²⁰For an analysis of Montaigne's "phallocentrism," which withholds consent to plain physiological explanations while, at the same time, reiterating the gender norms inherent in these, see Kritzman 190-191.

de desir, elle a meilleur compte d'incorporer, une fois pour toutes, cette virile partie aux filles. (99)

It is no great wonder, that such accidents doe often happen, for if imagination have power in such things, it is so continually annexed, and so forcibly fastened to this subject, that lest she should so often fall into the relaps of the same thought, and sharpnesse of desire, it is better one time for all to incorporate this virile part unto wenches. (97)

If, throughout the entire essay, adherence to "patriarchal ideology," to a gender hierarchization which favors the male principle, on the surface seems to be indeed at the center of Montaigne's preoccupation with sexuality and gender identity, it is important to note, however, that the narrative account of the Marie/Germain case does not at all legitimize Montaigne's moral advice following it. While the essayist attempts to persuade his readers that an all-pervasive feminine desire hides behind the sex change operation, an apparently incidental remark unveils the different nature of feminine emotions: "[...] et est encore en usage, entre les filles de là, une chanson, par laquelle elles s'entreadvertissent de ne faire point de grandes enjambées, de peur de devenir garçons, comme Marie Germain" (99; "[...] and to this day the maidens of that towne and cuntry have a song in use, by which they warne one another, when they are leaping, not to straine themselves overmuch, or open their legs too wide, for feare they should bee turned to boies, as Marie Germane was" 97). If, according to the girls' voice, it is fear rather than euphoric excitement which determines the women's reactions to Marie's sex change, Montaigne's final evaluation of the case, far from offering an accurate account of female inclinations, turns out to be a mere projection, a male construction which transforms into desire what is actually felt to be resistance. Yet if the female desire which is thought to aim at an adoption or incorporation of the "perfect" male principle proves to be non-existent, the "phallogentric" norm itself, on which Montaigne's comment relies and which secures the superiority of the masculine, equally reveals itself to be a construction which does not conform to experience. The episode thus illustrates the failure of the male subject to "domesticate" woman and to assume for himself a stable position within the cultural field of gender negotiations by positing a feminine desire which renders her inferior to man. Far from figuring as a weak and essentially deficient being, woman's reluctance to conform to the "phallogentric" construction transforms her, on the contrary, into both an enigmatic and threatening force the male subject has to comply with.

21 It is woman's resistance to submitting to masculine appropriations of feminine desire, I would argue, which, in "De la force de l'imagination," accounts for the highly precarious relationship, between the male subject and an inscrutable female other, that lurks behind the

examples in which men prove incapable of affirming their masculinity.²¹ This is confirmed by a series of narrative examples which more explicitly relate to contemporary cultural norms organizing gender relations. In the passage referring to Augustine, in which the essayist speaks in defense of the penis in a fictitious court trial situation, Montaigne concludes his argument by paradoxically conceding that the privileged position of the male member in relation to other organs of the body may, after all, be justified:

Quoy qu'il en soit, protestant que les advocats et juges ont beau quereller et sentencier, nature tirera cependant son train: qui n'auroit faict que raison, quand ell'auroit doué ce membre de quelque particulier privilege, autheur du seul ouvrage immortel des mortels. (103)

Howsoever it be, protesting that advocates and judges may wrangle, contend, and give sentence, what and how they please, Nature will in the meane time follow her course; who, had she endued this member with any particular privilege, yet had she done but right, and shewed but reason. Author of the only immortall worke of mortall man. (104)

The hint at "nature's course" points to the act of procreation, which serves nature's ends by generating offspring and prolonging the existence of mankind. The observation relies on the implicit assumption that it is possible for man to master the disobedient male organ and thereby activate masculinity in marital intercourse. A similar argument is put forward in the essay "Sur des vers de Virgile" ("Upon some Verses of Virgil"), where Montaigne draws a distinction between love and marriage. In contrast to love, Montaigne argues, ideal marriage is exempt from the "extravagances de la licence amoureuse" (850; "the [...] extravagant humor of an amorous licentiousness" 78); it is built on institutionalized relations between man and woman ("un nombre infiny d'utiles et solides offices et obligations mutuelles" 851; "an infinite number of profitable and solid offices, and mutuall obligations" 80) and pursues the aim of procreation (850/78). The opposition of love and marriage clearly posits a difference between the domesticated, continent, almost asexual wife and woman in general (see Desan 248-255; Matalene 374), whose violent desire (857/88) potentially exceeds the ardour and vehemence of amorous passions in man (854/84). While this essay strongly suggests that marriage represents the site for a contractual conciliation of gender roles and practices, "De la force de l'imagination," however, illustrates that it is precisely the domesticated act of procreation in accordance with the law of nature which cannot be accomplished:

²¹ In this respect, the essayist is far from corroborating traditional medical accounts of woman's "mystery," quite on the contrary, he radically opposes these in underscoring and unveiling the cultural consequences which arise from the failure to provide adequate explanations for feminine anatomy and behavior. On the perception of woman's "mysterious" physiology, which, within the contemporary medical discourse, arises from contradictory assumptions relating to the principle of finality, see Thomasset 72-73.

Les mariez, le temps estant tout leur, ne doivent ny presser, ny taster leur entreprise, s'ils ne sont prests; et vaut mieux faillir indecemment à estreiner la couche nuptiale, pleine d'agitation et de fievre, attendant une et une autre commodité plus privée et moins allarmée, que de tomber en une perpetuelle misere, pour s'estre estonné [=paralysé] et desesperé du premier refus. (101 f.)

Married men, because time is at their command, and they may go to it when they list, ought never to presse or importune their enterprise, unlesse they be readie. And it is better undecently to faile in hanseling the nuptiall bed, full of agitation and fits, by waiting for some or other fitter occasion, and more private opportunitie, less sudden and alarmed, than to fall into a perpetual miserie, by apprehending an astonishment and desperation of the first refusall. (101)

If here the inhibitive force of passion ("agitation," "fievre") seems to be confined to the wedding night only, the Egyptian king's impotence in the presence of his wife as well as the essayist's ensuing conclusion testify to the general impossibility of fulfilling nature's telos in the act of procreation, an impossibility which, the essayist now suggests, may be viewed as the result of the very coyness and continence that ideally distinguishes married woman.²² The institution of marriage, which, according to "Sur des vers de Virgile," represents the most efficient instrument for organizing intersubjective relations, then, fails to guarantee a stable affirmation of masculinity and appears to threaten the entire cultural order which largely relies on contractually defined gender practices.²³

22 Eventually, it is woman's enigmatic reluctance to conform to masculine appropriations of her sex and gender which may explain why Montaigne in "De la force de l'imagination" combines examples illustrating the male subject's failure to fulfill the "phallogocentric" norm of strength with the discussion of contemporary beliefs relating to witchcraft and demonic agency. The association of a threatening female with the figure of the malevolent sorceress not only appears in the accusation the Egyptian king raises against his wife. It recurs significantly at the end of the essay, where Montaigne reports an ancient belief according to which enraged Scythian women were capable of killing men by their mere glance (105/106),

²² "Or elles ont tort de nous recueillir de ces contenance mineuses, querelleuses et fuyardes, qui nous esteignent en nous allumant" (101; "Now they wrong us, to receive and admit us with their wanton, squeamish, quarrellous countenances, which setting us afire, extinguish us" 101).

²³ Montaigne's observations on the status of woman in society combine here with a critique of powerful public institutions which have been created by man. - On this critique see Leschemelle. - See also Bauschatz 99-100. Although Leschemelle's article offers a comprehensive survey of Montaigne's observations on women, the author's concern with Montaigne's alleged essentialist "misogyny" or "feminism" appears to miss the crucial point, since Montaigne himself explicitly concedes that woman's behaviour is to a large extent the product of social habits and institutional practices governing communal life. From this perspective, woman's disturbing character not only derives from her reluctance to conform to "patriarchal" ideology, but, paradoxically, also appears to be the product of a male educational system which prepares her for excessive sexual voluptuousness and lascivity. See "Sur des vers de Virgile:" "Nous les dressons dès l'enfance aus entremises de l'amour: leur grace, leur atiffeure, leur science, leur parole, toute leur instruction ne regarde qu'à ce but" (856; "Even from their infancy wee frame them to the sports of love: their instruction, behaviour, attire, grace, learning and all their words aimeth only at love, respects only affection" 86).

and subsequently associates this belief with a commonly shared contemporary assumption about witches: "Et quant aux sorciers, on les dit avoir des yeux offensifs et nuisans [...]" (105; "And concerning witches they are said to have offensive and harme-working eies" 106). Although Montaigne signals his reluctance to accept the belief, the association of the malevolent power of the demonic sorceress with the equally threatening power of the Scythian woman suggests that the figure of the witch, produced both by discursive strategies and superstitious beliefs, nonetheless functions as a cultural emblem, a model which epitomizes the disquieting inscrutability of woman as such. It is for this reason that Montaigne, while taking care to distance himself from the belief in supernatural or demonic agency, ascribes the same inhibitive force to the imagination and to mental representations an actual demonic "nouement d'aiguillettes" would have brought about:

Je suis encore de cette opinion, que ces plaisantes liaisons [...], ce sont volontiers des impressions de l'apprehension et de la crainte. Car je sçay par experience, que tel, de qui je puis respondre, comme de moy mesme, en qui il ne pouvoit choir soupçon aucune de foiblesse, et aussi peu d'enchantement, ayant ouy faire le conte à un sien compagnon, d'une defaillance extraordinaire, [...] l'horreur de ce conte lui vint à coup si rudement frapper l'imagination, qu'il en encourut une fortune pareille; [...]. (99 f.)

I am yet in doubt, these pleasant bonds [...] are haply but the impressions of apprehension, and effects of feare. For I know by experience, that some one, for whom I may as well answer as for my selfe, and in whom no manner of suspition either of weaknesse or enchantment might fall, hearing a companion of his make report of an extraordinary faint sowning, [...] whereupon the horror of his report did so strongly strike his imagination, as he ranne the same fortune, [...]. (98)

The implicit transfer of demonic power to the imagination and the recurrent metaphors of tyings and bindings suggest that for Montaigne impotence or the failure to affirm masculinity through the domination of the unruly male member is not the result of actual demonic intervention but derives from a "demonicized" imagination which maliciously "bewitches" the subject from within and subdues him to an irreducible authority.²⁴

23 If the entire essay illustrates that intersubjective processes of cultural exchange between man and woman result in a disquieting destabilization of the masculine gender construction inherent in Renaissance thought, it is no surprise that, ultimately, the narrative

²⁴ Montaigne does not simply operate the same shift from demonic agency to mental representations that underlies contemporary conceptualizations of the materializing force of the imagination. In linking the literary account of demonic agency to representations of anxiety and fear, which result from a cultural exchange of gender practices and rely on woman's reluctance to confirm to a "phallogentric" gender economy, he rather indicates that the operations of the imagination form part of cultural signifying practices. The essayist thus offers a genealogical account which withdraws from the "belief" in the physical reality of imagined phenomena and ascribes to the imagination primarily a "symbolic" or a "ludic" function. For a description of "ludic" and "symbolic" manifestations of the imagination which increasingly supplant the Renaissance "belief" in the materiality of phantasmata, see Dubois, *Essais* 29-34.

questioning of gender roles also affects the successful reconfiguration of masculinity. In the example relating to the "ligatures," the restoration of phallic potency is due to the eventual "untying" or relaxation of the malicious imagination ("sa pensée desbrouillée et desbandée" 100; "his thought being cleared and unmasked" 98). The central anecdote of "De la force de l'imagination," however, concerns a case in which the disease of impotence is cured by opposite means. The reader learns about a Count of Montaigne's acquaintance who, fearing the "sorcellerie" a rival might use against him, finds himself incapable of consummating the union with his wife on his wedding night and agrees to follow Montaigne's prescriptions in observing a curative procedure that enables him to overcome his temporary impotence. It is important to note that, in contrast to other examples, here the "healing" of the "disease" consists in providing a "contrebatterie d'enchantements" (100; "counter-battery of forcible enchantments" 99) that involves the same "ligatures" which are thought to be the cause of the disease: "Il avoit eu l'ame et les oreilles si battues, qu'il se trouva lié du trouble de son imagination [...]" (101; "[...] his mind was so quailed, and his eares so dulled, that by reason of the bond wherewith the trouble of his imagination had tied him, hee could not run on poste: [...]" 100).²⁵ The description of the "miraculous" healing procedure the Count has to undergo to be relieved from his ailment furthermore evokes diabolical ceremonies and rituals practiced by sorcerers and magicians:

[...] quand nous serions sortis, qu'il se retirast à tomber de l'eau; dist trois fois telles oraisons, et fist tels mouvemens; qu'à chascune de ces trois fois, il ceignist le ruban que je luy mettoys en main, et couchast bien soigneusement la médaille qui y estoit attachée, sur ses roignons, la figure en telle posture [...]. (101)

[...] when we should be gone out of the Chamber, he should withdraw himselfe to make water, and using certaine jestures I had shewed him, speake such words thrice over. And every time hee spake them he should girt the ribband, which I put into his hands, and very carefully place the plate thereto fastened, just upon his kidneyes, and the whole figure, in such a posture. (100)

While the other examples in the essay foreground the devastating effects of a "tied," demonized and threatening imagination, here the phantasmal belief in the efficacy of the ridiculous procedure brings about the opposite effect in that it leads to the eventual coincidence of the individual's desire to perform the sexual act and his physical ability to act accordingly.

24 Yet the affirmation of masculinity, the fulfillment of nature's telos in the act of marital intercourse, presents itself as the result of the same ceremonial performance, the same

²⁵ Montaigne points explicitly to the affinity between demonic workings and the fantasies generated by the imagination, when he writes: "Resverie germaine à celle de quoy nous parlons" (100; "A fond doting conceit, and cosin-germane to that we now speake of" 99).

demonic ritual on which the phantasmal cure of the merchant suffering from the disease of the stone relies. The central episode in "De la force de l'imagination" demonstrates most vigorously that it is not the withdrawal from an essentially "demonic" imagination but the very reliance on its force, the internalization of the demonic, which brings about the reconfiguration of the masculine gender role. The eventual affirmation of masculinity points to a fundamental deficiency in the "phallogentric" construction itself, an inherent void that is supplemented and externalized in the material medium of the gold medallion on which the Count's delusory faith is based. This is also suggested by Montaigne's reference to his own bathrobe which, according to his prescription, is to cover the couple during the marital act and which implicitly alludes to the cynic's coat that, in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, conceals the simulated performance of the shameful sexual act.²⁶ Restored masculinity, the return to the "nature" of masculine gender, thus reveals itself to be built on a ritualized performance devoid of substantial content and generated by the all-pervasive power of a "demonized" imagination whose operations both organize and threaten the functioning of the cultural order.²⁷

IV.

25 Starting out from a critical questioning of superstitious beliefs and learned stereotypes, Montaigne's narrative account of witchcraft describes sorceresses and magicians as victims and representative members of a cultural economy of negotiations which bridges the gap separating unlearned villagers and erudite urban authorities. If the essayist's criticism of the witch craze of his own day unmasks the normality of the demonic, his preoccupation with the constitution of gender, in turn, discloses the "demonization" of the normal, the unsettling incorporation of an otherness epitomized in the figure of the demonic sorceress and metaphorically transferred to the enigmatic character of woman as such.

26 Yet Montaigne's narrative account of the contemporary witch craze and of cultural gender negotiations also deeply affects the literary fashioning of the self and bears important

²⁶ A certain tradition has it that the ancient cynics, according to whom sexual intercourse was essentially lawful, did not feel ashamed to perform the act of copulation in public. Augustine, for whom sexuality is inherently shameful, expresses his disbelief in the legend and declares that the cynic Diogenes, covered by a cloak, only simulated the sexual act since he himself was not able to rid himself of the feeling of shame (see Saint Augustine, vol. 2 50).

²⁷ Taking into account Montaigne's hint at the simulation of the act, it is difficult to follow Kritzman's analysis, which does not mention the function of the bathrobe and tries to demonstrate that the episode testifies to Montaigne's attempt to "neutralize difference" and to "control nature" (Kritzman 194). For a similar account of Montaigne's view of difference and alterity, with reference to the alleged "naturalization" of miracles operated by the imagination, see Mathieu-Castellani 237-240.

consequences for the scriptural project described at the end of "De la force de l'imagination." As is signalled by the refusal to answer for the narrative examples borrowed from ancient and contemporary authors, the essayist's discursive task apparently consists in applying reason to establish truth: "[...] les Histoires que j'emprunte, je les renvoye sur la conscience de ceux de qui je les prens./Les discours sont à moy, et se tiennent par la preuve de la raison, non de l'expérience: [...]" (105; "The histories I borrow, I referre to the consciences of those I take them from. The discourses are mine, and hold together by the prooffe of reason, not of experiences" 107). His own narrative, however, integrates the same "fabulous" tales from which the author throughout the essay seems to distance himself: "Aussi en l'estude que je traite de nos moeurs et mouvemens, les tesmoignages fabuleux, pourveu qu'ils soient possibles, y servent comme les vrais" (105; "So in the studie wherein I treat of our manners and motions, the fabulous testimonies, alwaies provided they be likely and possible, may serve to the purpose, as well as the true" 107). The insertion of these tales, whose mere verisimilitude takes the place of historical truth not only indicates that the genre of the essay operates a conflation of the Aristotelian concepts of poetry and history and now figures as the site of a historiographical discourse which bears an utterly fictitious character (see Regosin), but it also implies a strict adherence to the "tesmoignages fabuleux" and thereby appears to presuppose on the part of the essayist the very "superstitious" attitude that his narrative ordinarily ascribes to witches and magicians.²⁸ A similar paradox occurs in "Des Boyteux." Here the essayist strongly expresses his doubts regarding the "imposture" of delusory fantasies and the inanity of human reason, which determine the mechanisms structuring cultural exchange. Despite his affirmation to disclose truth, Montaigne, however, confesses a liability to fall prey to the same "folly" that characterizes both witches and judges and subsequently does not fail to indicate the danger of turning into an "impostor" himself:²⁹

Moy-mesme, qui faicts singuliere conscience de mentir et qui ne me soucie guiere de donner creance et autorité à ce que je dis, m'apperçoy toutesfois, aux propos que j'ay en main, qu'estant eschauffé ou par la resistance d'un autre ou par la propre chaleur de la narration, je grossis et enfle mon subject par vois, mouvemens, vigueur et force de parolles, et encore par extention et amplification, non sans interest de la verité nayfve. (1028)

²⁸Montaigne significantly uses the term "religion superstitieuse" to describe this adherence to reported tales: "Il est justement permis aux escholes de supposer des similitudes, quand ilz n'en ont point. Je n'en fay pas ainsi pourtant, et surpasse de ce costé là en religion superstitieuse toute foy historiale" (106; "It is justly allowed in schooles, to suppose similitudes, when they have none. Yet doe not I so, and concerning that point, in superstitious religion, I exceed all historicall credit" 107).

²⁹ This is suggested by the use of the term "battelage" ("juggling tricke") which not only denotes the villagers' delusions (1030/321), but also serves to describe the essayist's own attitude towards truth: "Et me faut ordinairement bateler par compaignie à traicter des subjects et comptes frivoles, que je mescrois entierement" (1027; "And I most commonly juggle for company sake, to treat of idle subjects and frivolous discourses, which I believe nothing at all" 317).

My selfe who make an especiall matter of conscience to lie, and care not greatly to add credit or authority to what I say, perceive, nevertheles, by the discourses I have in hand, that being earnested, either by the resistance of another or by the earnestnesse of my narration, I swell and amplifie my subject by my voice, motions, vigor and force of wordes; as also by extension and amplification, not without some prejudice to the naked truth. (318)

It is significant that these paradoxical assertions regarding the essayist's narrative practice do not simply reiterate the gesture of the Pyrrhonian skeptic. The skeptic denies the possibility of achieving truth through human reasoning, but he posits a distant viewpoint that serves to secure his epistemic relationship with the outward world. In obfuscating the boundary between fantasy and reason, fiction and truth, while at the same time associating this skeptical gesture with the sorcerers' and judges' "imposture," Montaigne, however, deliberately abandons the privileged position of an external observer of the world and signals, on the contrary, his own complicity with the cultural formation he seeks to criticize.

27 This is confirmed by the discussion of monstrous lameness which occurs at the end of the essay "Des Boyteux" and in which the essayist returns to a narrative description of gender relations. Montaigne here operates a reversal of Paré and other Renaissance authors' causal explanations for the appearance of monsters and miracles in reporting a belief according to which the mutilation of the legs, instead of being the effect of lechery or demonic agency (see Paré 3-5), represents, on the contrary, the cause for enhanced sexuality: "A propos ou hors de propos, il n'importe, on dict en Italie, en commun proverbe, que celui-là ne cognoit pas Venus en sa parfaicte douceur qui n'a couché avec la boiteuse" (1033; "Whether it be to the purpose, or from the purpose, it is no great matter. It is a common Proverbe in Italie, that 'He knowes not the perfect pleasure of Venus that hath not laine with a limping woman'" 326). The image of the sexually powerful lame woman significantly recalls the ugliness and "deformity" of the witch Montaigne describes earlier in the essay and thus establishes a link between "demonic" appearances and excesses of sexual desire. What is yet more important to note is the fact that the writing subject uses both terms, "lecherous" monstrosity as well as "demonic" deformity, to define his own misshapen self, whose monstrous character exceeds all outward appearances:

Jusques à cette heure, tous ces miracles et evenemens estranges se cachent devant moy. Je n'ay veu monstre et miracle au monde plus expres que moy-mesme. On s'appivoise à toute estrangeté par l'usage et le temps; mais plus je me hante et me connois, plus ma difformité m'estonne, moins je m'entens en moy. (1029)

All these miracles and strange events, are untill this day hidden from me: I have seene no such monster or more expresse wonder in this world than my selfe. With time and

custom a man doth acquaint and enure himselfe to all strangenesse: But the more I frequent and know my selfe the more my deformitie astonieth me, and the lesse I understand my selfe. (320)

Montaigne's description of his monstrous appearance thus indicates that the constitution of his own gender role implies the same "demonicization" and the same experience of excessive sexuality that also characterize the precarious manifestations of masculine gender in "De la force de l'imagination." If, in this respect, the narrative examples quoted in "De la force de l'imagination" reveal themselves to be allegorical prefigurations of the writing subject who emerges in "Des Boyteux," it is no surprise that the affirmation of his "deformed" self equally appears to be contingent upon the presence of woman, as it is suggested by the only episode which explicitly relates to male voluptuousness and monstrosity:

[...] la Royne des Amazonnes respondit au Scyte qui la convioit à l'amour: [...] le boiteux le faict le mieux. En cette republique feminine, pour fuir la domination des masles, elles les stropioient des l'enfance, bras, jambes et autres membres qui leur donnoient avantage sur elles, et se servoient d'eux à ce seulement à quoy nous nous servons d'elles par deçà. (1033)

[...] the Queene of the Amazons answered the Scithian that wooed her to loves-embracements. [...] 'The crooked man doth it best.' In that feminine common-wealth of theirs, to avoyde the domination of men, they were wont in their infancy to maime them, both their arms, and legges, and other limmes, that might any way advantage their strength over them, and make onely that use of them that we in our World make of our Women. (326)

The example illustrates in the form of a political allegory woman's capacity to counteract and to reverse a gender hierarchy which guarantees the superiority of man. The monstrous and "demonic" character of Montaigne's own self thus also emerges within the precarious interaction with woman, who proves to be reluctant to conform to a culturally sanctioned norm. Far from reserving for the writing subject the privileged position of an external observer, the essay reveals, on the contrary, that both the construction of masculine gender and the fashioning of the self appear to be the product of a cultural economy of symbolic practices from which it is impossible to withdraw.

28 It is this constitutive involvement in the cultural formation of his own day which may ultimately serve to explain the specific nature of the essayist's project and the structure of the narrative text. It has been argued that the abolition of an external or olympic viewpoint as well as the transformation of techniques and arguments derived from Pyrrhonian skepticism relate to the fact that Montaigne's text reflects the presuppositions underlying the Christian notion of truth, which transcends the boundaries of human knowledge and compels the essayist to

multiply paradoxes and aporias within a discourse of fiction that no longer claims to master the contingency of reality.³⁰ In "De la force de l'imagination" and "Des Boyteux," Montaigne's preoccupation with the contemporary witch craze, however, does not primarily focus on issues which belong to the field of theory or epistemology.³¹ In contrast to other essays, in which the act of writing is presented as the counterpole of practical and public action,³² in "De la force de l'imagination" the narrative project appears to be intimately linked to the performance of ritualized acts, which repeatedly combine with medical therapies and the application of curative methods. This is most strongly revealed in the example relating to the merchant from Toulouse suffering from the "disease of the stone" whose treatment relies on the enactment of a purely formal procedure which brings about the curative effect. The episode re-actualizes and epitomizes a whole series of medical examples and figurations whose narrative function is anticipated in the metaphorical description of the essayist's discursive task provided in the very first paragraph of the essay: "Je visite plus mal volontiers les malades ausquels le devoir m'interesse, que ceux ausquels je m'attens moins, et que je considere moins. Je saisis le mal que j'estudie et le couche en moy" (98; "I am more unwilling to visit the sicke dutie doth engage me unto, than those to whom I am little beholding, and regard least. I apprehend the evill which I studie, and place it in me" 95). Read as a narrative illustration of the metapoetic description articulated at the beginning of the essay, the episode of the merchant suggests that the writing subject here implicitly assumes the role of the physician who pays a visit to his patient and effects the healing process.³³ By ascribing to the merchant the same "disease of the stone" Montaigne himself was known to be suffering from, the writing subject, however, equally appears to be embodied by the patient in the episode. Associating the essayist both with the physician and the patient of the anecdote, the narrative of the healing procedure thus presents the act of writing as the site of a ritualized performance that somehow resembles a theatrical stage on which the writing subject appears as an actor who plays a double role.

³⁰ For a detailed description of the implications of the Christian concept of truth in Montaigne, with reference to the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," see Kablitz 517-533. Kablitz' analysis derives its central impulses from Hans Blumenberg's historical and epistemological analysis of the emergence of 'modernity' in the Western world (see Blumenberg).

³¹ For an account of the scriptural project of "De la force de l'imagination," which also underscores the essayist's withdrawal from epistemological and "metaphysical" issues, see Dubois, *Essais* 74-88. In his suggestive reading of "De la force de l'imagination" Dubois, however, primarily focuses on the therapeutic character of the narrative project and does not take into account the context of Montaigne's preoccupation with the witch craze of his own day.

³² On the distinction between writing and public action, with particular reference to the essay "De mesnager sa volonte" ("How one ought to governe his Will"), see Pfeiffer 90.

³³ This is also suggested by the fact that the anecdote of the merchant from Toulouse obviously recalls an episode which immediately follows the metapoetical comment and in which the essayist tells about his visit to a rich man living in Toulouse who is a patient of the famous physician Simon Thomas (98/95).

29 As we have seen, the episode which provides the scene for the "theatrical" role-playing on the part of the writing subject also gains a public dimension in that it discloses the operations of the imagination and allegorizes central cultural mechanisms which, in "Des Boyteux," are related to the formation of the early modern witch craze. Yet it is, above all, the particular narrative structure of the example that reveals a fundamental trait of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century "diabolical spectacle," which, according to Michel de Certeau, inaugurates in its modes of enunciation a "style of practice" that follows a predetermined set of rules and bears a close affinity to ritualized and theatrical performances. Being urged by exorcists or judges to reveal their identity and to fix on a proper name, in interrogations or trial situations "demoniac" women frequently quote a wide variety of names and engage in a plurality of identifications with diabolical figures which are commonly drawn from registers provided by the exorcists themselves. The possessed woman's "disturbing" enunciation, which persistently shifts the locus of speech, thereby enters into a theatrical "double play" that operates a significant inversion of traditional hermeneutics based on the Christian notion of truth. While the hermeneutic paradigm presupposes a known and stable interlocutor, God, whose language includes unknown secrets that need to be deciphered, the confession scene reverses this scheme by presenting a mode of enunciation in which the content is known, whereas it is the interlocutor himself who remains unknown.³⁴

30 It is this theatrical mode of ritualized enunciation, I would argue, which largely informs Montaigne's art of writing. This is not only suggested by the tale of the merchant, in which the essayist engages in a "double play" by identifying both with the physician and the patient described in the episode. The specific status of the narrative enunciation is more obvious still in the passage in which the writing subject defends the male member against accusations raised by other organs of the body. At first sight, the whole passage provides one of the "discours" which belong to the essayist's own narration and which are explicitly set apart from the tales that are "borrowed" from ancient or contemporary authors. Upon closer examination, however, the essayist's ironic speech appears to be modelled on the fourteenth book of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, whose central argument is both reiterated and transformed. Far from offering a personal comment which relies entirely on the essayist's own reasoning, his speech thus offers another "vérité empruntée" (106; "borrowed truth" 108) and thereby represents a mode of enunciation which not only appears to disclose a content which

³⁴On the "demoniac" mode of enunciation and its cultural implications, see Certeau, "Discourse Disturbed" passim. - For a broader account of ritualized schemas of actions or "tactics" that combine to form a "style" or "art of practice" which operates within a given cultural field and disturbs, displaces or subverts its dominant power "strategies," see Certeau, *Practice* 29-42. On the affinity between ritual and theatricality, see also Turner.

is determined in advance and with which the erudite early modern reader is already familiar, but which furthermore, in reiterating the Augustinian text while at the same time defending the male organ, in a double sense proves to be spoken in the name of someone other than the essayist himself. It is therefore no surprise that the essayist chooses a pragmatic frame for his speech that presents the same public "staging" on which is built the early modern witch craze: If the whole discourse reads as a political figuration, in which the rivalling organs of the human body allegorize the competing forces within the body of the state,³⁵ it also illustrates an oral mode of enunciation which quite obviously recalls the court trial situation underlying the ritualized "diabolical spectacle" of witch hunting and now assigns to the writing subject the public "roe" of a lawyer who speaks in defense of the accused victim.³⁶ Taking into account the changing roles the essayist assumes throughout the entire text, we may eventually infer that it is the central narrative technique itself, the insertion of examples or tales from ancient and contemporary authors, that initiates a literary "style" or "art of practice," a theatrical "double play" which parallels the demoniac woman's enunciation and reverses the traditional paradigm of hermeneutics and truth in endlessly reiterating a known and trivial content while at the same time relying on an unknown interlocutor who persistently removes the locus of his own enunciation.

31 Montaigne's answer to the witch craze of his own day, then, is not located within the field of theory and epistemology, but reiterates and displaces ritualized schemas of actions and practices which are situated at the center of the Renaissance diabolical stage. The cultural function of these performances, which are devoid of substantial content, is epitomized in the episode of the Count de Guerson, in which the writing subject himself appears in the role of a demonic conjurer who enacts a "monkey trick" whose very "inanity" accounts for its result and thus discloses a disturbing demonicization of the narrative project which does not escape the essayist's notice: "Ces singeries sont le principal de l'effect: nostre pensée ne se pouvant desmesler que moyens si estranges ne viennent de quelqu'abstruse science. Leur inanité leur

³⁵ For this reading of the passage, which focuses on Montaigne's parody of the theory of the "sacred" body of the state and views the defense of the penis as an emblematic model of the essayist's narrative project, see Teuber, "Figuratio impotentiae" 117-118.

³⁶ This is confirmed by the essayist's reference to scapegoating strategies which quite explicitly point to the communal witch hunting of his own day: "Si toutes-fois en ce qu'on gourmande sa rebellion [de ce membre], et qu'on en tire preuve de sa condamnation, il m'avoit payé pour plaider sa cause: à l'aventure mettrois-je en suspeçon noz autres membres, ses compagnons, de luy estre allé dresser [...] cette querelle apostée, et avoir par complot armé le monde à l'encontre de luy: le chargeant malignement seul de leur faute commune" (102; "Nevertheless if a man inasmuch as he doth gormandize and devour his rebellion [of this member], and drawes a triall by his condemnation, would pay me for to plead his cause, I would peradventure make other of our members to be suspected to have [...] devised this imposture, and framed this set quarrell against him, and by some malicious complot armed the world against him, enviously charging him alone with a fault common to them all" 102).

donne poids et reverence" (101; "These fopperies are the chiefe of the effect. Our thought being unable so to free it selfe, but some strange meanes will proceed from some abstruse learning: There inanie gives them weight and credit." 100).

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Living on the Borderline. Politics of Domination, States of Insanity and the Quest for Female Identity in the Work of Bessie Head.

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Abstract:

Both, Gilman and Head, were treated for the same "insanity" which they attributed to their fictional heroines. [...] In Head's case it is the socio-psychotic structure of a male-dominated, racist society in which any kind of aberration of the norm must be judged as dangerous and which therefore has created many forms of exclusion. One of these forms is emigration, again in the double sense of inner and outer emigration. An other form is the retreat into madness which then becomes a realm of being where no one else, no violator, no prosecutor, can follow.

1 The dedicated work of feminist critics as well as of female writers - since Mary Wollstonecraft's challenging vindications of the "rights of men and the wrongs of women" - has stated just how dependent on men's approval women are in their self-understanding and in their attempts to formulate their own world view. When they pursue their own way too insistently to be understood or tolerated by men, the label "mad" is readily at hand. It is an old story that goes back many centuries to Greek philosophers and physicians who have described women's deviations from the generally accepted behavioural norms as "madness." This term exerts a particular fascination in European or Western cultural history, as Michel Foucault has convincingly shown. Denoting something as "madness" implies the notion of liminality and of a threshold between the here and the beyond, between sanity and insanity, between reason and its other. Drawing the limits means excluding something which is seen as outside the valid order. This space in-between, this empty space that opens up between inside and outside, between the included and the excluded, tells as much about a society itself as it tells about its values. A society establishes and preserves its values through the continuity of history; through processes of inclusion and exclusion, however, a society makes its significant choices.

2 A paradigmatic and intensively captivating literary rendering of this liminality is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story *The Yellow Wallpaper* from 1890. It is "a striking story of female confinement and escape, a paradigmatic tale which ... seems to tell the story that all literary women would tell if they could speak their "speechless woe," write Gilbert and Gubar in their illuminating book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (89). Gilman herself characterized her novel as a description of a nervous breakdown - hence it is very similar to Bessie Head's novel *A Question of Power*, which will be of interest to my discussion.

3 There are many similarities between Gilman's and Head's stories, in particular concerning the fictionalisation of autobiographical issues. Both Gilman and Head were treated for the same "insanity" that they attributed to their fictional heroines. In Gilman's case it is a dominant, paternalistic physician husband who treats his wife for a severe postpartum psychosis. For a cure he confines her to a large garret room in a house that he has rented. He forbids her to do any writing or reading. As the narrator tells us, her husband fears that

with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. (15-16)

The fact that she cannot create fictional characters who might help her to externalise her turmoil and anxiety makes her mental condition rapidly worse until she finally imagines "gestalten" in and behind the yellow wallpaper of her room. She creates another woman, her double, who finally helps her tear down the wallpaper altogether.

4 Externalising the double within, turning the phantasmatic figures of the soul into literary characters is a first step out of what Gilbert and Gubar metaphorically call "the attic," the exclusion from the male order. In Head's case the socio-psychotic structure of a male-dominated, racist society judges any kind of aberration of the norm as dangerous. It therefore has created many types of exclusion. One of these types of exclusion is emigration - again in the double sense of inner and outer emigration. Another type is the retreat into madness which becomes a realm of being into which nobody else, no violator and no prosecutor, can follow. Bessie Head will move into the same direction as Gilman and call upon the imaginative creation as a way out of madness.

5 Bessie Head is one of the few female African writers whose name appears in post-colonial readers and anthologies as representative of "non-white" literary reactions to the "Scramble for Africa", thus presenting a paradigmatic view from within.¹ Her name is often mentioned together with that of Nadine Gordimer, who has also closely connected the conditions of female existence - black, coloured or white - with racial and political issues in South Africa. In their fictional as well as their critical writing both authors make it very clear that the women are particularly affected by any kind of political change; women constitute the least flexible social group as they are responsible for the care of their children which they more often than not have to raise by themselves. There are little girls without any mothers to take care of them, children raised in orphanages, women who become mothers without the

¹ "Scramble for Africa" is the title of Thomas Pakenham's study of the period between 1876 and 1912, a phase during which, Pakenham concludes, "Europe had imposed its will on Africa at the point of a gun." And, he continues, it was a lesson that would be remembered, fifty years later, when Africa came to win its independence. See Pakenham XXV.

help of socially functioning role models - childhood emerges as a multilayered metaphor in the writings of South African women. Bessie Head says about her protagonist's son in *A Question of Power* (50): "People who had mothers like he had were lost if they did not know how to care for themselves." When Elizabeth suffers her first breakdown in the novel she is taken to hospital where she finds an understanding and warm-hearted "Afrikaner man from South Africa," who takes her son by his hand: "My wife will take care of your son until you come out of hospital. We are both refugees and must help each other" (52). In a short dialogue he admits that he suffers, too, because he does not have a country: "A lot of refugees have nervous breakdowns." Elizabeth feels she has to explain, to excuse herself, to make others understand why this happened to her: "I want to tell you something," she said. "There's something torturing me. There are strange under-currents and events here ..." (52). The African man turns his face away; he does not want to listen to any of this: "He did not want to hear details about the country or anything else, simply accepting the fact that she had a nervous breakdown out of the blue" (52).

6 With a few, almost laconic sentences, Bessie Head paints an intensive atmosphere of fright, oppression, and constraint among the refugees. Although they are in Botswana, a "free" country compared to South Africa, they still do not want to talk about the past and about their own histories. The retelling of their individual histories would entail individuation, separation, and particularity; it would also raise questions of right or wrong, of cause and effect, of truth and falsehood. These questions are subject to the politics of interpretation and hence also subject to questions of power. It is important to the refugees to overcome or to neglect differences and to draw strength from the acceptance of a common fate. The politically important message of this scene is a call for solidarity among the refugees, a solidarity which is not based on the memory of a shared past but which grows out of the shared experiences of a common present.

7 Bessie Head was born in a mental asylum in Pietermaritzburg, a small town in South Africa, in 1937. The memory of the place and the circumstances of her birth were to haunt her all her life, as she felt threatened to live a life on the borderline between sanity and insanity, just like her mother. Not much is known about Bessie Head's relationship to her mother or about her own feelings towards her. Did she feel betrayed? Did she hold her mother responsible for the manifold problems and misery in her own short life?

8 In autobiographical writing, in statements Bessie Head made in interviews as well as in the few critical texts which have approached Bessie Head's literary productions, the information we find about Head's family history is sparse and rather vague. Her stories about

her mother's "illicit" relationship with a "farm boy," a "stable hand," or just "a black man," increasingly involve fantastic elements. However, so much seems clear: Bessie Emery, Bessie Head's mother, had an affair with a black man who worked on the family estate; she soon found herself pregnant by him. This relationship could not be tolerated by South African whites in the 1930s.

9 Did her "abnormal" behaviour or did the sanctions the community imposed on her for this violation of the moral code confine her to the mental institution? Was she really insane, or was she just labelled insane because this was the most appropriate punishment for white women who so completely forgot where they belonged - socially, racially and morally? As far as we know, Bessie Head was taken from her mother at birth and raised in a "coloured," that is a mixed-race family. She was educated at a mission school, where - as she tells us in her novel *A Question of Power* - she was immediately told about her prospective place: "As soon as she arrived at the school, she was called to one side by the principal and given the most astounding information." The principal said:

We have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native. (16)

Nevertheless, as her mother had left written instructions that her daughter was to be given a good education, the mission school lived up to this obligation as best as it could. Head received a teaching certificate from this school in 1955. She taught for a few years but then gave it up because she did not like it and from then on worked as a journalist in Cape Town and Johannesburg. As a journalist Bessie Head wrote political and critical essays commenting on the situation in South Africa in general, but she also addressed the problems that coloured women had to face under the apartheid regime.

10 In 1960 Bessie married a journalist named Harold Head; but as the marriage ended after only four years, she decided to leave South Africa, and moved to Botswana with her son. Betschuanaland, as it was called then, was one of the three territories that England had "put under protection" so that all those who sought refuge from the Zulus or the Boers could live relatively undisturbed in these territories.

11 In Botswana, Bessie Head began writing novels. Her first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968) tells the story of a political refugee from South Africa who escapes to Botswana, like Bessie Head herself. He moves to a small town named Golema Mmidi where he meets people, most of them fellow refugees, who share the same dreams and the same

political ideas. The village chief, however, is suspicious of these new tendencies and seeks to boycott them. His political scheme does not work out and in the end he commits suicide. Thus, Head's message in her first novel reads: the old political structures must be destroyed so that the world may be liberated.

12 A Question of Power is Bessie Head's best known novel, published in 1973. Intensely autobiographical, the novel retraces the protagonist's geographical movements from South Africa to Botswana as a metaphoric journey on the borderline between sanity and insanity. The protagonist, Elizabeth, had read a newspaper article about teachers being needed in Botswana, but in order to be able to cross the border she had "to take out an exit permit, which, like her marriage, held the 'never to return' clause" (19). Her destination is a small village, Motabeng, which means the place of sand; it is situated "remotely inland, perched on the edge of the Kalahari desert," and she tries to settle there (19). But her instable mental condition does not allow for peaceful and continuous existence. As the narrator tells us in A Question of Power, after a few months Elizabeth feels her equilibrium give way to fits of rage, to feelings of rejection and paranoia: "It was barely three months after her arrival in the village of Motabeng when her life began to pitch over from an even keel, and it remained from then onwards at a pitched-over angle" (21).

13 Critics agree that the novel is a masterwork; they disagree, however, on the reasons. Some read the novel autobiographically as the striking document of Bessie Head's mental derangements, others read it as a negotiation of alienation and oppression on a mental, sexual, racial and political level. Nancy Bazin argues for example that the novel is an example of "the experience of a black African woman driven 'mad' by the madness surrounding her" (140). All these readings are accommodated by the novel; this is what is so fascinating about A Question of Power. By incorporating psychoanalytical, social and political dimensions into the narrative about her heroine Elizabeth, Bessie Head creates a complex literary text, which refers to the inside world as well as the outside world and also to the literary text itself as an intentional construction. The question of power is raised on all levels of the novel. Not only does Head present the story of a woman in the grip of two men who dominate her, chase her around and undermine and destroy her self-esteem, but she also reflects on the cultural constructedness of gender, racial and cultural identity:

There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality. There wasn't any escape like that for anyone in South Africa. They were races, not people. (44)

The circumstances of Elizabeth's life are very similar to those of Bessie Head herself. Elizabeth also has a young son, whom she has taken to Botswana with her. In one scene, she

has an argument with him. Although the emotional stress, caused by her son's stubbornness, is almost unbearable for Elizabeth. She is able to reflect on the different ways in which women, as opposed to men, cope with the "inner life" (50). In order to evoke the novel's emotional quality, I would like to quote one of those scenes at some length.

Her head was throbbing with pain from a sleepless and feverish night. She grabbed a pile of his clothes off a chair and said irritably: "You'd like to be slaughtered, hey? Shut your mouth, you damn little nuisance."

He took all his moods from her and imitated her in every way. A day which started off like this could throw him off balance completely. Suddenly, he seemed to sense something funny in the air and mimicked in a shrill voice: "You'd like to be slaughtered, hey? Shut your mouth, you damn little nuisance." (49)

The scene goes on like this building up more and more tension, until Elizabeth begins to cry. The boy immediately senses that this is no time to play games:

"I can show you I know how to dress myself," he said haughtily. "I can put my own shoes on. I can eat my porridge." He sat down on the floor again and grimly concentrated on eating his porridge. People who had mothers like he had were lost if they did not know how to care for themselves. (50)

Elizabeth looked at him in agony and thought: "Journeys into the soul are not for women with children, not all that dark heaving turmoil. They are for men, and the toughest of them took off into the solitude of the forests and fought out their battles with hell in deep seclusion." (50)

Elizabeth's conclusion in the above quoted passage is that the "inner life is ugly" (50). Passages like these reveal an ambiguous attitude towards children and along with it also an ambiguity towards the socially defined roles of women. And because it is ugly, it has to be hidden. Sometimes, however, the inner turmoil is so strong that it breaks out and leaves the individual without shelter.

14 Bessie Head went through this experience again and again; her own background could not have been more traumatic. When she was a newborn she was given up for adoption to a white family by the unsuspecting adoption authorities, but was soon returned because she looked "strange." After that she was adopted by a so called "coloured couple," but unfortunately her adopted father died when she was only six years old. When the first holidays arrived and she thought she could go home to the family she had lived with, she learned in a very brutal way that the woman she had thought of as her mother was not her mother at all. Experiences like these might have shattered women under less threatening political circumstances, too.

15 After some time Elizabeth, in the company of the two male figures Dan and Sello, whom she has created as characters out of her own imagination, recognizes the similarity

between racist and sexist attitudes and calls her two companions "power-maniacs" who live "off other people's souls like vultures" (19).

1. Adopted Motherlands - questioned identities

16 In Bessie Head's novel the protagonist's psychic imbalance not only suggests a focus on displacement, alienation and isolation; it also connects the implied social message with a kind of political utopia. As Valerie Kibera states in her essay "Adopted Motherlands," Head's novels "evinced a deep commitment to their adopted societies" (318). Although Bessie Head developed paranoid feelings towards Botswana authorities over the years, her narratives exhibit a "moral idealism" that projects itself in the metaphor of the agricultural co-operative which has a central place in her first and third novels. The co-operative in Golama Mmidi, in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, is a "unique place" consisting of "individuals who had fled there to escape the tragedies of life" (22). The co-operative in *A Question of Power* is placed at the edge of the Kalahari desert; both communities are made up of, inspired and run by refugees from deadly places that hold no future, such as South African, Tswana and English refugees.

17 The co-operative is more than a practical organisation for Bessie Head; it operates on a human level; this means that a group of people pursues a common goal such as the construction of a well or the development of food production systems or finding different ways to cope with Botswana's hostile climate conditions. This labour also encourages solidarity among individuals who have nothing in common besides equal working conditions as refugees. For Bessie Head, who had lived most of her life "in shattered little bits," this possibility of establishing meaning, of projecting continuity in activities which definitely reached beyond the limits of the day, meant having positive experiences of a new kind. It seemed as if the shattered bits began to grow together and to form a "sense of wovenness, a wholeness in life here" (Head, Serowe: x), when she had lived for a decade on the Bamangwato Development Farm.

18 Bessie Head uses Elizabeth's breakdowns to signify her own uprootedness. In her fits she feels disconnected, not responsible for herself or anybody else anymore because she does not have to fight for and define a place of her own in the new country. This becomes very clear after her first collapse in Motabeng. After she has been given a sedative, the "storm in her head had subsided." And then she describes how this very individual feeling of disaster enlarges its scope, and sparks cultural reflections on the status of a refugee and the feeling of homelessness:

It had taken such drastic clamour to silence the hissing record in her head, but it had left a terrible wound. She could feel it bleeding and bleeding and bleeding, quietly. Her so-called analytical mind was being shattered to pieces. It depended on questions and more questions, tentative propositions, with all the time and patience in eternity to solve the riddles, and the joy of friendly and affectionate exchanges.

When she comes out of her stupor and looks up, she sees Sello standing beside her bed, one of the imaginary male figures which her schizophrenic mind had created as her company. He forces her to come with him and face a deep cesspit: "It was filled almost to the brim with excreta. It was alive, and its contents rumbled" (53). Thus, Sello, a strong, virile male, whose will dominates Elizabeth, makes her look at the ugly "inside" without giving her the chance to deal with it.

2. Power relations: Sello, Elizabeth, Dan

19 It is interesting to note that it is Sello who is the first character to appear on the imaginary level of *A Question of Power*. With the creation of Sello, Head makes an affirmative, but also critical contribution to the value systems in African societies as she experiences them. She depicts a strongly patriarchal system in which the male character sets the pace and dictates what is right or wrong. "It seemed almost incidental," writes Head at the beginning of Head's novel, "that he was African. So vast had his inner perceptions grown over the years, that he preferred an identification with mankind to an identification with a particular environment" (11). In view of the fact that Sello is Elizabeth's creation - as Elizabeth is Bessie Head's creation - and that therefore his characteristics are projections of Elizabeth's own fantasy, this passage provides an insight into the workings of Elizabeth's mind as she tries to let go of her connections with her mother country and instead attempts to establish a somewhat general connection with the whole world in the form of "mankind." Due to the symbiotic relationship between the narrator and her creation, this extended worldview is also hers. In distancing herself from herself by projecting herself onto another female figure Elizabeth can appropriate the "perfect statements" which he from time to time makes, such the observation that "to him - love was freedom of heart" (11):

The man's name was Sello. A woman in the village of Motabeng paralleled his inner development. Most of what applied to Sello applied to her, because they were twin souls with closely-linked destinies and the same capacity to submerge other preoccupations in a pursuit after the things of the soul. It was an insane pursuit this time. It did not bear comparing with the lofty statements of mankind's great teachers. Hidden in all their realizations were indistinct statements about evil. They never personified it, in vivid detail, within themselves.

20 The other male figure that Elizabeth creates as part of her "trinity" is Dan; he is a completely different character, who never holds "conversations with death" (12); he much rather puts his virility on display for everyone to see and recognize. Whereas Sello represents the more philosophical, literary and critical mind, Dan is the phallocrat, almost exclusively identified with his sexual organs: "The three of them," so Elisabeth, "had shared the strange journey into hell and kept close emotional tabs on each other" (12). In this triangle Elizabeth becomes the pivotal point; both men, as she describes it, fling unpleasant details at her "in sustained ferocity" (12). As in a horror-stricken Poe story we can feel the walls closing in on Elizabeth; we realise how her space of action keep diminishing and how she is instrumentalised for the narcissistic self-stagings of her two creations: "She had no time to examine her own hell. Suddenly, in one sharp, short leap to freedom, she called it Dan" (12). By giving the phantasmagoric appearance a name, it becomes "real," identifiable, principally manageable. When she calls him by his name, he seems to be "taken off guard":

He had been standing in front of her, his pants down, as usual, flaying his powerful penis in the air and saying: "Look, I'm going to show you how I sleep with B.... She has a womb I can't forget. When I go with a woman I go for one hour. You can't do that. You haven't got a vagina" (13)

21 Death is always around the corner in Head's stories. She calls upon dead people who once were her companions and the metaphoric language that she creates in her novel evokes the atmosphere of the Gothic novel, and with it the notion of repressed, displaced and hidden desires, as we have seen earlier. Although Dan stands for sexual desire and sexual power, this is not the only thematic focus important to Head's novel. Since repressed and hidden desires are also connected with the will to know, with curiosity and inquiry.

22 Hence, her presentation of power-relationships not only refers to political or gender topics but also to the organisation of knowledge and the access people have to it. Writing entails representing the systems of knowledge by which a society is governed. Thus, Or, Trinh Minh-ha suggests in her book *Women, Native, Other* that writing "reflects on other writings and, whenever awareness emerges, on itself as writing" (23). That is to say that by using images and metaphors, writing displays the value system of a given culture as it exposes the referential system that constructs meaning: "Writing is meshing one's writing with the machinery of endless reflexivity," Minh-ha writes. Elizabeth's attempts to come to grips with the many facets of her personality could be seen as such an enmeshing, such a machinery of endless reflexivity: "Footprints of emptiness multiplied to infinity in an attempt at disarming death. She says to unsay others so that others may unsay her and say: 'It's still not it.'"

23 All of Bessie Head's writing circumscribes these issues of meaning, of reference and of knowledge. *A Question of Power* is "a powerful portrayal of a woman in the throes of a nervous breakdown," as Gillian Eilersen writes it in her introductory remarks to Bessie Head's collection of short stories *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (9). In her last novel Head concentrates on the proliferations of "I"s and "Self"s, which she must knit together in order to be able to fulfil the role of the mother to her little son. Although Elizabeth remains "mentally unhoused" by her inner demons, once on her way to achieving a new identity she starts writing poetry. The fictionalisation of her divided psyche allows both women - Bessie and Elizabeth - to step back, observe, reflect and understand their problem.

24 Thus it makes sense that the artist figure is a recurring image in Head's novel; it is emblematic of her own work as the creator of new worlds and new selves. To put this again in the words of Trinh Minh-ha:

Writing necessarily refers to writing. The image is that of a mirror capturing only the reflections of other mirrors. When i say "I see myself seeing myself," I/i am not alluding to the illusory relation of subject to subject (or object) but to the play of mirrors that defers to infinity the real subject and subverts the notion of an original "I". (22)

Minh-ha also reflects on the ethical question of who speaks for whom with what right to do so - this is a question which is also central to Bessie Head:

A writing for the people, by the people, and from the people is, literally, a multipolar reflecting reflection that remains free from the conditions of subjectivity and objectivity and yet reveals them both.

25 Minh-ha's summary of this argument could be read as a summary of Bessie Head's project in *A Question of Power*. Why write at all? Trinh Minh-ha gives the following answer: "I write to show myself showing people who show me my own showing." The mirror, she argues, is not only the symbol of an unaltered vision of things, but also an instrument for self-knowledge. When we conceive of writing as a mirror, one in which we have total faith, this mirror also bears a "magical character" that transcends its functional nature. When she says: "In this encounter of I with I, the power of identification is often such that reality and appearance merge while the tool itself becomes invisible" (22), it reads as if Minh-ha described Head's novel *A Question of Power*.

3. A Period of Darkness

26 In one of her short stories entitled "A Period of Darkness" from 1977, Bessie Head illustrates Trinh Minh-ha's argument that writing always reflects and refers to other writing. The title of the story clearly reflects Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* in which

Conrad negotiates the central questions of modern existence, such as personal and collective identity, the constitution of meaning, and the referentiality of language and of texts.

27 In "A Period of Darkness" Head tells the story of an autocratic African Chief, Motswasele II, who, in 1823, subjected the people of Bakwena tribe to a terrible regime of terror which lasted a number of years. During his reign the "people fell into a period of darkness" (Head, *Tales* 78). Chief Motswasele did not respect any ethical norms, took what pleased him - goods, cattle, houses and women, and his punishment for disobedience very often was the death penalty.

28 Motswasele's rule was so inexpressible, so inexplicable, unbelievable and unheard of that - as Head insinuates - there was no historical precedence and that therefore it was "almost impossible to deal with" (79) for the people. Bessie Head describes his regime in terms that connote extreme experiences such as slavery or the Holocaust:

He was so impossible to deal with partly because in tradition people regarded themselves as the property of the chief and partly because the unspeakable had crept up on them unawares... It was a demented village of hysteria and fright. For a long while people had presented each other with a wide range of laughter and hysteria in order that they might live with the unspeakable. (79; italics mine)

In the following passages Bessie Head creates the claustrophobic atmosphere of a social and political life in which everybody distrusts everybody else. Although conceived in reference to "Chief Motswasele," it is quite clear that the descriptions aptly apply to all places where and all times when human beings are chased and tortured because of racial difference or religious or political opinion. Although there is no reference to a historical place or time, it is not difficult to guess that Bessie Head had South Africa in mind. The fact that she obviously takes into consideration that many national socialists went to South Africa after 1945 because they found a hospitable political climate there provides an interesting aspect that Hannah Arendt also focused on in her book *Origins of Totalitarianism*.²

29 Among the people suffering under the regime of Chief Motswasele there was one man, Leungo, and his wife, who did not speak. One evening they went into the nearby hills and hanged themselves. When they were found, the corpses were quickly removed so that no trace of the tragedy should remain in the memory of the people. The death of Leungo and his wife Keeme made an impression, nevertheless. If suicide was unheard of until Leungo's death, so was the question of killing a Chief: "There was no precedent for killing a Chief. If it ever happened then or later it was a most rare occurrence; the society was too moral and balanced" (82). Up to the point where Leungo and his wife hang themselves, the story shows strong

²Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951; see the chapters "Race and Bureaucracy" and "The imperialist legend and the imperialist character."

similarities with Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, a novel which he wrote as an African response to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In Achebe's novel it is the originally strong male character Okonkwo who finally gives in to the changes he cannot understand. Like Leungo he retires to a secret spot outside the village in order to hang himself - writing apparently necessarily refers to writing, as Minh-ha observed.

30 Bessie Head emphasises the power of literature in the closing chapters of her story. Chief Motswasele wants to force his people into a war against tribes that are much inferior in military power. On the gathering day war was declared and the rituals of praising the Chief begun. But very soon it was clear that the poem which should have been a praise song of Motswasele had been turned into a poem of condemnation, which listed all the damnable deeds of Chief Motswasele. While listening to the song Motswasele took some time to realise that things had changed and that a revolt was coming:

His eyes widened with fear as he looked out at the assembled men. He opened his mouth, silently gasping for breath. And so he died, with wide-open, terror-stricken eyes. For the men arose and, instead of moving off to war, they moved towards him and one by one cast their spears into his body. (83)

Here the "magic quality" of a literary text manifests itself: through literature something new comes into the world and changes the world. Although there is not much change after the death of Motswasele as another power-hungry and corrupt dictator chief replaces him, the memory of that short period in-between, when the people had united themselves in order to successfully change the political system nevertheless remains. This short period - which is not a period of darkness - is worth being remembered and being handed down to the following generations:

But in that brief pause a triumphant statement was made - that people had always held a position of ascendancy in matters of government, that people had always lived with the limmerings of a true democracy. (83)

4. Tales of Tenderness and Power

31 Bessie Head's focus in her writing is on the mad nature of the social and political situation in southern Africa. Her texts provide perspectives from which to view a nightmarish past and present. The characters in her stories seek to communicate the horror that they have known as well as their longings for something else for which they do not necessarily have a name; this has become obvious from "*A Period of Darkness*." Bessie Head's stories revolve around the questions of identity, of belonging and of the transracial phenomenon of power. Like Buchi Emecheta, another African woman writer, Bessie Head makes it clear that the

exertion of power is not an issue of being black, white or coloured. It can be, but it need not be an issue of race. The two male figures, Sello and Dan, illustrate this very clearly.

32 The central question for Bessie Head, it seems to me, is the question of how and why an individual fits or does not fit into the symbolic order of a given society. It is a question of interdependence, of dialectical interaction between the individual psychic apparatus as formed by social conditioning and the social self as conditioned by psychic disposition. Social organizations do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic system. Those who move on the borderline, those who are in the interstices, the spaces in-between - or to use Homi Bhabha's term: the Third Space - are the ones who are endangered or afflicted with madness (see Cixous 7).

33 But as Michel Foucault has convincingly shown in his book on Madness and Society, this existence in-between, in the interstices, both enables and restricts, excludes and includes. According to Foucault, madness and truth of human existence are intricately interwoven. If we transpose this statement to Bessie Head's novel *A Question of Power* we can say that Elizabeth's madness reflects the madness of the political reality of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, just as Trinh Minh-ha's reflection of writing mirrors the complicated network of re-writings and re-readings in which we live:

By reconceptualizing culture as a category of translation, as an analytic of "borderline" transformation, we might open up a range of questions that link the growing interdisciplinarity within the academy, with the global and the transnational nature of cultural transformations. (Bhaba 271)

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1 Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture is among the most recent contributions to the burgeoning field of masculinity studies. The point of departure for this collection edited by Peter Lehman, a pioneer in this area, is a sceptical view of this "masculine turn": although not entirely unexpected in our era of identity politics, the academic debate around masculinity has so far failed to sufficiently conceptualise, let alone "explain" it.

2 If Lehman's scepticism regarding the theorisation of masculinity sets the book's tone, anxiety and crisis are its main themes. A popular movie that has become a by-word for the angst apparently overshadowing male experience in the late twentieth century is John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972; based on the novel by James Dickey), which shows men torn between the desire to express and the demand to repress their natural urges. Sally Robinson contextualises the tension underpinning the film by reading it against the male liberationist discourses that developed in the 1970s as a response to feminism. Men, in the terminology of these discourses are "blocked" and their natural urges repressed; they can only be released with the aid of archaic notions of manliness. By contrast, Robinson argues, Boorman's film expressly undermines idealisations of a violent, primal masculinity and accepts a state of anxiety as the norm.

3 This notion is endorsed by many of the 17 essays in this collection. By far the greatest fear overshadowing masculine identity and male relationships is the threat of homosexuality. Unsurprisingly, the theoretical point of reference of many essays is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal thesis that patriarchal power is constituted through male bonding based on homosocial desire. Its downside: the homosocial may always dangerously slide into the tabooed homosexual. One way of overcoming the threat of homosexuality is to face it head on, as the contributions by Robert Eberwein, Susan White and Joe Wlodarz illustrate. Eberwein argues that even those scenes in World War II combat films and photography that appear to depict instances of homosexual male bonding are ways of asserting heterosexual masculinity. In a similar way, Anthony Mann's *T-Men* (1947), discussed by White, exploits the "homosexual panic" (111) of the post-war era by tampering with the safe borderline between the homosocial and the homosexual in order to endorse normative heterosexuality; a strategy also typical for recent male rape movies, which, as Wlodarz points out, exploit the kick of transgressing straight masculinity at the cost of making gay men the scapegoats for

this thrill. However, in some cases these strategies of containment seem to fail. Justin Wyatt argues that in Barry Levinson's *Swingers* homosexual patterns inflect heterosexual male bonding in a positive way. Similarly, Amy Aronson and Michael Kimmel's tour de force précis of contemporary cinema illuminates how the dangerous slippage into homosexuality inevitably haunts mainstream cinema's attempts to mine gay markets. Even the stock feature of the healthy homo buddy, which Aronson and Kimmel read as a contemporary version of the classical Hollywood trope of feminine innocence delivering a morally weak man from evil, potentially undermines the normative ideals it serves.

4 No less anxiety-inducing than homosexuality is the category of race. Amy Louise Wood provides a differentiated analysis of the construction of white masculinity through the participation in and photographic documentation of lynchings. Her essay thereby provides an important historical backdrop to Krin Gabbard's discussion of the Mel Gibson blockbuster *Ransom* (1996), where the (white) protagonist's increasingly irrational vendetta against his son's kidnapper is informed not so much by his wish to free his child but by the overriding need to defend his precarious masculinity against the destructive influences of his wife and a domineering "antagonist": a gratingly reasonable black FBI-agent. Gibson's violent pursuit of whiteness is validated in the end, as he manages to liberate his child and destroy his enemy in a spectacular showdown. For Italian-American men, by contrast, ethnic and gender identity is far more problematic, as Aaron Baker and Juliann Vitullo point out. While films like *The Godfather* and *Rocky* establish the idea that Italian machismo is an authentic alternative to bloodless WASP masculinity, more recent movies such as *Analyze This* and TV series like *The Sopranos* defy the traditional narrative of Italian manhood and the myths that sustain it, exposing the way this ideal enables and perpetuates violence.

5 But although Baker and Vitullo foreground the psychological tensions experienced by Italian-American men trying to position themselves within American culture without recourse to ethnic and gender clichés, their essay entails the promise that normative notions of masculinity can be subverted after all. This possibility is further explored in the essays by Chris Straayer on Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and Toby Miller on "James Bond's Penis." For Straayer, Highsmith's strained relationship to homosexuality results in the creation of an almost poststructuralist ideal of genderless identity in *Ripley* - a potential left unexplored by *Purple Noon* (1960), the first film version of the novel. Even James Bond movies, despite the overt machismo of their protagonist, break down the demands of masculinity, creating a camp hero defying the prescribed limits of his identity. In Miller's words, Bond "is a drifter in a tux whose body bears the signs of social stratification, but who

never stays in one place long enough to adopt the mantle of patriarchy through its trappings of soil, blood, and home" (250). By contrast, Warren Beatty embodies the limitations of that ideal, subversive potential: as Lucia Bozzola argues, the gradual deflation of Beatty's public persona is a direct result of this insatiable stud's attempt to concurrently establish a romantic and familial self-image.

6 The essays in this collection are at their best when they manage to locate the representation of masculinity in its cultural context, often developing complex and insightful conceptualisations of masculinity at a given historical moment. Thus Dennis Bingham's analysis of Oliver Stone's *Nixon* biopic emphasises that Stone's portrayal of Nixon "as a product of failed American assumptions about political success and the wielding of power" (273) - while at times unfaithful to historical reality - manages to capture the uncertainties that characterise American culture on the eve of the twenty-first century. The cultural coding of masculinity is illustrated convincingly by Lee Parpart, whose impressive survey of male nudity in Canadian cinema is in part a response to and extension of the category of "the melodramatic penis" - the carefully choreographed and staged exposure of male genitals - discussed by Peter Lehman in his contribution to this collection. Agreeing with Lehman that this convention above all confirms men's powerlessness, Parpart nevertheless explains it as a predominantly American phenomenon.

7 Yet although the collection yields such fruitful insights, one cannot fail to notice its pervasive undertone of complaint, which echoes the tenor of the "images of femininity" debates of an early stage of feminist criticism. Were it not for Robert Lang and Maher Ben Moussa's discussion of *Rih Essed* (1986), the acclaimed and moving debut of Tunisian director Nouri Bouzid, on the one hand, and performance artist Tim Miller's piece about his workshop-experience, on the other, *Masculinity* would suggest that there is no material praxis beyond the theorisation of subversion. While Lehman's collection ably illuminates the scope of the current debate on masculinity, it also confirms his initial scepticism that much groundwork remains to be done.

Stephen M. Whitehead. *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002.

by Isabel Karremann, University of Tübingen

1 Since the project of masculinity studies began in the Anglo-American academia in the 1970s, much has been published on "man" as a gendered category. From within the context of women's studies, a critical view of men and masculinity has been demanded by feminist critics as a necessary contribution to the project of deconstructing patriarchal myths and power structures. "Man," for centuries held to be "the very centre, the core, the drive, the universal 'mankind,'" (Whitehead 5) has become the object of rigorous scholarly scrutiny which aims at making men visible as a political and a gendered category and at decentring and particularizing men's experience and social position. Over the last two decades, predominantly sociological literature on men has provided increasingly complex tools for theorizing masculinity. This sociology of masculinity focuses on contemporary masculine identities. Another strand of academic writing on men is located within the field of gender history and aims at laying open the historical change of notions of masculinity and hence deconstructing an ahistorical, universal image of Man.

2 Stephen Whitehead provides us with a very readable, informative survey of the development, issues, and theoretical concepts of this increasingly important area of study. Whitehead explicitly identifies himself as a "profeminist" scholar, thereby distancing himself from "men's studies" which for him are "those more populist writings that either portray men as needing to reject feminism (if they are, that is, to 'find themselves'), or ignore feminist theories altogether in their research on men" (2). This statement of course is not meant to belittle the earlier academic attempts at critically questioning "Man" which were published under the label "men's studies," but it is rather aimed at the publications of a so-called "mythopoetic men's movement" which glorifies a traditional manliness, or scholarly work that aims at retaining a hierarchical gender order as a natural given. Whitehead, in contrast, sees his book as a contribution to the feminist project of emancipation and thus he draws extensively on poststructuralist feminist theory.

3 The seven chapters of *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions* can be roughly divided into two sections. Section one (chapters 1-3) progresses from the discussion of earlier theoretical debates on men over men's studies as a backlash against feminism to different conceptualisations of masculinity based on Foucauldian notions of power and resistance. Section two explores the potentially problematic social identities of

men as "public men" (ch. 4), "private men" (ch. 5), and the materialization of the male body as an effect of current discourses on manliness (ch. 6). Chapter seven finally provides a conclusion and offers an outlook on new directions in the field of masculinity studies.

4 Chapter one takes up the nature-nurture debate and traces the question of how much of masculinity "is (cultural) illusion, and how much is (material) reality" (9). Whitehead first critically quotes surprisingly recent sociobiological and genetic works which purport a natural sexual difference either located in prehistory or inscribed in our genetic/hormonal make-up. He then examines different attempts at envisioning sexual identity as an effect of nurture. One line of argument follows a historical perspective through which masculinity is revealed as historically variable and subject to change. The focus on nurture reveals both the diachronic as well as the synchronic fragility of concepts of manliness. In this context it is more appropriate to talk of masculinities, "a term that allows us [...] to highlight the contingency of masculinities and differences between men in terms of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on" (17). Whitehead then charts the development of the sex/gender debate by discussing key texts from the fields of sociology and psychoanalysis, placing special emphasis on the impact of Freud and Jung on the conceptualisation of (gender) identity. Analogous to the three waves of feminist criticism, he presents three development stages of the sociology of masculinity, always in relation and in response to feminist scholarship and critical thought. He identifies the first wave as those writings which draw attention to "the problematic dimensions of masculinity as a culturally privileged or idealized form of male behaviour" (42). Here, the work of sociologist J. H. Pleck is important: Pleck developed the influential notion of a "male gender role strain," challenging the notion of masculinity as functional and stable and stressing the discontinuities and ambivalences of the male socialization process instead. The "male gender role strain" implies that individual men have to pay a high price in order to live up to the dominant ideal of masculinity as powerful, self-controlled, rational and rooted in the public space of work and competition. A second wave, highly influenced by second-wave feminist theory, shifted the focus to the ways in which gender relations in our society are informed by power and favoured a social constructionist understanding of men and masculinities. Influential authors whose concepts are discussed in detail in chapter three are Robert Connell, Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and Arthur Brittan. Yet with all this insistence on masculinity as a social "illusion," Whitehead begs not to forget the very material reality of men's violence which seems to be a persistent feature of male identity (see 35-41). In a third, current wave, the sociology of masculinity is inspired by the poststructuralist theories (especially by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler [see discussion of ch. 3]).

5 Chapter two explores in greater detail the relation of men and feminism, that is, how the political and social impact of feminism has changed notions of masculinity and still continues to do so. Here Whitehead critically discusses (and dismisses) the notion of a "masculinity in crisis" that emerged in reaction the "threat" of emancipation and sees men as "disadvantaged" by a growing emphasis on gender equality. This discourse draws on a "monolithic" notion of masculinity, defining "Man" exclusively as white, heterosexual, and middle-class. Men's reactions to the challenge of feminism have been quite diverse. Besides a conservative perspective that argues that gender roles should not be changed at all, Whitehead identifies as anti-feminist a masculinity-in-crisis perspective, which ranges from groups seeking to defend men's rights from new injustices and new sexism against men to the mythopoetic movement searching for men's "inner selves" that are rooted in archetypal myths and rituals. On the other hand, a group-specific scholarship such as gay or queer studies or postcolonial studies aligns itself with feminist scholarship in its critique of an ethnocentric and standardized discussion of men, while a decidedly profeminist perspective seeks to develop a critique of men's practice informed by feminism (63-77).

6 Chapter three presents two major strands of conceptualising men and masculinities in second and third-wave sociologies of masculinity. Here Whitehead discusses the very influential concepts of patriarchy (Kate Millett), hegemonic masculinity (Robert Connell), gender order (J.J. Matthews) and masculinism (Arthur Brittan). While "patriarchy" has been criticized for purporting a rather ahistorical, reductionist and monolithic view of gender relations, other concepts promise a more dynamic, particularized view: Thus, "hegemonic masculinity" (the dominant interpretations and definitions of being masculine) is a dynamic concept that connects the institutional aspects of male power with the collective and historically changing practices of men:

The concept of hegemonic masculinity achieves what patriarchy fails to achieve: it offers a nuanced account of the processes and relationalities of femininity-masculinity and male power while staying loyal to the notions of gender and sexual ideology, and male dominance. Hegemonic masculinity not only succeeds in signalling the multiple, contested character of male practices; it does so in the context of larger formations of gender structure. (90)

"Gender order" also acknowledges the relations between men and women to be historically constructed, while placing greater emphasis on the dynamics and fluidity of power relations. Similarly, "masculinism" is "the point at which dominant forms of masculinity and heterosexuality meet ideological dynamics, and in the process become reified and legitimized as privileged, unquestioned accounts of gender difference and reality" (97). Although these concepts increasingly stress fluidity and multiplicity, Whitehead rejects them since in his

view they are all based on a notion of power as unchanging, hierarchical and fundamentally oppressive and presents the male subject as pre-discursive and self-consciously in possession of social power. Against these, he sets a notion of power as circulatory, rather dynamic than static (Foucault), and a male subject that is discursively constructed. Drawing on the poststructuralist theories of both Foucault and Judith Butler, he postulates masculinities as "a set of symbolic and material practices, the engagement of which by the discursive subject enables gender identification to be socially validated and materially embodied. Thus the subject is both *subjected to masculinity and endorsed as an individual by masculinity*" (111, Whitehead's emphasis). This allows Whitehead to reject the humanist notion of the autonomous, free male subject and to conceptualise it instead as informed by a specific discourse of masculinity which invests it with power and identity. However, this concept does not strike the reader as quite as revolutionary as Whitehead presents it; it rather seems to be a necessary complement to the existing and still valuable notions of hegemonic masculinity, gender order and masculinism, developing as it does from these very concepts.

7 The following section explores masculine identities in the context of the public/private dichotomy so pervasive in Western societies. Chapter four begins with a short overview over the deconstructive critique of this very distinction, followed by an analysis of the myths and icons of manliness as they are purported in literature, film and popular culture. The cultural scripts for men becoming "real men" are explored through images of "Man as hunter" - "the adult male subjecting himself to the rigours and dangers of the wild, far removed from the comfort of the (female) home, enduring these trials for the very sake of 'my family's well-being" (119) - and "Man as hero," the successful leader devoted to building an empire. Whitehead then shows how a masculine identity develops in tension with an ideal of manliness that encompasses both work and leisure time. He points out the "pathological and emotionally damaging consequences of striving for this unattainable masculine behaviour" (127) both for "men at work" and for "men as managers." Moreover, leisure time, instead of providing a total escape from the stressful demands of the work place, is also informed by gender politics (138-143). Thus, Whitehead views leisure time also as part of the public sphere and concludes: "The public world of men, men's heroic projects, men's empires, men as (natural) managers and leaders, professional man, superman - these are all myths of (heterosexual) masculinity" (144).

8 What then about the private lives of men? Is there an inner, "apolitical" space apart from social performances in which a man's individuality is rooted? Whitehead explores male subjectivity in relation to the role of the family father, the importance of friendships and

relationships, male sexualities and, finally, the impact of trust, intimacy and emotions on men's lives. Each of these four aspects is discussed in more detail than can be presented here; let it suffice to say that far from reifying the public/private dichotomy, Whitehead seeks to "unpack and illuminate" (149) the individual sense of a masculine self in order to overcome the rigid hierarchies and divisions that inform our society: "In the final analysis, it is this dualism [which declares] the naturalness of the supposedly rational public world of men and the supposedly emotive private world of women that is at the heart of contemporary definitions of gender" (179).

9 Similarly, chapter six seeks to "unpack" another aspect of men's lives that has hitherto been rendered invisible by masculine myths, yet is vital to every man's sense of self: the male body. Required by dominant discourses of masculinity to be strong, reliable, and otherwise unobtrusive, Whitehead in contrast examines the ways in which "male bodies are positioned as 'Other' and rendered insecure" (182), as source of doubt and tension instead of as site of unproblematic embodiment of a mythical ideal. Here Whitehead focuses on race, sexuality and age as potentially destabilizing forces, with black, gay, elderly, or weak bodies as deviating from or falling short of the manly ideal promoted by the dominant discourse. Drawing on the work of Marion Young and Judith Butler, this chapter explores in greater detail the male body as a discursive construction and complements chapter three in which Whitehead develops his notion of a discursive masculine subject.

10 The final chapter takes up the theoretical discussion of chapter three and connects the "sociology of masculinity" with poststructuralist and third wave feminist theory. Again the notion of a masculine subject is taken up and assessed in Butlerian terms. Drawing on the work of Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Whitehead introduces the notion of a "masculinist ontology:"

[...] through the immanent search for existence and being (male/man), the subject engages with and works on the historically and culturally mediated codes of masculinity that prevail around it. As these codes are already placed at the disposal of the subject, they offer a ready means of identity signification. This search for being (male/man) is termed herein as masculinist ontology. (216)

Such an understanding of men and masculinity offers the possibility of change through the dynamics of the process of embodiment, reification, play and resistance the discursive male subject is engaged in. While this deconstructive position cannot ignore the universality of men and women as a fundamental reality (see 217), the point remains that a discursive gender identity is informed by so many variables that the distinction man/woman, masculinity/femininity with all its mythical idealizations is a crude, positivist reduction

unsuitable to an adequate account of gender relations. The concepts Whitehead offers here provide us with much more sophisticated tools for analysing, conceptualising and describing men and masculinities.

11 *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions* is both a valuable, detailed introduction to the sociology of masculinity and an original contribution to the theoretical debate at the intersection of feminist and poststructuralist thought and masculinity studies. Since this new area of studies is of growing interest and importance, Whitehead's book is a very welcome and necessary summary of current research issues taking the study of men and masculinities into new directions.

Thomas R. West. *Signs of Struggle. The Rhetorical Politics of Cultural Difference*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002.

By Stephanie Rott, University of Cologne, Germany

1 Thomas R. West's monograph seeks to provide rhetorical and pedagogical approaches to dealing with difference. His conception of cultural difference is based on Bhabha's (1990) distinction between "cultural diversity" in the multiculturalist sense and the notion of "cultural difference" characterised by the ambivalence originating from the relationship between coloniser and colonised. The title hints at West's attempt to synthesise insights from the fields of rhetoric and composition, cultural and critical theory, and postcolonial studies in order to situate them within a pedagogical framework. His overall concern is to show that culture as well as race, gender, and sexuality have to be understood as signs, or sites of agonistic political struggle and resistance affected by the impact of emotion.

2 The author invokes the three main guiding questions throughout the book:

What kinds of rhetorical politics should be advanced in order to encourage differences to be more than merely expressed, tolerated, and celebrated?

How can we accept the risk of disruption to the status quo that irreducible difference may represent [...] without resorting to an "anything goes" style of rhetorical politics?

How can we foster social relations dependent on states of knowledge that are prepared to suffer modification and interrogation by what they neither possess nor claim as their own?

(3)

West intends to answer these questions by formulating a rhetorical politics that takes into account the "critical gravity of differences, accepting and engaging differences on their own terms", and by positing "a guideline for viewing community as an assemblage of 'compositions of difference'" (3). Thereby, he focuses on the pedagogical relevance of learning and teaching the engagement with difference. While the first part of the book is concerned with the "critical negotiation" of difference, the second part addresses issues of coping with anger and strong emotion which originate from difference. In the so-called "anti-conclusion" West finally posits a "multi-critical rhetoric of difference" viewing culture not only as a sign of struggle, but also as an "assemblage of compositions of differences." Proceeding from a critique of the shortcomings of existing traditional models of engagement with difference, he offers alternative models in each of the five chapters. As a consequence, he runs the risk of confronting the reader with a number of juxtaposed "theories," "models," "politics," "pedagogics," and "rhetorics" which make it difficult

to discern how they relate to the guiding questions quoted above.

3 The first chapter tries to suggest a model of engagement with cultural difference on the basis of theories of hybridity by Anzaldúa (1987) and Bhabha (1990). On the level of identity politics, the author sees hybridity as a critical strategy of negotiation that challenges restrictive and reductionist negotiations of racial identities. His attempt to appropriate hybridity as a *rhetorical* strategy of "critical negotiation," which he wants to be understood as a strategy of resistance in the colonial and postcolonial sense, does not seem to be very convincing. According to Bhabha (1990), the potential for resistance in cultural difference and hybridity is based on the psychoanalytically defined uncanniness of ambivalence that characterises the colonial strategy of "mimicry." Ignoring "mimicry" as a strategy of resistance, West's intention is to make use of the critical and transformative potential of colonial and postcolonial ambivalence in order to avoid taking reactionary oppositional stances during the critical negotiations of racism, sexism and homophobia. However, the main problem with this attempt is that - when theorising about Bhabha's colonial strategy of resistance - it is neither unproblematic to separate ambivalence from "mimicry," nor to equate it with anger and other strong emotions as signs of collective political struggle. Thus West's "theory of critical negotiation" at times appears to be misleading because it fuses a radical call for a passionate political struggle with psychoanalytically based issues of the ambivalence of hybrid "in-betweenness" without recognising its psychoanalytical roots.¹ Finally, it remains to be questioned whether hybridity can function as a *rhetorical* strategy of negotiation.

4 However, chapters two and three aim at providing concrete examples of the critical negotiations of race, gender, and sexuality which seek to counter racism, sexism, and homophobia. Proceeding from a critique of institutional discourses (such as multiculturalist and liberalist ones) which continue to represent racial, gender, and sexual difference as diversity or otherness, West calls for a reconceptualisation of race, gender, and sexuality as signs of struggle, or "ideologies of difference" that influence the conception and deployment of difference. While pseudo-scientific discourse misconceptualises race, gender, and sexuality on the basis of essentialism and naturalism, poststructuralist approaches do so, because they conceive "ideologies of difference" as mere illusory textual constructs. Critical race theory, the critical study of whiteness, and the movement of "race traitoring" examine the cultural significations of

¹ West's "critical theory of negotiation" is based on the following four characteristics of critical negotiation: 1. the role of the affective in critical negotiation, 2. negotiation as mutually constitutive, 3. the influence of anteriority during negotiation, and 4. the histories and contexts of negotiation (20, 21).

the privileged status of whiteness as an unmarked marker of difference accounting for its socio-historical constructedness. In order to avoid recentring whiteness, the critical study of whiteness must remain self-critical and self-reflexive. In a similar vein, queer studies, the critical study of men and masculinity, as well as the concept of "gender traitoring" critically negotiate gender and sexuality in terms of questioning the social construction of ritualised hegemonic masculinity.

5 In chapters four and five West analyses the affective politics of difference in rhetoric and pedagogy. As he puts it, differences do not only involve the ways in which people think about one another, they also involve the ways in which they feel about one another. While chapter four investigates the relations between violence, oppression, emotion, and rhetoric introducing models of engagement with anger and strong emotion which stem from difference, chapter five advances an agonistic pedagogical model that accounts for the relations between anger and conflict as political action. Ways of feeling are not purely psychological and individual, they are structural and political as well, for emotions are teachable and learnable. On the basis of Lorde's (1996) distinction of hatred and anger, and Mouffe's (1999) differentiation between "antagonism" and "agonism," West describes a "politics of hate" characterised by destructive antagonism towards external enemies as opposed to a "politics of anger" considered as the agonistic relation between adversaries which is characterised by mutual respect. "Dominant pedagogy," psychology, and therapy are accused of mystifying emotions by presenting them as an exclusively individual and psychological matter that subordinates emotion to reason and dismisses "women's emotions" and "black anger" as exclusively individual emotions, erasing difference as motivation for violence, and of causing feelings of shame, guilt, and of self-loathing. According to West, the transgressive potential of anger should be used to challenge the politics of othering and to counter pedagogies of hate. Anger is seen as the first step towards political action; the author then goes on to devise an agonistic pedagogic model, "the praxis of shelter" which rests on two primary premises:

1. that people are motivated to act socially and politically because of their affective conditions and investments, and
 2. that suffering is one of the fundamental motivations for human community and action.
- (104)

Thus, the "praxis of shelter" seeks to politicise and universalise psychological "problems" as closely related to, or even caused by, political, social, and economic conditions.

6 In the so-called "anti-conclusion" of his book, West finally engages with the notion of culture as a sign of struggle. On the basis of a critique of democracy and its rhetorics of "civility" that connects "culture" with "civilisation," and thereby leads to rhetorical strategies of othering

allegedly "uncivilised" cultures, as well as depoliticising relations with "other cultures," West develops a "multi-critical rhetoric of difference" which he considers to be an extension of Hall's (1998) rhetoric of "cultural composition." With reference to Hall, such a rhetoric does not only seek "to understand how 'cultures' and identities are 'composed' *in relation to* other cultures and identities" (119), but it also defines culture as an "assemblage of relationships" formed within the asymmetrical politics of difference. While West views Hall's "cultural composition" as a kind of postcolonial dialogical rhetorical field of study "that examines the use of discourses of authenticity to create and affirm cultures," the "multi-critical rhetoric of difference," he "recognizes that there is an increasing need to be critical of struggle concepts, or signs of struggle such as culture" (120). According To West, regarding culture as a sign of struggle means to be critical of existing concepts of culture - such as the notion of "culture as civilisation" -, and to transform them into a notion of "culture as difference," which takes into consideration issues of affect and emotion within the mutual processes of the formation of culture's politics and identities.

7 One of the most crucial shortcomings of West's book is that he attempts to fuse radical approaches to difference with postcolonial ones that are based on psychoanalytical concepts in order to posit "a rhetorical politics of cultural difference." While psychology and "the therapeutics" are criticised throughout the book, at the same time "psychological problems" serve as the very basis from which he develops the agonistic pedagogical model of "the praxis of shelter," which calls for a politicisation and universalisation of psychological matters. West himself argues that "it also would be helpful when listening to others, to attempt to think emotion and not merely feel and react to it" (102). So, when dealing with emotions like anger, anxiety, shame, or guilt on a theoretical level, it might be useful to take into consideration insights from psychoanalytical theory instead of demonising them. Furthermore, the attempt to "reconceptualise" race, gender, sexuality, and culture as "signs of struggle" by simply trying to add the component of emotion proves to be not unproblematic. While claiming that poststructuralist approaches to difference misconceptualise race, gender and sexuality as mere textual constructs, West ignores the existence of feminist poststructuralist approaches which do situate difference within socio-historical contexts, account for the impact of emotion, and challenge homogenising multiculturalist, liberalist, and heterosexist discourses. However, the book provides a good and detailed overview, criticises current approaches to difference, and tries to situate them within a rhetorical and pedagogical context, thus relating theory to practice. All in

all, it can be said that West largely answers the guiding questions he poses in the introduction of his book. Therefore, it should be recommended to students and academics working in the fields of rhetoric and composition, critical and cultural theory, learning and teaching, sociology, and postcolonial theory.

Helene Meyers. *Femicidal Fears. Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

By Aldona Bialowas Pobutsky, Wayne State University, Detroit, United States

1 Meyers's engaging study on romance and the contemporary appropriation of conventional tropes of the Gothic joins feminist debates about essentialism, victimology, female agency and the body. Instead of dwelling on traditional Gothic trends such as madness and maternity, Meyers argues that feminist critics should turn to the contemporary female Gothic which highlights violent crimes and murder in particular, and which "explores the difficulties of, and the necessity for, taking gender oppression seriously without positioning women as pure victims" (xii). This aspect of her work, essentially the analysis of recent narratives through the grid of the Gothic as well as contemporary debates among feminists and postfeminists, makes the volume particularly valuable in its contribution to cultural studies, feminism, and genre studies. Meyers delineates how women writers have used the Gothic romance to mediate the connection between gender norms and female victimization. The diachronic transformations of the genre are the focus of Meyers's analysis that shows how contemporary women writers adopt Gothic conventions to address the sexual politics of their time.

2 The second chapter, entitled "Gothic Traditions," probes the early female Gothic, paying particular attention to the question of women's fear vis-à-vis male sexual politics and the legitimacy of such apprehension. Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), for example, applies the Gothic to mitigate women's horror by presenting male protectors as true heroes and the heroine's anxiety as unwarranted. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798) stands in stark contrast to such consoling narratives because it depicts villainous male partners as those who inevitably keep the law and social mores on their side. This phenomenon signals the possibility of a continuous and unabated abuse of women, with the blind approbation of society. Daphne de Maurier's canonical *Rebecca* (1938) is a problematic example of the Gothic tradition going awry, since the message, although relatively conventional in its restoration of peace and woman's security in the arms of her husband, is overshadowed by a camouflaged crime. Maxim de Winters disposes of his first wife, Rebecca, following the "male status quo" which seeks to eliminate dominant and manipulative women. What is surprising and indeed alarming to Meyers, is the second Mrs. de Winters's puzzling reaction to this femicide. Far from blaming her spouse or fearing a similar fate, she commiserates with her man. Thus, the positive message of "they lived

happily ever after" is corroded by the shared secret of crime and the heroine's tacit cooperation with the murderer. Meyers concludes from her diachronical analysis that, in accordance with Gothic conventions, "good" women need not be afraid because it is only "bad" ones - meaning those who do not comply with patriarchal order - who may die at the hands of their partners.

3 Chapter Three, ominously entitled "Love Kills," starts off by differentiating between the contemporary and the traditional Gothic which, as in Radcliffe's novel, explored issues of woman's vulnerability, but provided a refuge for the heroine in the end. Modern texts rule out such blissful heterosexual relations, following in the footsteps of Wollstonecraft's Maria and contemporary crime files. In the present-day Gothic, Meyers contends, normalized familial and romantic relations end in tragedy and murder, upholding violence against women as a cultural convention. Edna O'Brien's *Casualties of Peace* (1966) exemplifies women's vulnerability in their relations with men. Willa, one of the protagonists, escapes from a sadistic relationship with Herod, only to die at the hands of Tom, who has mistaken her for his own wife. Beryl Bainbridge's *The Bottle Factory Outing* (1974) again demonstrates that women who act like "born victims" survive the onslaughts of men whereas formidable females risk their lives. Brenda is the epitome of passive and fearful behavior, apologizing to men for not allowing them to abuse her to the fullest extent. Freda, her counterpart, aggressively strives to reach her self-appointed goals. Predictably, Freda dies at the hands of the man whom she follows with amorous intentions, whereas Brenda, terrified by this femicide, turns to her ex-husband and her parents for protection. She does so because the only thing the submissive heroine learns from her experience is "that a woman outside a legitimate (i.e., male-dominated) community risks a broken neck" (54). Meyers asserts that both texts frustrate the traditional Gothic as they demonstrate that women's fear of men is well warranted.

4 Meyers brings together the Gothic and pornography in her fourth chapter entitled "The Construction of the Sado-masochistic Couple," arguing that the pornographic imagination plays upon the worst fears of the Gothic heroine by encouraging perverse and harmful sexual practices in our culture. Reinforcing the idea that masochism is part of the "feminine personality," pornography contributes to the common misconceptions present in the dominant mythology of mainstream culture. To exemplify her point, Meyers analyzes Angela Carter's *Honeybuzzard* (1966) and Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat* (1984), texts which insinuate that patriarchal concepts of femininity and masculinity generate male sadists and female victims. Carter's heroine, Ghislaine, craves pain and finally encourages her sadistic lover

Honeybuzzard to strangle her to death. This gruesome end is preceded by numerous instances of her boyfriend's cruelty, such as when he punches her around or slashes her face. Spark's novel presents another female murder victim as a protagonist, where the final mystery of the narrative turns out to be the fact that the heroine planned her own murder and consciously led the so-called reformed women-victimizer to her own defenseless body. Meyers thus illustrates that the persistence of the dichotomy of male victimizers and female masochists contributes to acts of violence against women and to an abundance of female corpses. The conscious avoidance of sadomasochistic scripts in arts and culture, according to Meyers, is a prerequisite for abating the prevalence of murder.

5 In the fifth section, entitled "Paranoia Will Destroy You or Will It?," Meyers argues that the women's feeling of paranoia is not only justified but also serves a positive aim of unifying them as a class of subjects. Edna O'Brien's *I Hardly Knew You* (1978) presents a heroine born into a volatile home with an abusive father and a browbeaten mother. The protagonist's own marriage reiterates the unbalanced patriarchal script; her numerous affairs with married men only reconfirm the impossibility of positive erotic bonds with the opposite sex. Once engaged in a relationship with a younger man and her son's best friend, she kills him half consciously, taking revenge on all the males who have hurt her. Diane Johnson's *The Shadows Knows* (1974) presents a freshly divorced and anonymous N. who is confronted with violent acts directed at her African-American home. The plot revolves around the paranoia caused by these acts; the heroine suspects various men, from her own ex-husband to her previous baby-sitter's boyfriend. As she begins to conceive the possibility of revenge on her part, N. comes to realize that she has not only been a victim but also an accomplice in other women's oppression. Both narratives stress a layered gender, race, and class oppression, the legitimacy of the paranoid subject, and the need to be aware of latent danger as a self-defense strategy.

6 In Chapter Six Meyers looks at postfeminism, which, as a backlash against Second-Wave feminism, depoliticizes the fundamental issues of its forerunner and strives to contain the Gothic as passé. Meyers argues that such a reaction involves a dangerous denial of the still-palpable perils women face in society. Moreover, this conservative rebuttal takes women back to the pre-feminist era rather than advancing them. To illustrate this cultural phenomenon, Meyers posits Joyce Carol Oates's *Soul/Mate* (1989), whose heroine moves within the parameters of a postfeminist *Weltanschauung*. Dorothea, a young widow, falls in love with a married man, Charles, while she herself becomes the focus of attention of a murderous psychopath, Colin. Her admirer, who is also Dorothea's male *alter ego*, kills all the

people who stand in the heroine's path towards future bliss and, ultimately, kills himself. The woman can finally become her lover's lawful wife as well as the director of the foundation she had worked for. Without demonstrating determination or ambition, Dorothea gets what she wants by means of Colin's bloodshed. Acting in a self-effusive and passive manner and remaining dependent on men, she adheres to the codes of hegemonic femininity. Her desire to contain her relationship with Colin, as well as her efforts to hide her drive for professional success, delineate postfeminists' efforts to ignore the persistence of the Gothic world.

7 Meyers concludes that the tendency to contain feminism and the quotidian Gothic leads to the denial of gender hierarchy and gender oppression. The femicidal strand in the contemporary Gothic corroborates women's trauma in reaction to hegemonic definitions of gender as well as the contemporary flight from essentialism reinforced by tenacious somatophobia. For Meyers, Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* (1981) shows postfeminism as symptomatic of such fear of the body. Rennie, a journalist, sets off to a Caribbean island to forget her recent mastectomy, unsuccessful love affairs and a break-in by an unidentified pervert to her Toronto apartment. There, she becomes involved in island politics and ends up in prison. Whether she returns home or remains in jail on the island remains unclear to the end. Atwood has her protagonist Rennie retrospectively observe her own (postfeminist) flight from women who, like her mother and many others, offer martyrdom, abandonment, and disillusionment with life. Rennie looks back on how she has always avoided female bonding, yet heterosexual relationships turned out lackluster as well. Imprisoned, she finally faces her own fear of men, and realizes that escaping from femaleness and denying the Gothic world only magnifies its threatening presence. As she decides to care for her tortured cellmate, Rennie initiates female connection, using her touch to cure, and, figuratively, her body as a necessary element for reinvigorating feminist thought.

8 In conclusion, Meyers argues that her study, as well as contemporary Gothic texts, place an emphasis on women's "difficulty of refusing victimization but also on the necessity and the possibility of such refusals" (154). Despite its popularly acclaimed allure, heterosexual romance remains the symbol of gender oppression and sadomasochistic relations. Denying the feminist Gothic leads to bigger harms, as it reiterates old scripts of male violence, female victimization, and lack of awareness on the part of the victims. Meyers insists that we "all swim in Gothic waters" (155) and a conscious analysis of this state may help create healthier environments.

9 Overall, Meyers's close readings of various modern narratives, viewed through the optic of traditional Gothic and contemporary feminist trends, make this book a singularly

engaging study. The logical division of chapters skillfully lays stress on the necessity to account for the underpinnings of engendered violence. One might take issue with the author's preference for depressing scripts that invariably essentialize women as victims. And although in the introduction Meyers calls for empowering readings which would avoid pigeonholing women as prey, her ensuing analysis invariably accentuates victimization. Yet this in no way detracts from the author's achievement: *Femicidal Fears* contributes eloquently to the ongoing debate on gender and power relations through its gratifying and eminently readable investigation of crucial modern texts.

Eight Poems by Five Bengali Poets

Debjani Chatterjee

from her collection: *Albino Gecko* (University of Salzburg Press, 1998).

From Silence

"Speech is... but silence is golden."

"Little girls should be seen, not heard."

What bully shut our silver mouths?

("In the beginning was the Word.")

Silence is ripening yearning,

listening. Let my silence grow -

silence to nurture thoughtful speech.

From silence may my language flow.

The Geisha

Gliding soft on tatami mats,

she was silent, invisible,

like a paper screen pulled across.

Yet the blank room had a precise

ikebana that bore her touch.

Her laugh was an apology,

hidden by a delicate fan;

her eyes were careful to avoid

stares at her butterfly beauty.

Ordered tea-times saw her preside

with a quiet formality.

Each morning she removed the beds

and effaced herself from the day.

Saleha Chowdhury

Translated from Bengali by Debjani Chatterjee. from *My Birth Was Not In Vain: Selected Poems by Seven Bengali Women* ed. by Debjani Chatterjee & Safuran Ara (Sheffield Libraries, 2001).

Woman

Noorjahan¹ was stoned to death,
Surotjan died of blows from shoes.
In Wife Number Three's mouth
the scent of paan² lingered all night.
Their husband said:
"The Kazi is right in our society
to pronounce such punishment."
Women may be sold at any time
and ten takas will buy four.
But shoes are too expensive,
so he now gathers stones.

Shared Pain

Rohim Miah's two wives
pull the plough in his field;
Rohim Miah enters
his field for work at midnight.
His house is shut in the daytime -
Rohim Miah's womenfolk are learning the Shariah.³
From time to time a cane
swishes sudden welt marks on backs.
Heads ache, blood is vomited -
alas! God is the witness.
From time to time the two women
hold each other and weep.
People marvel at such friendship
between the two wives.

¹ In accordance with orthodox Islamic law, Noorjahan was stoned to death in Bangladesh for adultery.

² *paan*: a betel-leaf eaten as a digestive. *Kazi*: a judge who administers Islamic law. *Takas*: currency notes in Bangladesh.

³ *Shariah*: the canonic law of Islam, but in popular speech it refers to any of Allah's commandments.

Susmita Bhattacharya

Translated from Bengali by Debjani Chatterjee. from *My Birth Was Not In Vain: Selected Poems by Seven Bengali Women* ed. by Debjani Chatterjee & Safuran Ara (Sheffield Libraries, 2001).

The Mask

A mask hid my face all day long,
the mask concealing every wrong.
Now at dusk, spectacles discarded,
mask removed, my face unguarded -
where is my face?

Where is my face?

Search is pointless -
unused, my face just fades, I guess.

Banana Tree Bride⁴

You were the living branches, their leafy verdure;
In vibrant green you breathed life's exultant song.
The first man worshipped you as one with Nature;
Goddess, bodied in flora, you made us strong.
Now bride - the green beneath the cloth is pale,
The voice of the drum has stifled her dying call,
The muted pain of uprootment has told no tale.
Below the dias, the divine doll's veil shrouds all.

Rashida Islam

Translated from Bengali by Debjani Chatterjee. From *Mother Tongues: Non English-Language Poetry in England* ed. by Stephen Watts & Daniel Weissbort (Modern Poetry in Translation, King's College London, 2001).

Question

(for International Women's Day)

I am a proud woman of this earth:

⁴ In Bengal the banana tree is the bride of the elephant-headed god, Ganesh.

loving Mother, Sister, Beloved.
 An ascetic's statue in an evergreen wood,
 I am a cluster of stars in night's darkness.
 Filling my sari corner, I brought gracious hope.
 I have freely given love and abundant affection.
 Neel-kantha-like⁵, I have swallowed poison.
 My sacrificial nectar has slaked Agastya's legendary thirst.
 I have heard that I am free, a free-living bird,
 That is why I would sing freedom's song;
 I wish to move in step with everyone, to move in unison.
 I am absorbed in the dreams shaped by a liberated mind.
 Then why these impediments to my progressive plans?
 Why am I a puppet on an invisible string?
 Someone seems to play whimsical games with me.
 String-pulled, I turn to cinders, my heart's core burning.
 Then what is this unfulfilled dream I see?
 Will I awake at last, will I be free?
 I have shot so many pointed questions at the Creator.
 Like a question-paper in a test, He offers no answer.

Safuran Ara

Translated from Bengali by Debjani Chatterjee. From her collection *Songs in Exile* translated by Debjani Chatterjee (Sheffield Libraries, 1999).

A Bengali Woman in Britain

A Bengali woman in Britain earns her bread,
 her life is not confined by narrow limits.
 Hard looks can hold no threat for her,
 she is no homeless victim or beggar.
 A Bengali woman in Britain does not easily surrender.
 She is no still and silent statue.
 Nothing startles her, no sudden noise;

⁵ *Neel-kantha* means 'Blue-Throated'. Shiva saved humanity by swallowing the Serpent Vasuki's venom; this sacrifice earned him the title *Neel-kantha*. *Neel-kantha* is also a small bird in the Indian sub-continent. *Agastya* was a famous sage.

she is no golden deer caught in a veil of illusion.
Though far from home, she is no straw adrift on the tide.
The scent of lemon, moonlight dancing on tamarind leaves,
music in the drizzling of Monsoon nights, grip her in nostalgia.
Even today such sweet memories have not dimmed.
A Bengali woman in Britain
has yearnings unfulfilled but her head is unbowed.
She is no wretch to crawl in anyone's dust.
Do not view her with pity, she is no beggar.
A Bengali woman in Britain
arose one dawn and flew, she soared wild on wings.
She is not insignificant, she needs no looks of sympathy,
she is no angelic being, nor some drunkard's slut.
She is no mysterious goddess, she wants no worship.

List of Contributors

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Debjani Chatterjee (b. 1952) was born in Delhi, India. One of the best-known South Asian poets in Britain, her collections include: *I Was That Woman* (Hippopotamus Press), *Albino Gecko* (University of Salzburg Press) and - for children - *Animal Antics* (Pennine Pens). She has edited award-winning anthologies including: *Barbed Lines* (BWSG Book Project) and *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry* (Redbeck Press), described in *Poetry Review* as 'recording a seismic shift in British culture.' A founder-member of Bengali Women's Support Group, Debjani has played an active role in community relations for many years.

Saleha Chowdhury (b. 1943) was born in Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Settled in London where she is a teacher, she has written six novels in Bengali, five short story collections and three

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