

## NATION AND MIGRATION: EMIGRATION AND EXILE IN TWO CUBAN FILMS OF THE SPECIAL PERIOD\*

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In his introduction to *The Cuban Filmography, 1897 Through 2001*, Alfonso J. García Osuna poses the important question of how best to define the elusive term “Cuban film.” Those critics who might place Cuban cinema in a completely separate category quite often see it merely as a foil to Western values and culture—the antithesis of capitalist, bourgeois societies. Such a view, García Osuna argues, reduces a complex medium into a convenient reflection of the hegemonic society’s own worldview (6). Yet to see Cuban film as solely a variant of the Western tradition would be an equally reductive and ineffective characterization. Within Cuba itself, he adds, the prominence of cinema in post-revolutionary Cuba has been seen by many Cuban intellectuals as an “Americanization of culture,” one that has displaced or usurped the status that Cuban literature had enjoyed world-wide (6-7).

This discussion points to the complicated mutual history between the US and Cuba, one that goes much farther back than the 1959 revolution. As Louis Pérez notes:

Cubans and North Americans occupied a place in each other’s imagination and in their respective fantasies about each other. They intruded on one another as the national character of each was in the process of formation, which is to say that they entered each other’s national consciousness and henceforth the character of each would retain permanent traces of this encounter. (6, qtd. in Banet-Weiser 161)

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The US and Cuba “[re]entered each other’s national consciousness” in a decidedly dramatic way after the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emigration crisis that occurred on the island. Known in Cuba as the “Special Period,” the era heralded by the 1990s brought unprecedented hardships and shortages of even the most basic necessities, largely but not exclusively, as a result of the Soviet Union’s inability to continue to bolster the Cuban economy. Undoubtedly, the lack of support from the Soviet Union was largely to blame for the mass exodus at this time, but internal problems on the island, the on-going US trade embargo, and the US’s own special immigration policies toward Cubans up to this time surely abetted the increase in balseros [rafters] as well (Masud-Piloto 134).<sup>1</sup> Curiously, this pressing issue of migration had been an “elephant in the room” of sorts in Cuban cinema after 1959. But the crisis of the Special Period not only brought the figure of the émigré into the foreground, it also drew on that figure to help bolster its own sense of nationhood at a time when it seemed the dream of revolution might dissolve.

Two films in which emigration is a principal theme, Julio García Espinosa’s *Reina y rey* [Queen and King] and *Miel para Oshún* [Honey for Oshún] directed by Humberto Solás, focus on the return of the exile of the 1960s and 1970s—a more distant figure than the émigré of the 1990s. Directed by two of Cuba’s most prominent directors, these films share not only the common theme of Cuban emigration, but also capture on celluloid a similar view of Cuban nationalism.

## Los balseros

Through the likes of CNN and other networks with global reach, the world has been privy to an on-going televised drama off the shores of the Florida coastline that became all too familiar in the decade of the 1990s: the scene of men, women, and children desperately clinging to life on what remained of a make-shift raft. It is a sight that inspired pathos but also a growing sense of ambivalence regarding the status of those individuals who are willing to risk all to reach US shores—a form of reality television that did not readily provide a simplistic reading of the situation. Recent changes in world politics have resulted in a reappraisal of the standing of Cuban exiles in this

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<sup>1</sup> Following the Mariel Crisis, the accords signed with Cuba guaranteed that the US would issue 20,000 visas annually. The agreement was renewed in 1987, but the actual number of visas up to that time had not come close to the 20,000 per year quota. Between 1985 and 1994, the US had issued 11,222 visas, a mere 7.1% of the quota amount, while it had admitted 13,275 Cubans who had entered the country illegally.

country. Thus, to this seemingly made-for-television nautical saga was added the maneuvering of US Coast Guard ships around the balseros as part of the carefully choreographed dance of current immigration policy toward Cuba commonly referred to as “wet feet/dry feet.” Once welcomed as refugees of Communism, Cubans attempting to enter the US illegally by sea now find themselves in less accommodating circumstances. But this exclusive immigration policy nonetheless guarantees that Cubans fleeing the island who manage to make it onto US soil (the “dry feet”) will be eligible to apply for legal residency. If, on the other hand, they are intercepted at sea by the Coast Guard, they must be returned to Cuba unless they can prove that they are indeed political refugees in need of asylum.<sup>2</sup> Even these immigration guidelines become equivocal, however, when it comes to the issue of Cuban immigrants. Nothing could have made that more clear than the media circus that accompanied the rescue and subsequent plight in Miami of Elián González, the six-year-old boy found floating on the ocean on an inner tube in 1999.<sup>3</sup>

The changes in US immigration law regarding Cuban immigrants were precipitated by the Cuban migration crisis of the 1990s, when the issue of illegal rafters took on special significance. According to US Coast Guard statistics, the number of balseros rescued at sea began to rise sharply at the beginning of the 1990s after an extended period of relatively low figures in the 1980s. The number of people rescued jumped from 467 in 1990 to 2,203 in 1991, with the figures rising steadily in the following years, reaching a staggering 37,139 in 1994, a pivotal year in Cuban migration (Masud-Piloto 140).

From May to August 1994, incidents of violence rocked the Cuban capital. In August, a small riot erupted in Havana, and several boat hijackings in the previous months had grim outcomes. People began to look for ways to leave the island by any means possible.

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<sup>2</sup> The 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act made Cuban émigrés eligible for permanent residency as well as citizenship under less stringent conditions. While migrational links between Cuba and the US can easily be traced to the nineteenth century and before, the sudden jump in Cuban immigration is most evident after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Indeed, between 1959 and 1990, more than one million Cubans emigrated to the United States. It should be noted that the first waves of immigrants to the US (those who came before 1980, and in particular those who left in the 1960s, were markedly different as a group from subsequent immigrant waves. The first groups were largely made up of members of the upper and middle classes, professionals, and business people.

<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the Elián González case in the US media, see Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Elián González and ‘The Purpose of America’: Nation, Family and the Child-Citizen.” *American Quarterly*. 55.2 (2003): 149-78.

On August 5 when Fidel Castro addressed the nation on Cuban television, he lay blame for the violence squarely on the United States, issuing the ultimatum that if the US “failed to take serious measures to guard their coasts,” Cuba would essentially open its borders for all those who wanted to leave the country (Masud-Piloto 137-38). The US, of course, did no such thing. There can be no doubt that those who decided to leave had been encouraged by the fact that the US had up to that time welcomed as political refugees those individuals who had “stolen a plane, a boat, or [even] committed murder” in order to reach US shores. These individuals had been offered asylum regardless of the crimes they might have committed in their singular pursuit (Rodríguez Chávez 44; 46). As a result, August of 1994 became a record-setting month for Cuban migration to the US.

The Clinton administration, fearing another massive exodus of Cuban refugees not unlike the Mariel boatlift of 1980 when some 125,000 refugees entered the US, took immediate and unprecedented action. On 9 September 1994 the US signed a new migration accord with Cuba. Under this new agreement, the US would no longer accept rafters found at sea attempting to enter the country illegally, except in those cases where they made it to US shores before being intercepted, but it would continue to accept up to 20,000 Cuban émigrés a year, as per the quota set in the 1980s (Masud-Piloto 102; 134).

These new Cuban émigrés, unlike most of their predecessors, took to the waters not because of direct opposition to the government; rather, their primary motivation appeared to be what many of their compatriots in other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean seek: a way to ease the burden of scraping together the essentials of daily life. Ideology, it would seem, took a back seat to the pragmatic concerns of a population in distress. As one individual interviewed in a survey of émigrés in 1994 put it: “I didn’t have and do not have any problems with the Castro regime or the Revolution. ... My choices were to leave with my children or starve” (Eckstein and Barberia 807).

In the aftermath of the rafter crisis, Cuba also made some changes in its policy toward returning émigrés. Familial ties across the Florida Straits continued to grow, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to subject families to the stringent rules for visitation that had existed. At the same time, and of equal importance, those visiting relatives brought important revenue to a nation that was strained to the limit (Eckstein and Barberia 811). In the mid-1990s, Cuba removed the quotas for émigré visitors and allowed pre-1970s émigrés to use

their US passports to enter the country. Cubans in exile, previously vilified as *gusanos* or worms, became known officially as “fellow countrymen who reside in the territory of the US,” and were no longer referred to as counterrevolutionaries and traitors (Fernandes 154). This re-configuration of the figure of the *émigré* seemed a logical step as the legal migration between the US and Cuba increased to highs not seen since the late 1970s. Eighty percent of first-time travelers to Cuba were from the group of exiles who had left the island after 1980. These more recent groups tended, quite naturally, to have more family connections (Eckstein and Barberia 815). It is against this backdrop of mass expatriation that Cuban cinema takes up in earnest the subject of Cuban emigration.

### **Cinema, Migration, and the National Imagination**

Exiles are—by virtue of the fact that they stand between two cultures—political subjects.<sup>4</sup> Whether the homecoming is a permanent repatriation or merely a temporary visit to a now lost homeland, the return of any Cuban to his native country must be understood, at least in part, as a political act. As such, exiles are subjects of interest to the national imaginary—subjects of those media that by virtue of their power to represent reality, whether on the small or the large screen, are laden with the visual tropes that suitably support a nationalist project.

For its part, Cuba has been keenly aware of the power of such media, having singled out cinema as one of the most important instruments both for the dissemination of ideology and as an important weapon against the hegemonic world view being framed on the small screen of the world news media. As has been well documented by film historians, the development of film as an arm of the Cuban revolution became a huge priority for the new government. Just months after guerrilla forces took power in 1959, the ICAIC (the Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry), came into being in March of that year. Soon after, the meager film production of no more than 150 films in the entire 60 years preceding the revolution, swelled to a production of 112 full-length films and 900 documentaries in only the first 24 years of revolutionary government (Burton 126).

In spite of the prodigious output of the ICAIC, very few films had dealt with the issue of emigration. In fact, in the thirty years following the revolution (i.e., up to 1989) only one fictional feature-length film,

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<sup>4</sup> I borrow this notion from Sarah Banet-Weiser 162.

*Lejanía* [Distance] in 1985, and one documentary *55 hermanos* [55 brothers] (1978) take on emigration as a central theme.<sup>5</sup> The overwhelming wave of emigration in the 1990s would change the reluctance to deal with emigration, as the exigencies of reality lay claim to cinematic production.

In her essay on the topic “La mirada de Ovidio. El tema de la emigración en el cine cubano de los 90” [The gaze of Ovid: the theme of emigration in Cuban cinema of the 90s], Désirée Díaz offers an explanation for the exclusion of such a pressing reality. In spite of widespread emigration from the island, she argues, “the most propitious conditions for a truly unprejudiced analysis of a situation that involved a great many emotions and wounds, and in which virtually everyone sees himself reflected, did not yet exist...” (Díaz 40).<sup>6</sup> This at once explains the inability of filmmakers to deal with the theme of emigration head-on, as well as the number of movies that opted to touch on the theme only obliquely and lightly.

Clearly, the issue of emigration was quite a delicate one for Cuban filmmakers, and one, as she states, that involved the question of

how to investigate and reactivate the basis of Cuban nationalism and represent and testify to the revolution’s humanism, while still including those areas of social reality that in fact create a fissure in the revolutionary project: emigration, and the family conflicts that surround the decision to leave. (Díaz 39)

One of the primary factors that operated against the representation of the émigré is the marginalized status that such a figure had in the early years of the revolution. Known as *gusanos* and *vendepatrias* [turncoats] during the first waves of migration, émigrés became outsiders from the moment the decision was made to leave the country. In addition, the historical vilification of the figure of the émigré condoned by the central government made the topic of emigration something of a “third rail” for filmmakers, and the ICAIC was an institution that had customarily exercised a great deal of self-censorship, so much so that the central government had rarely stepped in to censor its productions (Fernandes 107).<sup>7</sup> Still, as the phenomenon proliferated

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<sup>5</sup> The theme of emigrations and exile in Cuban film is discussed extensively in Désirée Díaz, “La mirada de Ovidio. El tema de la emigración en el cine cubano de los 90,” *Temas. Cultura, ideología, sociedad*. 27 (2001): 37-52. and to a lesser extent in Ana M. López, “Greater Cuba.” *The Ethnic Eye. Latino Media Arts*, ed. Chon Noriega and Ana M. López. (Minneapolis, Minn.: U of Minnesota P, 1996): 38-58.

<sup>6</sup> Here, as elsewhere unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

<sup>7</sup> Among the rare exceptions were Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Hasta cierto*

and touched more and more lives, the question became not how to represent the Other as much as how to represent the “Other Among Us.”

In times of adversity, the impulse to solidify the idea of nation takes on greater urgency. One might argue that the uphill climb to national self-identity in Cuba has been on-going since the revolution started, since the new revolutionary society had always been under siege from outside forces. The definition of nation, as James Snead has argued, depends in part on the idea of cultural distinction or difference:

One could classify various national cultures both in terms of the tenacity with which coverage was maintained and the extent to which one culture projected an image of radical difference—defined as “national” or “natural” superiority—from another culture. (Snead 235)

Thus, the need to establish a sense of what is essentially Cuban, or *cubanía*, and the sense of exceptionalism that comes with identifying as a Cuban becomes a cultural priority. Exile represents a sense of loss of nation but also of identity, for leaving one’s country also represents leaving behind part of the essence of who we are.

The idea of nation furthermore implies a need to create a collective worldview—that is, a way of seeing the world that excludes others while also binding together those within. Timothy Brennan says it best when he defines nationhood as not only a political formation, but

a formal binding together of disparate elements. ...[O]ut of the multiplicities of culture, race, and political structures, grows also a repeated dialectic of uniformity and specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and people. ... [I]n Franz Fanon’s statement ... “[I]t is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows.” (Brennan 62-63)

At the beginning of the 1990s, the ICAIC went through a period of upheaval in several areas, as did other Cuban institutions.<sup>8</sup> Because of the financial hardships the ICAIC faced with the beginning of the Special Period, it gained a considerably greater autonomy from the state due to the restructuring process, but compared to its previous output, it was reduced to making only about one or two feature films a year—and those, with foreign collaborators (Fernandes 124).

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*punto* [Up to a Certain Point] (1984), and the 1991 film *Alicia en el pueblo de las maravillas* [Alice in Wondertown] directed by Daniel Díaz Torres, which was withdrawn from Havana theaters shortly after its debut.

<sup>8</sup> See Paulo Antonio Paranaguá’s discussion in “Cuban Cinema’s Political Challenges.” *New Latin American Cinema, Volume 2, Studies of National Cinemas*, ed. Michael T. Martin. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1997).

Nonetheless, the high costs involved in filmmaking meant cinema had to be much more closely aligned with the political leadership than other art forms, and as has been noted, a considerable part of the hegemonic project of building nationhood through art had been assumed by cinema (Fernandes 88).

Humberto Solás, the noted director of *Miel para Oshún* [Honey for Oshún] (2001), one of the films that focused on the theme, expressed this idea in a recent interview when he said, “[I]f you are unable to create a cinematic image of the nation, you cannot, in the modern world and among the polity, project nationhood” (Martin and Paddington 12). And in what is surely the best known Cuban film of the 1990s, *Fresa y chocolate* [Strawberry and Chocolate], the burden of defining an inclusive national space is a prominent theme. As Emilio Bejel comments, the two protagonists—David, a young, staunchly Marxist student and Diego, a disaffected homosexual—find mutual ground precisely through their nationalism (158, qtd in Fernandes 145). Indeed, nationalism is a recurring theme in the 1990s, whether films focus primarily on the Cuban diaspora, or as in the case of another popular film, *La vida es silbar* [Life is to Whistle], they do not.

But the challenge lay in the representation of the nation in film that would allow for a dialogue with the exile Other without allowing the figure of the émigré or exile to fracture the nationalist project.<sup>9</sup> In the two films under close discussion here, *Reina y rey* [Queen and King] (1994), which was made precisely at the height of the Special Period, and *Miel para Oshún*, the idea of nation is brought out through the narrative representations of the émigré as either a conflicted or tormented figure and/or one whose sense of self-identity has been shattered. In the case of *Miel para Oshún*, the figure also appears as an individual haunted and deeply scarred by the specter of loss.

## Reina y rey

Julio García Espinosa’s *Reina y rey* represents the figure of the émigré as one whose values are profoundly antithetical to the revolution. It employs a stereotypical view of the Cuban émigré who fled to Miami in the first waves of emigration for primarily political reasons, although those reasons are never explicitly stated in the film. The

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<sup>9</sup> Another fictional film produced after 1990 dealing primarily with emigration was Pastor Vega’s *Vidas paralelas* [Parallel Lives] (1992). *Mujer transparente* [Transparent Woman] (1990) is made up of five segments, the last of which takes up the issue of exile.



blatant materialism of the middle-aged couple who return to Cuba after decades in exile might lead one to conclude that one of the main motivations for their flight might well have been the loss of property after the revolution.

The story revolves around a working-class woman named Reina, who worked before the revolution as a maid and nanny for an upper middle class couple. When the couple immigrated to Miami with their young son, they left Reina the sprawling, modern house they had occupied in Havana. Now Reina, whose name means “queen,” lives there alone with a small mutt she calls Rey, or king. The film has a rather slow start during which García Espinosa paints an elaborate portrait of Reina’s daily struggle to make ends meet, as she grapples between using her rationed food allowance for herself and for her beloved pet.

In desperation, she tries to give away the dog and even considers taking him to the pound, until one day the difficult choice is made for her after Rey runs off on his own. Here the early influence of Italian Neorealism on García Espinosa, who was a student at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in his youth, is apparent in both content and ideology. Reina’s character is drawn from Vittorio DeSica’s *Umberto D* (1952), whose protagonist is likewise a lonely old man living alone with his dog. Finding himself in dire circumstances following the War, *Umberto D* also tries to get rid of his dog, and even attempts suicide. In the same way that Italian Neorealism moved away from the movie-land world of the *Cinecittà* and brought the camera out to the streets in an attempt to capture the real poverty and devastation left in the wake of the Second World War, García Espinosa captures that desperation in the character of Reina, following DeSica’s original themes of old age, solitude, and the lack of communication between characters.<sup>10</sup>

The despondent Reina lies awake at night waiting for Rey’s return, until one morning a knock on the door brings an unexpected development. Carmen and Emilio, the former residents, have come back to Cuba after a twenty-year absence with the ulterior motive of taking Reina with them back to Miami. The contrast between Reina’s unassuming, authentic manner and the shrill, affected character of Carmen is quite evident, as it is meant to be. From her first appearance, Carmen comes off as a caricature of the Miami Cuban who returns to Cuba overflowing with all that materialistic culture has to

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<sup>10</sup> See Vittorio DeSica’s comments on *Umberto D* in the documentary made for Italian television in 2001, *Così è la vita* [That’s Life], directed by Sandro Lai.

offer. “Want to see what Santa Claus brought?” she asks Reina just minutes after she and her husband enter the door. Through her loud and histrionic behavior, Carmen is presented in such an unappealing light that she is instantly dislikeable. Her outward appearance is merely the wrapping for her equally repulsive values. A hint of her racism is evident in her news about Emilito, her son, who is married to a woman Carmen describes to Reina as “blonde, blue-eyed, from a good family—what more can I say?” Indeed, Carmen has said it all in the description that implies that her son has found a more ideal mate in Miami than he might ever have found in Cuba.

No sooner have they toured the house than Carmen proceeds to re-colonize it and assert her former position. When they are standing in the master bedroom (now Reina’s bedroom), Carmen asks Reina if she would not mind letting Emilio and her sleep in their old bed again.

Now the two visitors begin a whirlwind tour of some of the most famous tourist spots in the capital: the Plaza de la Catedral in Old Havana, the capitol building, the Tropicana nightclub—all with Reina in tow. Here the film explores another important and recurring theme in the experience of returning exiles: the experience of viewing the place from the perspective of a nostalgic past. And it is here, perhaps, that the film is at its best.

If there is any doubt at this point in the viewer’s mind as to the motives behind the couple’s desire to take Reina away from the dire circumstances in which she is living, they are dispelled in two critical scenes. The first takes place in the house of a neighbor named Rosa, who as it turns out, was a close friend of Carmen. Apparently, Rosa has been trying to leave the country legally for over a year with no success and is imploring Carmen to help her when the couple returns to Miami. Carmen’s response leaves no doubt as to the value she places on friendship and human affection. Without a moment’s hesitation, she responds in no uncertain terms that she simply cannot. “We aren’t financially solvent,” she tells Rosa. In other words, Carmen is not prepared to help her former friend escape the economic hardship she is facing, if it might imply that Carmen would have to sacrifice some of her own money to do it. Thus, it is evident once again that the Cubans on “the other shore” are not very admirable, to say the least. Carmen and her husband are only interested in helping out that particular individual who would benefit them personally: Reina.

Another key scene cements this image in the viewer’s mind. In the evening, Carmen sits at her old dressing table in the bedroom discussing with Emilio their attempts to convince Reina to leave Cuba.

They speak of her as if she were a business investment, referring to the fact that she's still very healthy and strong, in spite of her age, and that she is someone they can trust. Emilio's main concern is that the terms of the offer be made clear: they would provide room and board, and Reina would in turn work for them as she had in the past. Concerned that they may not be able to get the necessary data out of Reina herself in order to begin the paperwork, Carmen suggests that Emilio visit Cristina, the head of the neighborhood CDR (Committee in Defense of the Revolution), who lives across the street. In the telling scene when Emilio visits Cristina, it becomes evident in the course of their conversation that Emilio had been romantically involved with Cristina in the past. Carmen surely was privy to this affair, as she urges Emilio to use that very connection to extract information about Reina from Cristina.

Not surprisingly, Cristina refuses to talk. In the end, Emilio admits to her that his request was merely an excuse to see her again and confesses that he "can't forget what [they] were to each other" and that he isn't happy in his life. The implication here is that when he left Cuba, Emilio also left behind the most genuine part of himself. True love and a more authentic existence were traded for the expedience and relative comfort of exile.

Reina, in the end, does opt for the genuine but difficult existence she has in Cuba, where she is no one's servant. In a subtle act of defiance, she tells Carmen that her real name isn't Reina, but Yolanda, evoking the title of a famous song by the Cuban singer Pablo Milanés. This song is heard playing on the radio at the beginning of the film when Reina is lying in bed with her dog Rey. Although "Yolanda" is a love song, it has an interesting last line that is heard as Reina stands at the window watching her visitors get in their car:

Si alguna vez me siento derrotado/Renuncio a ver el sol cada mañan-  
a/Rezando el credo que me has enseñado/Miro tu cara y digo en la  
ventana/Yolanda/Yolanda/Eternamente Yolanda.

[If ever I feel despondent/I turn away from the sun shining through  
the window/ and look at your face as I sing the prayer I learned from  
you/Yolanda, Yolanda, forever Yolanda]

At the beginning of the film, "Yolanda" was a song of love shared by Reina and her beloved pet, as they lay in bed in the lazy moments of the early morning. Now it becomes a metaphor for the love for Cuba—the Rey that Reina patiently awaits—and the struggle for survival itself becomes a rebellious nationalist act. One recalls José Martí's sense of nationalist pride when he suggested that "[o]ur wine may be bitter but it is our own wine."

## Miel para Oshún

Humberto Solás's film *Miel para Oshún* deals with a more recent phenomenon in the history of Cuban emigration: the return of those individuals who left Cuba when they were children and decide to make the journey back as adults. The film approaches the theme of the émigré from the perspective of a man who left Cuba when he was only eight years old. Roberto, the protagonist, grew up in the US with his father, believing that his mother had abandoned him. One gets the sense that the father was adamantly opposed to the new regime, and he therefore made his son Roberto promise that he would never return to the island. Upon his father's death, Roberto decides to break his promise and do just that. After a 32-year absence, he returns to Cuba to search for his mother.

Like Espinosa in *Reina*, Solás opts in this film to profile the early wave of émigrés who left in the decade of the 60s and early 70s, but this time, his protagonist is not one of those who chose to leave. Roberto is one of the many of the so-called "one and a half generation" of Cuban-Americans who have decided once they become adults to return to the island in order to reconnect broken family ties and/or to make up their own minds about the country of their birth. In the black-and-white flashback at the opening of the film, Solás recreates the scene in which Roberto's father boards a yacht as the two make their frantic departure while the boy cries out for his mother. It is a scene that might evoke in the viewer's mind the unforgettable sight of the raid on the home of Elián González's relatives, when another child was whisked away seemingly against his will—a scene which presents the absolute inversion of the concept of nation here.

Immediately upon his arrival in Havana, Roberto makes contact with the cousin he had so loved in childhood, Pilar, who informs him of a deeply disturbing fact: Roberto's mother had never abandoned him. Because the mother refused to leave the island, Roberto's father kidnapped the boy and later invented the story of abandonment with which Roberto had lived his entire adult life. Thus, the film begins with the revelation of a lie, bringing into question other lies that might have accompanied Roberto's life in exile, and what follows is the quest to rectify this wrong and be reunited with the mother. This story resonates strongly with a parallel story that has captured the interest of other filmmakers and writers on the island, the airlift of the early sixties known as Operation Peter Pan, in which 14,000 Cuban children were brought to the US in a program coordinated through the Catholic Church in Miami. It was the subject of a Cuban documentary film *Del*

*otro lado del cristal* [The Other Side of the Glass] in 2000.<sup>11</sup> In the US, recently released CIA documents have rekindled interest in the story, primarily from the perspective of those individuals who were involved in the airlift. While Roberto was not one of the Peter Pan children, he nonetheless represents another émigré figure who is returning to Cuba with increasing frequency. Now a professor of Spanish and Latin American literature in a North American university and by his own description not a happy man, Roberto returns in an attempt to recover the life that was taken from him. Unlike Espinosa's Emilio, Roberto did not have a choice about leaving Cuba, but both characters nonetheless share a similar kind of unhappiness as exiles.

The film has traces of what some see as the influence of the increasing need for foreign collaboration in recent Cuban films. While such collaboration, as noted earlier, has allowed for a certain degree of autonomy, it also makes filmmakers beholden to another kind of pressure. Filmmakers now find themselves catering to foreign tastes for the exotic in Cuba. In particular, Afro-Cuban religious culture is de rigueur in joint productions. The Cuban actor Luis Alberto García puts it bluntly when he says: “[I]t is always obligatory in films made with non-Cubans to have a mulatta, salsa, lots of palm trees, and a scene of Afro-Cuban religion, which attracts most attention” (García qtd. in an interview with Fernandes 127).

Although Roberto is an avowed agnostic, his cousin Pilar insists on taking him to see a Santería priestess (her “madrina”) to try to determine where Roberto's mother might be. From a trance state, the priestess tells them that the mother will be found “where the waters of Oshún (the goddess of rivers and female sensuality) meet the waters of Yemayá (the goddess of the sea and maternity).” Armed with this knowledge and the last known whereabouts of the mother, the two begin a journey with their driver across the entire country to the easternmost province of Oriente. So begin the travels that extend the film's mise-en-scène across the entire island (and thus the nation), through the popular genre of the road movie (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's *Guantanamera* immediately comes to mind). After hitting numerous dead ends and endless problems with transportation so typical of road trips in Cuba, Roberto is ready to give up in frustration. He wanders aimlessly into an open square in the small

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<sup>11</sup> Two books in English on the subject are *Operation Pedro Pan* by Yvonne Conde and Victor Andrés Triay's *Fleeing Castro. Operation Pedro Pan and the Cuban Children's Program*. The publication in Cuba of *Operación Peter Pan. Un caso de guerra psicológica contra Cuba*, by Ramón Torreira Crespo and Jorge Buajasán Marrawi, presents a decidedly different perspective.

town where he and his companions are staying and in a seminal scene of confession lashes out at a group of local spectators:

I don't know who I am ... if I'm Cuban or American. Act like an American. Marry an American. Have American children so they won't treat you like a worthless [shitty] Latino. You at least know who you are. Even though things may be bad here, even though you have problems, you understand yourselves. ... But not me. I am nothing.

What rings true is the fact that such stories do exist in the space of the imagined community of Cuba, in the space that is inhabited by Cubans both in and outside the island, and through film, the image of such a tormented existence is very powerfully manifested. Roberto himself signifies what is most dangerous about leaving Cuba: a loss of self and the devastation of any hope of aspiring to a genuine existence. To return to Cuba is to be reunited with his mother in the most profound sense possible. It is to become once again, part of the Cuban nation. But even when in the end Roberto is reunited with his mother—and by extension with his patria, or homeland—he will always remain a mere simulacrum of what it is to be Cuban. The film's ending falters in its unabashed sentimentality and nostalgia, and also because here too, it succumbs to the pressure of exoticizing Cuba, for in the end we learn that Roberto's mother—the Cuban Mother, and Cuba-As-Mother—is none other than Cuban Mulata.

It is critical to note here the importance of the female figure in Cuban film, particularly as she embodies the idea of nation. Marvin D'Lugo's reading of Cuban film leads him to conclude that

[w]hile the allegorical condition of women as embodiments of a concept of nation has been sustained, the female figure has emerged in Cuban films as the agency through which a new range of critical discourses about Cuban culture in general and the revolution in particular are enunciated. (156)

Indeed, Solás's use of the Cuban Mother as figuration for the Cuban nation is not entirely new. As D'Lugo explains, the women in *Lucía*, possibly the most important work in the filmography of Humberto Solás, embody the development of the Cuban nation from colonial times to the post-revolutionary period and function allegorically as "the 'site' in which the audience participated metaphorically in the process of national self-realization" (156). Roberto's mother, Reina, and Cristina all serve such a purpose in these films. All three characters are mulatas and represent the lower classes that the revolution embraced. Moreover, they are the figuration of a mestizo Cuba, one that represents the idealized mestizo nation of José Martí.

In *Miel*, Solás puts his Cuban audience in the untenable position

of trying to recreate a new identity out of a discourse of exile mired in nostalgia and loss, and at the other end of the spectrum, a representation of Cuba that is somewhat tainted by seeing itself as exoticized Other. As Cuban film critic Alberto Ramos puts it, Solás leaves the viewer with “the sad consolation that others’ misfortunes engender in us in order to distance ourselves from what is a less than enticing present.” One can easily extend Ramos’s observation to the final images of *Reina y Rey*. And he concludes: “[h]ere or there, in Cuba or in exile, whether besieged by material poverty or the entrenched solitude of the exile, the Cuban will always remain an agonized being; it appears to be the ontological curse ... that weighs upon this island” (26-28).

What seems to overcome a rather cynical view in these two films is the possibility that the years of loss and struggle from which Cuba seems to have begun to rise may present new “foundational fictions” for a new era. Both the exclusionary view of the exile presented in *Reina y Rey* and the view of the exile-as-victim presented in *Miel* appear to have been superseded in recent productions by a younger generation of filmmakers who treat the theme of exile and emigration from a more nuanced perspective. Gone are the simplistic stereotypes drenched in the emotional fog of the revolution’s early years. Films such as *Video de familia* (2001) and *Nada* (2002) seek to rework the old paradigms of exile and family to present a hopeful, if nonetheless complex and problematic, vision of the future. We are left with the feeling that there is a future Cuba for which it will still be worth living and an imagined community that will be able to embrace the expatriate upon her return.

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## THE ACHE OF VICTORIANISM: L.P. HARTLEY AND KENNETH GRAHAME

Roger Craik

Less than half a century ago, everything suggested that L.P. Hartley (1895-1972) would be remembered as a distinguished, but not great, English novelist, as well as a short story writer and literary reviewer. In 1925 he had established himself as a Jamesian novelist with *Simonetta Perkins*, and after many other novels (he wrote sixteen in all and was at work on the seventeenth when he died) came *The Go-Between* (1953), generally considered to be his masterpiece, in which the middle-aged narrator Leo Colston looks back to a holiday he took at the age of twelve, in 1900, at the country house of a school friend's family, where he is persuaded to pass love letters between the school friend's beautiful elder sister Marian and her farmer lover Ted Burgess. Hartley lived long enough to see his novel made into a gratifyingly successful film directed by Joseph Losey, scripted by Harold Pinter, and starring Julie Christie and Alan Bates. Posthumously he was still to the fore in the late 1970s when the BBC serialized his trilogy *Eustace and Hilda* (1941-47). But since then he is spoken of little, and *The Go-Between* is remembered, if at all, as the book-of-the-film, rather than the book in its own right. Now, of all the books that Hartley wrote, only *The Go-Between* and a later, feeble novel, *The Hireling*, remain in print. If he were to have had any revival, it would have followed the publication of the only full-length biography of him, Andrew Wright's, with its claims that Hartley was a homosexual and possessed a lifelong but unrequited love of Lord David Cecil. The smatter of reviews of Wright's book, though, mainly written by friends of Hartley, were not only discouraging to the biography but were resigned: all of them, some more than others, felt it necessary to explain Hartley to a world that they knew does not know him. Reading these notices, one senses that Hartley's day is done: in the closing years of the twentieth century there was no place for his novels, warmed as they are by Georgian, Edwardian and Victorian suns. The world of Hartley's fiction, of public schools, of privileges

and servants and class distinctions, is distant from the technological and increasingly business-minded England of today, and lingers as recognized anachronisms rather than part of that country's cultural fabric. Sadly, not even the great virtues of Hartley's novels—his universal themes such as the transition from childhood to adulthood, the destructiveness of emotional and sexual relationships, and the self-withering trait of keeping one's love hidden—have been able to preserve his novels in a century he came to loathe and which Philip Larkin bemoaned in one of his later poems, "Going, Going":

And that will be England gone,  
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,  
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.  
There'll be books; it will linger on  
In galleries. . . (Larkin 189)

These are Hartley's fears too, and they have come true. Consequently, of all the injustices meted out to Hartley the cruellest is that his most famous sentence, "the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there," has become true of his own past and of himself.

The handful of critics who have written on Hartley concur with Peter Bien's general assessment that "Hawthorne and Brontë [Emily] are ever-renewed sources of inspiration, while Henry James remains more in the background as a teacher whose lessons have been fully absorbed" (14-15). Giorgio Melchiori has established beyond doubt that Hartley drew on Hawthorne's story "Rappaccini's Daughter" for his description of the Deadly Nightshade, the poisonous plant that so fascinates Leo Colston in *The Go-Between*. Later, in 1966, Richard Allan Davidson makes an unconvincing claim for the influence of Graham Greene's short story "The Basement Room" (1936).

The greatest and by far the most far-reaching influence on Hartley's *The Go-Between*, however, has gone unnoticed. He is Kenneth Grahame. The book in question, lauded by Swinburne as "well-nigh too praiseworthy for praise," and which was prescribed as compulsory reading for English parents who "will understand their children the better for doing so" (qtd. in Green 104), is not *The Wind in the Willows*, but *The Golden Age*, published by a curious but perhaps significant coincidence in 1895, the year that L.P. Hartley was born. A collection of stories written about children but intended for adults, *The Golden Age* reverts to the Wordsworthian and Blakean ideas of children as "illuminati" whose perception is far superior to that of the unimaginative pleasure-stifling adults ("Olympians") who control them. The particular children are five orphans living with an aunt and visited by various grown-up friends of the aunt. The book made Grahame famous.

My original aims in this essay were first to establish *The Golden Age* as the major influence on L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* and then to explore how Hartley's reading of Grahame's book infuses and illuminates his own, but during the course of my reading and thinking about Hartley's and Grahame's now unfashionable books, another aim began quietly to assert itself, namely that as our own troubled century advances in its first decade, readers of this journal might be encouraged to take up Grahame and Hartley with admiration and pleasure.

It is with pleasure indeed that those familiar with Grahame's *The Golden Age* read the chapter "The Secret Drawer" in which the boy narrator finds himself in "a little used, rarely entered chamber." The boy is sensitive to the room's atmosphere:

There was something very feminine in the faint hues of its faded brocades, in the rose and blue of such bits of china as yet remained, and in the delicate old-world fragrance of pot-pourri from the great bowl, blue and white. . . . But one other thing the room possessed, peculiar to itself; a certain sense of privacy—a power of making the intruder feel he *was* intruding. . . . There was no doubt it was reserved and stand-offish, keeping itself to itself. (171-72).

Displaying an adult habit which Kenneth Grahame perceives so well as being particularly irritating to children, Uncle Thomas enters the room and approaches an old bureau, exclaiming "There's a secret drawer in there somewhere" but then dashes off to smoke, leaving the boy enraptured at the thought of a secret drawer but with no means of finding it. In vain he "explore[s] the empty pigeon-holes and sound[s] the depths of the softly sliding drawers. [He] becomes disillusioned":

I . . . felt over every inch of the smooth surfaces, from front to back. Never a knob, spring or projection met the thrilling fingertips; unyielding the old bureau stood, stoutly guarding its secret; if secret it really had. I began to grow weary and disheartened . . . . Was anything any good whatever? In my mind I began to review past disappointments, and life seemed one long record of failure and non-arrival. (177)

Some minutes later, after the boy has mused upon the early evening sky, his fortunes change: "Hardly had I put my hand once more to the obdurate wood, when with a sort of small sigh, almost a sob—as it were—of relief, the secret drawer sprang open" (178-79). Grahame lets us experience the boy's disappointment at the contents of the secret drawer before he divulges those contents, and when he does so it is with a sensitive child's sense of increasing wonder:

And yet, as I looked again at the small collection that lay within that drawer of disillusion, some warmth crept back to my heart as I

recognized that a kindred spirit to my own had been at the making of it. Two tarnished gilt buttons—naval, apparently—a portrait of a monarch unknown to me, cut from some antique print and deftly coloured by hand in just my own bold style of brush-work—some foreign copper coins, thicker and clumsier of make than those I hoarded myself—and a list of birds'-eggs, with names of the places where they had been found. Also, a ferret's muzzle, and a twist of tarry string, still faintly aromatic! It was a real boy's hoard, then, that I had happened upon. He too had found out the secret drawer, this happy-starred young person; and here he had stowed away his treasures, one by one, and had cherished them secretly awhile; and then—what? Well, one would never know now the reason why these priceless possessions still lay here unreclaimed; but across the void stretch of years I seemed to touch hands a moment with my little comrade of seasons—how many seasons?—long since dead.

I restored the drawer, with its contents, to the trusty bureau, and heard the spring click with a certain satisfaction. Some other boy, perhaps, would some day release that spring again. (179-80)

The *Go-Between* opens as follows:

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

When I came upon the diary it was lying at the bottom of a rather battered red cardboard collar-box, in which as a small boy I kept my Eton collars. Someone, probably my mother, had filled it with treasures dating from those days. There were two dry, empty sea-urchins; two rusty magnets, a large one and a small one, which had almost lost their magnetism; some negatives rolled up in a tight coil; some stumps of sealing-wax; a small combination lock with three rows of letters; a twist of very fine whipcord, and one or two ambiguous objects, pieces of things, of which the use was not at once apparent: I could not even tell what they had belonged to. The relics were not exactly dirty nor were they quite clean, they had the patina of age; and as I handled them, for the first time for over fifty years, a recollection of what each had meant to me came back, faint as the magnet's power to draw, but as perceptible. Something came and went between us: the intimate pleasure of recognition, the almost mystical thrill of early ownership—feelings of which, at sixty-odd, I felt ashamed. (5)

Hartley's debt to Grahame is clear: Grahame's miscellany of objects, the child's treasure-trove, gives rise to Hartley's, and in particular the "twist of tarry string" occasions Hartley's "twist of very fine whipcord." Also, Grahame's secret drawer and Hartley's "small combination lock with three rows of letters" are both sprung open, as if in relief at revealing their secrets, by narrators who are musing and entranced, rather than trying. But it is not enough to speak merely of Hartley's debt to Grahame as if the former merely appropriates details from *The Golden Age*. What is fascinating—and, at its best, inspired—is Hartley's modifying for the needs of his twelve-year-old narrator, Leo Colston, the discoveries and reactions of Grahame's ten-year-old. This one instance is particularly complex. Grahame's narrator, who

is never given a name, thrillingly finds a secret drawer containing the treasures belonging to a child from the past. Hartley's Leo Colston, on the other hand, is in his middle-sixties, and the secret trove he uncovers belongs not to some unknown child but to himself as a child: the small lock that he cajoles open releases not, as in Grahame, initially unrewarding objects, but his diary which chronicles the traumatic events he underwent when he was nearing thirteen, and which account for the course of his life since then.

This opening scene, energetic in response to *The Golden Age*, is crucial to the novel. Grahame had written of a small boy who goes into a little-used room and is sensitive to its atmosphere and color, noting the "faint hues of its faded brocades, in the rose and blue of such bits of china as yet remained, and in the delicate old-world fragrance of pot-pourri from the great bowl" (171). He then finds a boy's treasure-trove and muses on it awhile before resuming a life of spirited games, of "warmth and light and laughter" (181). By contrast, such a future and such a room are precisely what Hartley's Leo Colston feels should have been his, rather than the dreary room which reflects the dissatisfaction-filled bachelorhood, with little life remaining, that he has chosen for himself: Leo's ruminations show him aware of the consequences and deprivations of the path he has chosen:

I should not be sitting in this drab, flowerless room, where the curtains were not even drawn to hide the cold rain beating on the windows, or contemplating the accumulation of the past and the duty it imposed on me to sort it out. I should be sitting in another room, rainbow-hued, looking not into the past but into the future: and I should not be sitting alone. (6)

The contrasts continue. One of Kenneth Grahame's many talents is that he writes exactly as a child thinks:

Was it any good persisting longer? Was anything any good whatever? In my mind I began to review past disappointments, and life seemed one long record of failure and of non-arrival. Disillusioned and depressed, I left my work and went to the window. (177)

As adults we might smile indulgently or even a shade ironically at the ten-year-old speaker as he snaps out of most of his mood and resumes his games, with all of his life ahead of him. But ten-year-olds do feel such sweeping fits of despair, and they can indeed feel old and hopeless: I remember doing so myself at the same age. Despair, though, is justified for Hartley's Leo Colston, who nearing the end of his life has no such future and who feels that "every object in the room spoke of the diary's enervating power, and spoke of its message of disappointment and defeat" and who experiences "a bitter blend of self-pity and self-reproach" (6).

To read Hartley alongside Kenneth Grahame is to sense the energy of Hartley's response to the earlier writer. Here, that energy is bitter. The boy narrator of *The Golden Age* is comforted to think that "a kindred spirit to my own had been at the making of it [the collection of treasures]" (179), and describes him as "this happy-starred young person." There we readers leave him, unknowing what becomes of him. But whereas the boy in Grahame is *imagined* as "happy-starred," Leo Colston *knows* that he himself was indeed so, full of grandiose ambitions for himself in the new century, and with a private hierarchical system of the zodiac to support him. Hartley has the aged Colson reproached by his twelve-year-old self for failing to take advantage of "such a good start": "What has become of the Ram, the Bull, and the Lion, the example I gave you to emulate? Where above all is the Virgin. . .?" (17). Here the aged Leo encounters in his younger self a figure who is at the same time Grahame's "kindred spirit" and yet not one: "kindred" literally by kin, but not kindred because Leo grew so witheringly away from his earlier promise.

I cannot emphasize enough that this chapter in Grahame is not just *an* influence on Hartley but *the* influence, and so I cite it again:

He too had found a secret drawer, this happy-starred young person; and here he had stowed away his treasures, one by one, and had cherished them secretly awhile; and then—what? Well, one would never know now the reason why those priceless possessions still lay here unreclaimed; but across the void stretch of years I seemed to touch hands a moment with my little comrade of seasons—how many seasons?—long since dead. (180)

"Then—what?" expects no answer; its wonder and lack of answer are its point. But for his part, Hartley does answer the question, and it is with the whole novel that he does so. The events chronicled in Leo's diary truncate his childhood and stunt his life—they and the withered life they create, causing the diary and the childish things to be abandoned, are the "what" that Grahame asks. What is more, Hartley has his novel confront and then refute Grahame's assumption that "one would never know now the reason why these priceless possessions still lay here unreclaimed": it is by reclaiming the diary and by coming to terms with its contents that Leo, even though he admits he "has not much life left to spoil" (21) can salvage and fructify the remainder of his life with kindness, with the fellow-feeling he so denied himself until then. Hartley thus takes Grahame at his word in a way the latter could never have imagined or intended anyone to do. And it is with bitter wordplay that Hartley on Leo's behalf exercises his imagination on Grahame's remark that "across the void stretch of years [I] seemed to touch hands a moment with my little comrade

of seasons. . . long dead.” That “void stretch of years” in Grahame is void simply because it is empty through being unknowable, but for Leo Colston “void” means spiritually empty and *known* indeed by him. And although Hartley surely realized that in “my little comrade of seasons long dead” the “dead” refers to the seasons, he saw the phrases, by transference, as relating to Leo’s spiritual death, related in the diary, after his holiday at Brandham Hall. In this light, Hartley has Leo “touch hands” with his former self not for “a moment” (as in Grahame) but for the years remaining to him.

From Grahame, too, Hartley took the leitmotif of the go-between. In “The Burglars,” a late chapter in *The Golden Age*, the narrator’s elder brother Edward idly repeats an anecdote told him by a friend:

“Bobby Ferris told me,” began Edward in due course, “that there was a fellow spooning his sister once—”

“What’s spooning?” I asked meekly.

“O I dunno,” said Edward indifferently. “It’s—it’s—it’s just a thing they do, you know. And he used to carry notes and messages and things between ’em, and he got a shilling almost every time.” (90)

Edward goes on to recount how the lovers quarrel, leaving Ferris to continue to receiving the money, giving fictitious messages. The account then trails off inconsequentially. In Hartley, go-betweening is anything but slight as Leo carries messages first from Trimmingham to Marian, and then, with serious consequences, between Marian and Ted, and lastly, over fifty years later, from Marian to her grandson, even though it is against Leo’s wishes: “‘Once a go-between never a go-between’ had become my maxim” (249). And, like Bobby Ferris in *The Golden Age*, Leo comes to gloss the messages that he bears: he tells Trimmingham out of kindness that a curt remark of Marian’s, meant curtly, was a joke, and claims that he has come to fancy himself “as an editor as well as a messenger” (115).

Both books have go-betweens serving the cause of “spooning,” a wonderfully dated and equivocally used expression, but the meanings of the word differs. When Edward declares that “there was a fellow spooning his [Bobby Ferris’s] sister,” the activity is innocent, however dubiously transitive it may sound to our ears. When asked what spooning is, Edward answers “indifferently,” and his hesitation (“It’s—it’s—it’s”) is the older child’s slight annoyance at not knowing and being seen to not know. Earlier on, the narrator had come across “spooning” but did not know it by name when he encountered

a pair of lovers, silent, face to face o’er a discreet unwinking stile. As a rule this sort of thing struck me as the most pitiful tomfoolery. Two calves rubbing noses through a gate were natural and right and within

the order of things; but that human beings, with salient interests and active pursuits beckoning them on from every side could thus—! Well, it was a thing to hurry past, shamed of face, and think on no more. (19)

Exhilarated by the glories of a windy morning in spring, the narrator finds that everything he meets “seemed to be accounted for and set in tone by that same magical touch in the air; and it was with a certain surprise that I found myself regarding these fatuous ones with kindness instead of contempt” (19). This reaction is out of character, however. Generally in Grahame children despise adults for spooning when they have so much freedom to do better things. But it is important to stress that spooning, even though it is “a thing to hurry past,” has for Grahame nothing to do with sex.

With Hartley, spooning has everything to do with sex, or, rather, it *comes* to the naive but curious Leo to have everything to do with sex. Early in the novel, when he reads part of a love letter from Marian to Ted, Leo is greatly disappointed that the two are in love, and, like any schoolboy of his age, despises demonstrations of love as “soft, soppy—hardly, when the joke grew staler, a subject for furtive giggling” (102). It is inspired of Hartley to have Leo’s view of spooning move, in the course of the novel, from one side of Grahame’s view to the other. In Grahame’s sexless world, spooning means merely billing and cooing, “natural” in animals but “shameful” (that is to say, embarrassing and unworthy) in people. That matter decided, the narrator continues to enjoy the childhood pleasures available to him. Leo, though, is seen to change. Initially, courtship means the unbearable silliness of

post-cards, picture post-cards, comic post-cards, vulgar post-cards, found in shops on the ‘front’: I had sent some of them myself before I knew better.

‘We are having an interesting time in Southdown’—a fat couple, amorously intertwined. ‘Come to Southdown for a good spoon’—two spoons with human faces, one very thick, one very thin, leering at each other. (102)

“Amorously intertwined” and “leering” escape him. But as the novel proceeds, Leo is forced to face “spooning” in a series of shocks. On being told by Ted Burgess that the latter’s mare “did a bit of spooning,” Leo’s reaction is as follows: “Spoonng! The word struck me like a blow. Then horses could spoon and a foal was the result. It didn’t make sense” (107). Of course the matter does not make sense to Leo because until now he has relegated spooning to “a kind of game that grown-ups played” (108), a silliness. The fact that animals spoon, and that they should subsequently (not necessarily



consequently) conceive, brings Leo to the brink of the realization that spooning has something to do with sex, a subject of which he is completely ignorant. Matters are made worse by Ted Burgess—who is explaining things to Leo by answering his questions—telling Leo that spooning is a consequence of “Nature” (106). The topic having most unobtrusively moved from horses to people, Leo asks “Could you be in love with someone without spooning with them?” (108) and receives the reply that “It wouldn’t be natural” (108). That spooning is natural and can lead to children advances Leo’s knowledge considerably but has him wondering about the mechanics, which of course are so traumatically revealed to him when at the end of the novel he is forced to see Ted and Marian making love. Grahame’s “spooning” has shifted in meaning between the two books, and in doing so epitomizes the difference between the ten-year-old nauseated by courtship yet sturdily uninterested in it (while recognizing that it is natural in animals), and the twelve-year-old who is coming across the facts of life as disturbingly “natural.”

Another term of Grahame’s that Hartley adopts is “Olympians” (applied to adults for their loftiness and incomprehensibly willful behavior). Initially, adults are godlike to Leo, and because he is used as a go-between his vanity soon has him nominating himself as Mercury. Dwelling on the idea, he preens: “The messenger of the gods! I thought of that, and even when the attention of the gods had been withdrawn from me, it seemed to enhance my status” (83). Thereafter, he is captivated by such images: “I was a planet, albeit a small one, and carried messages for the other planets” (86). As he becomes more and more aware of social class, those who live at Brandham Hall become “resplendent beings” (46), Marian “a goddess” (138), and even Henry the footman is seen to exercise “Olympian tolerance” (226).

Much of what animates *The Go-Between* is Hartley’s energetic responding to *The Golden Age*: the latter stands behind the former, at Hartley’s elbow, continually furnishing not just the atmosphere of a Victorian childhood but the opportunity to transform a ten-year-old’s views into a twelve-year-old’s. This two years’ difference is significant. Grahame’s narrator will despair of adults:

it was one of the most hopeless features in their character . . . that, having absolute licence to indulge in the pleasures of life, they could get no good of it. They might dabble in the pond all day, hunt the chickens, climb trees in the most uncompromising Sunday clothes; they were free to issue forth and buy gunpowder in the full eye of the sun—free to fire cannons and explode mines on the lawn: yet they never did any one of these things. (4)

Even when he realizes that he is no longer a child but has hardened into one of the very Olympians whom he despises and finds incomprehensible, his tone is sad, regretful: “Can it be that I also have become an Olympian?” (7). The irony in Hartley is that although Leo Colston *wants* to be an Olympian, he does so for the very reason that Grahame’s narrator has grown out of: he envies Olympians for being “unaffected by any restrictions of work or family ties, citizens of the world who made the world their playground” (51).

However much Leo’s vanity makes him feel adult, grown-up humour remains beyond his grasp. He would have agreed with Grahame that “the reason of a child’s existence was to serve as a butt for senseless adult jokes—or what, from the accompanying guffaws of laughter, appeared to be intended for jokes” (27), and he would have sympathized, too, with his twelve-year-old counterpart who complains that a certain curate is “always saying things that have no sense in them at all, and then laughing at them as if they were jokes” (132). Unfamiliar expressions flummox Leo: told that “Mr. Burgess is a bit of a lad,” Leo “noticed the Mister but the rest of the remark was disappointingly meaningless. Ted Burgess did not seem in the least like a lad to me” (85). Of course this is Hartley’s means of presenting Burgess’s reputation to Leo, but it is also pure Kenneth Grahame, as is Leo’s reaction to Mrs. Maudsley’s attitude to Marian, early in the novel: “Her glance most often rested on her daughter who usually sat between two young men. What did they find to talk *about*? I remember thinking” (35). Here Hartley is drawing on the chapter “What They Talked About” where Edward is bewildered by Selina and the Vicar-age girls: “I can’t make out what they find to talk about” (130).

In Grahame’s chapter “A Harvesting,” the Rector bumps into the narrator, and, apologizing, says that the narrator “see[s] visions” (106), and adds: “you are hot, it is easily seen;—the day is advanced. *Virgo* is the Zodiacal sign” (106). These chance musings—hardly, one would think, in any way remarkable—must have resonated extraordinarily with Hartley, for from them he has Leo Colston’s diary contain a picture of the Zodiac and its emblems. From this picture, in turn, Leo fashions for himself an ecstatic personal philosophy in which the adults around him become not only gods but zodiacal figures. Most notably, Marian Maudsley becomes “the Virgin of the Zodiac” (155). Moreover, as Leo becomes more and more taken with his system and more and more eager to wring self-delighting significances from it, Grahame’s Rector’s remarks on a hot day in *Virgo* become Leo’s wondering to himself: “Perhaps Marian was the heat?” (228).

It is one thing for an excitable twelve-year-old in the heat of an

exceptionally hot summer to superimpose a zodiacal system on the adults around him, but it is quite another thing for him to put that vision to the service of a belief in the new century and then to invest his whole being in it. Early in the novel Leo confesses himself fearful that his illness will cause him to miss “the dawn of a Golden Age.” He adds, in explanation: “For that was what I believed the coming century would be: a realization, on the part of the whole world, of the hopes that I was entertaining for myself” (8). The more acute the strains of being a go-between, the more stridently egotistical Leo becomes: in his demands for “the realization of my Golden Age,” he insists merely on things “existing only for themselves and me” (218). But at this age, the age at which Leo is so zealously obsessive, the time of a Golden Age in Kenneth Grahame is past and that narrator is well on his way to becoming an Olympian. In this light, what is most disillusioning for Leo is that for all his hopes, he is simply too late to have a Golden Age. The one he mistakenly fabricates, and which destroys itself and him, contrasts painfully with the shared wonder-filled games that the children in Grahame’s *The Golden Age* enjoy. Nothing in *The Go-Between* suggests that Leo ever experienced such wonder, nor can he say, albeit with Grahame’s speaker’s wistfulness: “*Et in Arcadia ego*—I certainly did once inhabit Arcady” (8). Instead of living a fulfilling life in the twentieth century, Leo has lived a withered atrophied one in what Marian later calls “this hideous century we live in” (260). In 1953, the year of *The Go-Between*, this view was Hartley’s own.

It remains only to point out two further echoes from *The Golden Age*. One concerns Leo’s intuitive reaction to the Deadly Nightshade, *atropa belladonna* —

This plant seemed to be up to something, to be carrying on a questionable traffic with itself. There was no harmony, no proportion in its parts. It exhibited all the stages of its development at once. It was young, middle-aged, and old at the same time. . . It invited yet repelled inspection, as if it was harbouring some shady secret which it yet wanted you to know. (177)

This splendid passage, one of the most memorable vignettes of *The Go-Between*, is Hartley at his best, and no one would consider it unoriginal. The belladonna, while being distinctively itself, also emblemizes all the Leos since it is “young, middle-aged, and old at the same time,” and thus the young Leo is looking at (and finally destroying) his current selves and future selves too. Yet the disturbing aura of the belladonna is not entirely Hartley’s own; it recalls Grahame’s “little used, rarely entered chamber” of “The Secret Drawer”:

But one other thing the room possessed, peculiar to itself; a certain sense of privacy—a power of making the intruder feel he was intrud-

ing. . . There was no doubt that it was reserved and standoffish, keeping itself to itself. (172)

Hartley is particularly good at suggesting the eerie, and he does so again in his description of the sight that Leo suddenly encounters on a bathing party visit with the family from Brandham Hall:

There was a black thing ahead of us, all bars and spars and uprights, like a gallows. It gave out a sense of fear—also of intense solitude. It was like something that must not be approached, that might catch you and hurt you. . . . We had nearly reached it, and I saw how the pitch was peeling off its surfaces, and realized that no one could have attended to it for years. (49)

Whatever this piece of river machinery is, it anticipates the Deadly Nightshade that Leo will see soon afterwards, but it is also remembered from “A Holiday,” the very first story in *The Golden Age*:

I raised my eyes, and before me, grim and lichened, stood the ancient whipping post of the village; its sides fretted with the initials of a generation that scorned its mute lesson, but still clipped by the stout rusted shackles that had tethered the wrists of such of that generation's ancestors as had dared to mock at order and law. (22)

The narrator is left to “hurry, homewards. . . with an uneasy feeling . . . that there was more in this chance than met the eye” (22).

Influence can be a beguiling subject for the critic, tempting him or her to educe correspondences where there are none. As Kenneth Grahame admonishes elsewhere, “Grown-ups really ought to be more careful” (*Dream Days*, 51). I am confident of all the influences I have discussed so far, but slightly less so of the Litany which in *The Golden Age* “dragged its slow length along” (64) and which has Leo in *The Go-Between* “having a bet with myself as to how long it would last” (63). Given the number of other borrowings from Grahame it is tempting to add this one too, but Leo's reaction to the Litany is that of any child of that age, and Hartley did not need Grahame to tell him so. There are also similarities in the two writers' description of being in the countryside: both speak of how it feels to enter a wood that is surprisingly thick and oppressive, and of how hot it then feels to emerge into sudden sunlight. Both speak—Hartley of a river, Grahame of a stream—of flowing water widening into calm pools (Hartley 47, 49; Grahame 54-56). Readers can judge for themselves the weight, if weight there is at all, of Grahame's hand here. Likewise, given the extent of Hartley's thorough knowledge of *The Golden Age*, one might expect him to have borrowed from its successor, *Dream Days* (1898) or even from *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), but the details in common are not close enough to constitute influence.

What is certain, however, is that Hartley knew Kenneth Grahame's life, and the lives of his family, through his reading of the one biography of Grahame available to him, Patrick R. Chalmers' *Kenneth Grahame: Life, Letters and Unpublished Work* (1933). Hartley's borrowings from Chalmers are not complex, nor does he exert himself on them: therefore they can be cited side-by-side with passages from *The Go-Between*. Here is a hitherto unpublished musing of Grahame's, discovered in an old ledger dating from Grahame's years at the Bank of England:

Worn and depressed by harrying troubles I dreamt that I sped south over the sea, to a sunny isle far south in the Atlantic. . . My thoughts flew back to the faraway northern island, arena of strife and all the crowd of petty vexations. Now, how small they all seemed! How simple the unravelling of the baffling knots! How orderly and easy the way to meet them and brush them by! So that I, sitting there in the South, seemed to be saying to my struggling self in the North, "If I were you, how easily would I make my way through these petty obstacles! and how helpless and incapable you are in a little strait!" And myself in the North, put on defence, seemed to reply: "And if I were you, so would I—with your fuller knowledge, fuller strength. As it is, perhaps on the whole I do my best." And myself in the South, in justice forced to assent, returned, "Well, yes, perhaps after all you do your best—a sorry best, but as much as can fairly be expected of you." Then I woke, startled at the point to which my dream had led me.

Will it be like this again? Sitting one day on the dim eternal shore, shall I look back, see and pity my past poor human strivings? And say then, as now, "Well, perhaps, little cripple, you did your best, a sorry one though, you poor little, handicapped, human soul?" (37)

And here is the middle-aged Leo Colston arguing with his former self, the twelve-year-old self of the diary, with the same blend of condescension, pity, loftiness, defensiveness, and, above all, sadness:

If my twelve-year-old self, of whom I had grown rather fond, thinking about him, were to reproach me: 'Why have you grown up such a dull dog, when I gave you such a good start? Why have you spent your time in dusty libraries, cataloguing other people's books instead of writing your own? What has become of the Ram, the Bull, and the Lion, the example I gave you to emulate? Where above all is the Virgin, with her shining face and long curling tresses, whom I entrusted to you'—what should I say?

I should have an answer ready. 'Well, it was you who let me down, and I will tell you how. You flew too close to the sun, and you were scorched. This cindery creature is what you made me,'

To which he might reply: 'But you have had half a century to get over it! Half a century, half the twentieth century, that glorious epoch, that golden age that I bequeathed to you!'

'Has the twentieth century,' I should ask, 'done so much better than I have? When you leave this room, which I admit is dull and cheerless, and take the last bus to your home in the past, if you haven't missed

it—ask yourself whether you found everything so radiant as you imagined it. Ask yourself whether it has fulfilled your hopes.’ (16-17)

Chalmers describes Kenneth Grahame carrying out social work in London’s East End:

At Toynbee Hall he was known and loved by all who met him there. A shy man, he fought off his shyness and sung, extremely badly (or so he said), but for large audiences, the extremely sentimental songs of the period. Moreover, as the occasional chairman at sing-songs, he would announce the names of numbers, at which he must have shuddered, without a visible tremor. (40)

—and in *The Go-Between* Ted Burgess sings to Marian Maudsley’s accompaniment, at the village hall after the Hall-versus-Village cricket match which is a great set-piece of the novel:

“Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes,” announced Ted, as if they were the last thing one would want to take...

The new song was a sentimental one by Balfe. I don’t suppose it’s ever sung now, but I liked it, and liked Ted’s rendering of it and the quaver which threaded his voice. (133)

Chalmers also relates how Grahame’s son Alastair (known as Mouse) as young schoolboy sang at “a party for the village in the big barn at Boham’s (152):

He stood in the light, round him in the shadows sat the party, Newgate fringes and gaiters, shepherds, gamekeepers and carters, men and women of the down country. Mouse piped as sweetly as a thrush:

“Like silver lamps in a distant shrine  
The stars are sparkling well  
Now a new Power has come to the Earth  
A match for the armies of Hell,  
A Child is born who shall conquer the foe  
And the armies of wickedness quell.” (152)

Hartley echoes this scene by having Leo sing the religious song “Angels ever bright and fair” in the village hall, to the teams from the village and the Hall, to similar acclaim:

*Angels! Ever bright and fair,  
Take, oh take me to your care.  
Speed to your own courts my flight  
Clad in robes of virgin white  
Clad in robes of virgin white.* (148)

Finally, Chalmers chronicles Kenneth Grahame’s years at the Bank of England (where he rose to the position of Secretary), and quotes Grahame’s friend, the artist Graham Robertson, observing of him:

“He had a marvellous gift of silence. . . He would slowly become part of the landscape and a word from him would come as unexpectedly as a sudden remark from an oak or a beech” (97). For his part, perhaps in discreet homage, Hartley gives Grahame a cameo appearance in *The Go-Between* by having Mr. Maudsley work at the Bank of England—he is “W. H. Maudsley, of Princes Gate and Threadneedle Street” (29)—and also has him sharing Grahame’s characteristic of contented silence rarely broken by abrupt utterance: “‘Hugh coming?’ Mr. Maudsley asked, making one of his rare contributions to a conversation” (40).

What, in the end, do all these borrowings and influences amount to? How, in terms of illuminating the novel and adding to our knowledge of Hartley himself, do they measure up to what (leaving aside the thematic comments made by literary critics) might be termed the “autobiographical approach” to *The Go-Between*? For there is indeed such an approach, despite Hartley’s reticence about himself or his novel’s circumstances. From Adrian Wright’s biography we know that Hartley never forgot the long summer days of 1900 which seemed to him to usher in a Golden Age “almost literally, for I think of it as being the colour of gold. I didn’t want to go back to it but I wanted it to come back to me, and I still do” (Wright 7). We also know that in 1909, when he was thirteen, Hartley spent some of the summer at Bradenham Hall with his schoolfriend Moxey and Moxey’s family (“Brandham” and “Maudsley” respectively in *The Go-Between*), and that, in 1971, he tearfully revealed that he had been made to follow the real-life Mrs. Moxey to the outhouses where in *The Go-Between* Leo Colston sees Ted and Marian making love (Wright 32-33). This detail, inconclusive as it is and divulged the year before his death, is as much as Hartley allowed himself, and it is doubtful that any further details will come to light. The only other claim is that Hartley had been somewhat of a go-between himself as an army postman in the Great War, a job which Adrian Wright characterizes as “An easy happiness. . . [which] brought him approval, the sure knowledge that people would be pleased to see him” (169). One wonders, though, how Wright can be so sure about that “sure” knowledge, especially during the Great War. In short, these scant autobiographical traces cast very little light either on *The Go-Between* or on Hartley himself.

The literary influences, though, are a different matter. The liftings from Chalmers are delicate (and possibly slightly sly) homage to Kenneth Grahame’s *The Golden Age*, the great unacknowledged source which not only which played so great a role in bringing *The Go-Between* into being, but also galvanized the writing of it. But to talk of “influence” and “borrowings” is to fall far short of the importance

that *The Golden Age* held for Hartley. We do not know when Hartley first read it: it could have been in early childhood (many Victorian parents mistakenly construed it as book for children and gave it to them to read, and Hartley's well-to-do father had a large library). It could—although this is less likely—have been in adolescence; if so, one doubts how interesting Grahame would have been to Hartley then. How often Hartley reread it is also a matter of conjecture, but it seems to me improbable that he picked it up in adulthood and doggedly read it again and again by way of preparation for writing *The Go-Between*. To do so would be mannered, willful, not to say unnatural. Besides, Hartley wrote *The Go-Between* far more swiftly than any of his other novels, in a five-month burst, and he did so from “only the briefest of notes” (Wright 170).

Hartley was steeped in *The Golden Age*: the book, and all that it meant, became a part of himself. Only in this way can small details from Kenneth Grahame—the heat, the Zodiac, Bobby Ferris the go-between, the secret drawer—so unobtrusively spread into themes and motifs in *The Go-Between*. Hartley, this late Victorian who lived into the early 1970s, deploring the century for which he held such hopes, must, I suggest, have known Grahame almost by heart, from a very early age, from a lifetime of reading. Furthermore, Hartley's frequent re-readings of Grahame would not only bring back the childhood idyllicism that Grahame captures, but would recall to Hartley his *own* earlier readings of him, including the first time, when the boy Hartley lived so close to the time of *The Golden Age*. In this way he would relive in memory his own childhood, time after time, responding on the one hand with pleasure to the nostalgia that *The Golden Age* evoked in him, but on the other hand resenting the way that life, in particular the entire twentieth century, had not measured up to his earlier expectations. Towards the end of Graham Greene's life, one critic brilliantly wrote of him: “Only the books in the nursery never changed, never lost their original truth. In them was something that ought to be in life” (Pryce-Jones 121). Was Hartley thus? Did he, as a child or youth at most, take that “ought” in its simplest sense, but then, as he grew older, become jaundiced that life had not been as it “ought” to have been, that it had let him down? And did he react in both of these ways—sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both at once—to *The Golden Age*, a book that he regarded as a coeval, created in the year of his own birth, 1895, and ageing, to the very day, with him? This, of all the possibilities, is the most psychologically fascinating: *The Golden Age*, read at different stages of Hartley's life, would thus suffice the ageing man while making him once again the growing boy.



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## MAR, AMOR Y MUERTE EN ATARDECER EN EL ATLÁNTICO

María Teresa Bertelloni

El título del último poemario de Manuel Figueroa-Meléndez, *Atardecer en el Atlántico*, nos sitúa en un espacio múltiple y uno en el que el mar, la muerte y la vida no sólo remiten a fenómenos concretos y comprensibles para todos, sino que funcionan también como metáforas de la interioridad apasionada del sujeto poético, creación que trasciende lo anecdótico de la vida cotidiana del escritor.

El atardecer, teñido ya de oscuridad, mientras el sol ha desaparecido y sólo queda su refracción, que crea la ilusión óptica de verlo morir poco a poco, sugiere la toma de conciencia del vivir propio como un espejismo, aún más desgarrador en presencia de la muerte del otro, sea el sol o una persona amada.

En la oscuridad que se acerca para envolverlo en el misterio, antiguo como la conciencia del sentido y significado de la existencia, el poeta toma el lugar del hombre y busca en las palabras, siempre mágicas, de la poesía, la inmortalidad negada a los seres vivos.

En esta colección de poemas, como sucede generalmente en todo escritor, el yo poético se revela, a menudo, como el mensajero del yo histórico y descubre la fragilidad de la máscara existencial que ni siquiera la poesía puede conservar intacta en la escritura.

Por ello nuestro poeta comienza, por el camino del dolor, con un poema, inspirado por la muerte del padre. La cercanía y persistencia de la pérdida lo lleva a prestarle la palabra para que éste se despidiera de los suyos, dejando así la puerta abierta al diálogo de las almas. Gracias a este subterfugio poético, a pesar de que la muerte del padre ha arrancado una de las raíces de la vida y de la historia del cantor, queda la seguridad de que los recuerdos no son sólo para los vivos, como dice en los últimos versos:

me voy de viaje  
.....  
con los recuerdos

con todos  
contigo  
para siempre.

El hilo del discurso sigue en el segundo poema pero, esta vez, se ha ensombrecido el aire, la niebla desdibuja las cosas y las personas mientras el viajero, que sale hacia la eternidad, tiene sólo la certeza de lo ineluctable, que, al final, acepta como un mandato de la vida:

regreso a la brisa de la sierra  
al calor de la ensenada  
al cauce de la quebrada  
donde nunca se han pronunciado  
las sílabas de la esperanza  
regreso al aguacero del ocaso  
a la neblina que traduce  
con su misterioso brillo  
los setenta y siete hilos dorados. (9)

Las pausas del discurso poético son dadas únicamente por el espacio que separa las estrofas, así éste no se interrumpe, fluye como la vida, sin interrupciones.

En el tercer poema el sujeto poético ha cambiado. Solo, en la contemplación de las olas que van tragando poco a poco la luz, el poeta camina espiritualmente por el sendero por donde el otro ya se ha ido hasta que se asoma, como él dice, al:

...umbral del misterio  
en la melodía y el vuelo  
de las mariposas  
que anuncian la partida. (11)

La presencia de un nuevo sujeto en el poema señala un cambio radical. El padre se ha ido a convivir con el misterio, pero el poeta se ha quedado en el borde del abismo desde el cual el misterio acecha a los vivientes.

Nace aquí la pregunta necesaria y angustiosa: ¿qué es el misterio y cuál es su umbral? El misterio es el anonadarse del ser finito, el agujero negro que se traga la existencia, la infinitud de la noche sin luz. Misterio es esto y mucho más, pero ¿cuál es su umbral? Es un borde donde solamente queda una piedra afilada a la que agarrarse hasta que llegue el momento de deslizarse hacia la nada.

Mas el poeta transforma la piedra en palabra porque su intuición de lo absoluto se asemeja mucho a la iluminación del místico y, gracias a la palabra, que se le aparece en relámpagos breves e intensos, puede mirar hacia el misterio con una especie de exaltación. En efecto, cuando su voz se hace transparente escuchamos, muy lejano pero auténtico, el decir del ser. Es precisamente este

convivir, aunque sea una sola vez, con lo Absoluto, que le anticipa al poeta la posibilidad de alcanzarlo sin palabras. Su umbral es, pues, la palabra poética que le hace decir a nuestro poeta:

las horas se acaban  
a las doce  
en esta alcoba  
en la que entramos  
cuando pasamos del borde de la vida. (13)

Este poema es una meditación sobre la muerte y, a la vez, una mirada veloz al final futuro del yo que poetiza. Un descanso en el dolor de la pérdida del padre y una anticipación del propio final. El poema “VI” vuelve a la muerte ante los ojos en el momento del entierro, en la despedida:

El Viernes Santo  
huele a olivo  
.....  
en este campo  
en el que te despido  
en el que te desprendes  
de nuestras manos... (17)

Después de un último poema, el número siete, dedicado al día del sepelio en el que la muerte es vista como una guerra destinada a la derrota definitiva, aparece un poema que es, a la vez, una descripción del camino que cruza el pueblo amado por el poeta, y la trayectoria que lo enlaza con sus antepasados.

No hay duda que todos estamos atados, por un nudo inextricable, al propio lugar de origen, sobre todo si allí se ha vivido la niñez y la adolescencia, esa etapa en que empezamos a conocernos y a conocer a los demás, pero, para nuestro poeta, su patria chica es el centro de su pensamiento y de su vida y, desde allí, parten los diversos senderos que ha recorrido y los que recorrerá, para volver finalmente a la raíz misma de su razón de ser.

El poema VIII(21) cierra el momento del luto familiar y prepara una lectura interior e íntima. Se abre así un espacio hacia el mar, el amor y la muerte con el que se inicia la segunda parte del poemario. En ella se concretan los logros líricos de nuestro poeta. En muchos poemas la imagen luminosa hace enmudecer la palabra para dejarnos únicamente con la visión sugerente.

El poema IX sirve de introducción a la visión, a veces enigmática y, a veces, luminosa, pero siempre dramática, del amor y de la muerte, los temas clásicos y antagónicos que, aquí tienen como horizonte de infinitud el océano.

estas  
METÁFORAS  
son  
las  
ILUSIONES  
que  
alguna  
DEIDAD  
olvidó  
en  
el  
ÉXTASIS  
espumoso  
de  
la  
PLAYA.

(23)

El poema, escrito con versos breves señala un movimiento lento, por las pausas que impone el espacio en blanco, hacia el horizonte existencial que representa el mar, como lo he señalado en un escrito sobre Eugenio Montale.

El mar es, en efecto, una metáfora perfecta del continuo movimiento de la vida frente a la finitud del existente concreto. El poema contiene, además, cinco palabras en mayúscula —metáforas, ilusiones, deidad, éxtasis y playa— que forman un espacio imaginario en el que las metáforas son el centro y las otras los cuatro puntos cardinales.

Con esta introducción, que pone la lengua poética como punto de partida, el poemario nos introduce en la historia —o historias— trágicas del amor, tal vez la única historia que sobrevive.

En el poema “X” la espera paciente de la persona amada es recompensada, al final, con la fusión del recuerdo con el mar y el cuerpo recordado, en la oscuridad mágica de una madrugada en la playa, como dice el poeta:

en esta playa  
el recuerdo se confunde con la espuma  
con el viento y la sal  
con tu cuerpo en la orgía  
de aquella madrugada. (25)

Mas no es suficiente el recuerdo, no es suficiente el revivir lo vivido, porque la espera encierra la ilusión de una nueva realidad antigua, un renacer que borre la pérdida y la soledad y venza el tiempo y el silencio, como lo revela el intenso poema “XIV”:

te confieso que esperaba algo más  
que me obligara a renacer

con el mismo cuerpo  
con la misma intensidad  
del fuego y del viento  
pero quedé atrapado  
en esta mar de silencio  
..... (33)

El poeta, que centra su creación sobre el tema del amor, siente, al mismo tiempo, la necesidad de preguntarse sobre el sentido del universo y del ser humano. Mientras que, en la recreación erótica prevalece una fuerte dimensión sensible, en la meditación metafísica domina la espiritual:

.....  
si el soplo de aliento  
fuese un momento en el vacío  
yo no entendería el universo  
ni el por qué nos han dejado  
en este mítico fuego  
consumiendo el balbuceo  
de la humana razón. (41)

No se trata, sólo, de la esperanza que da la fe cristiana; algo enigmático se revela en algunos poemas, como si el poeta se sintiera parte de un ciclo amplio de vidas como cuando afirma que:

...hilos delgados  
que rozan las paredes  
que me queman y consumen  
como sándalo ardiente  
en el alféizar de una egipcia ventana (43)

o recurre a la mítica pitonisa para preverla y, al mismo tiempo, sentirla “lejana, mágica y transparente” como en el poema “XXII” (49).

En este poema la muerte ha perdido su dimensión de indescifrable horror para transformarse, en la mirada de la adivina, en una seductora sombra que espera al poeta para el abrazo infinito. La muerte es, pues, en esta visión gnóstica, la amante que nunca traiciona.

En la lectura lenta y concentrada del poema, el lector también pierde el miedo ancestral a la muerte y experimenta una inesperada y extraña quietud, que lo envuelve y lo consuela.

En el silencio desde el cual la poesía nace, el poeta busca la yuxtaposición de pasado y futuro en un presente inextinguible que cobija *eros* y *thánatos* como las dos caras de la existencia. Un poema, breve como un relámpago, así lo sugiere:

tu imagen  
es la ausencia de un instante

en la esfera cósmica  
del silencio. (59)

La palabra silencio se repite en estos poemas de dimensión mágica que aluden a una esfera de realidad otra, en la que se andan y desandan los senderos del tiempo y del espacio. En este silencio en el que se mezclan los mitos clásicos con los elementos de la naturaleza —sobre todo el agua y el fuego— escribe Figueroa-Meléndez este poema que anticipa el fin, incluso del silencio:

el silencio  
es una de las llamaradas de este holocausto  
que ahoga mi palabra  
que disminuye la vida  
como se transforma la madera  
en brasas y cenizas  
en la espesura del bosque (65)

El amor, perdido y dolorosamente deseado, sobre todo en la oscuridad de las noches sin sueño y en las tardes lluviosas en las que las cosas pierden los contornos conocidos, es el hilo conductor del canto que revela la soledad física y espiritual en la que vive el yo poético, después de la pérdida definitiva del tú amado, en la nostalgia sin fin de una realización que sólo el amor compartido concede.

Es emblemática, en esta dimensión del poetizar de Figueroa-Meléndez, la presencia de una palabra que César Vallejo usó para titular un poema trágico en el que su propia vida es vista como una enfermedad contagiada por un dios enfermo, ya que el estribillo “Yo nací un día/ que Dios estuvo enfermo.”, se repite con la añadidura del adjetivo “grave”. La palabra, procedente de la lengua quechua, es espergesia e indica una deshojación sagrada.

En el breve poema XXXIII la palabra espergesia es usada en forma plural como si el poeta señalara hacia un despojarse paso a paso de las máscaras que recubren el cuerpo y el espíritu, hasta llegar a la desnudez total.

Es un desnudarse lento y doloroso en el que la soledad exterior da paso a la soledad interior y, al final, quedan únicamente “las mil cicatrices” que encierran el paso al olvido, único remedio misericordioso para los males del vivir. Nuestro poeta no puede alcanzarlo y se siente, desesperadamente, atrapado en los recuerdos. Así, lo que fue un momento de plenitud amorosa en vez de transformarse en una palabra muere en la mudez del universo, como dice el poeta:

al compás de la música  
del sándalo y el deseo  
aquella tarde nos consumimos  
bajo el agua...



y el silencio del cielo. (75)

Y desde el silencio llega el tiempo que abrió el sendero de los deseos, de los encuentros y desencuentros, de la búsqueda del sentido de la propia existencia suspendida, como dice Figueroa-Meléndez, “en la puerta del barranco” (79).

La vida humana se realiza entre la soledad del nacimiento y la soledad del salto final en la oscuridad de la nada. Entre estos dos puntos límites encontramos algunos momentos luminosos que dan sentido a nuestra existencia: el amor, la amistad, el saber, la creación artística, en todas sus manifestaciones e, incluso, el dolor que afirma la vida con más fuerza que cualquier otra vivencia.

Todos estos sentimientos constituyen el entramado en el que se apoya el mundo poético de Figueroa-Meléndez, pero, el substrato de dicha fundación es la intuición profunda, de carácter metafísico, del sinsentido del universo y de la vida, porque en esa intuición sólo existe, como un oxímoron, la nada. El poeta ha apresado, en un brevísimo instante de silencio, el vacío total y aterrador. Los poemas de nuestro poeta, ya sea de manera discursiva ya sea a través de la sugerencia enigmática, son el escudo frente a la caída final que lo acecha. En ellos el desgarramiento de los recuerdos amorosos es, esencialmente, una afirmación vital, como cuando canta:

este atardecer frente a la ventana  
es una soledad húmeda de cristales  
y los calados es una inquietante luz  
que se apaga y se enciende  
con los vitrales de la desesperanza. (83)

Es cierto que en este conjunto de poemas prevalece lo erótico y la falta de plenitud vital que concede al amor compartido. Es cierto que la pérdida del amor deja sin protección el yo entregado a la realización de una unidad dual que anticipa, en medida parcial como todo lo humano, una unidad con el Todo en la inmortalidad; pero también es revelador del poder de la palabra poética el poder evocar al otro yo en el sufrimiento causado por la lejanía buscada por él mismo y así recuperar, dramáticamente, el poder seductor de su propia mirada.

En el poema “XLI”, a través del decir poético, se siente y se transforma en el dador de luz. Dice el poeta:

es inevitable que sufras  
desde una estrella que no riela  
es inevitable que sufras por mí  
por los claroscuros de la vida  
por el recuerdo en la soledad



voroso consuelo que el poeta transforma los latidos de su corazón en versos que lo anticipan:

esta línea es el eco del silencio  
que traduce los misterios de la lluvia  
en la piedra que corta  
los cristales de la memoria  
.....  
es la línea que traza mi sombra  
en la corona de luna de cristal azogada  
que divide mi cuerpo  
como ojiva de espejo  
en el abismo de la alabarda. (93)

En esta poesía inscrita en la sombra, en la que la luz parece iluminar únicamente la desolación que vive en el cuerpo y en el espíritu del poeta, el abismo va adueñándose poco a poco de lo que fue y de lo pudo ser:

la soledad ya no deja la sombra  
del amor inconcluso  
por las transiciones del karma  
ya no deja las huellas  
ni las sonrisas amargas  
sólo deja un vacío  
que mi muerte atrapa. (95)

La trayectoria vital de todo ser humano se inicia dentro de un horizonte geográfico que va a determinar el ámbito en el que se desarrollará no sólo la vida sino también la creación. De allí, en el caso del artista, brota, como de un fuente, el universo ficticio, un mundo nuevo y original, que muestra las huellas de una forma particular de vivir las experiencias, que constituye la raíz de su sentimiento poético.

Los artistas que nacen en las islas, y especialmente los que viven cerca del mar, se mueven vital y emotivamente desde ese horizonte cambiante e inaprensible, la relación que se establece con el mar es ambivalente y dramática porque del mar viene la vida y la muerte y el vaivén de sus olas es semejante al camino de la existencia con sus misteriosos senderos.

Figueroa-Meléndez se ha movido en el espacio preferencial creado por el horizonte marino, ya en los momentos de alegría, ya en los momentos de infinita tristeza y desesperanza, y no es coincidencia que, en un poemario anterior titulado *Contigo he abierto el Paraíso*,<sup>1</sup> la portada y la contraportada del libro tengan la foto de un atardecer

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1. Manuel Figueroa-Meléndez, *Contigo he abierto el Paraíso* (Manatí: Ediciones del Chorro, 1990).

en el Pacífico tomada por el propio autor. Pero en esa colección de poemas, a diferencia de la presente, la atmósfera es luminosa y astral y la poesía se sustenta no sólo en eros sino también en la creencia en un ciclo vital inacabable, donde el yo subconsciente puede ir purificándose y perfeccionándose hasta alcanzar el abrazo de la Totalidad.

En *Atardecer en el Atlántico* es otro océano el que llena la mirada del escritor, más rebelde, y el agua bienhechora se ha transformado en la pared imposible de escalar en esta etapa de su vida, porque no es sólo el amor que se ha desvanecido sino también la esperanza y, me atrevería a decir, incluso el deseo de transformar el dolor en estímulo de la creación.

Lo que el lector percibe, lo que oye latir, es la sangre de las heridas abiertas que se han transformado en una inmensa llaga de la que fluye la sangre sin parar, como un río de “tinta bermeja”. El poeta ha escrito una especie de testamento que no contiene “sus últimas voluntades”, según la fórmula clásica, porque no hay en él ninguna voluntad que no sea la de entregarse a la oscuridad eterna.

Dice el poeta en el poema “XLVII”:

he estado vagando desde entonces  
con las lloviznas espinando mi cuerpo  
ardiendo desde adentro  
crepitando como aceite en el candelero  
desmitificando mis aciertos  
envejeciendo entre el recuerdo  
muriendo frente a la lámpara y el silencio. (99)

Las imágenes arquitectónicas y un lenguaje salpicado de clasicismos se mezclan con imágenes eróticas enigmáticas y atrevidas, interrumpidas, raras veces, por un sentimiento de serenidad que alivia el terror de la muerte como el poema siguiente:

aquí  
están  
las  
olas  
serenas  
a  
mis  
pies  
con  
el  
sol  
de  
frente  
iluminándome  
en  
el

último  
segundo  
de  
vida.  
(101)

Después de la serenidad el salto hacia lo desconocido en el abrazo líquido del mar amado en todas las latitudes. Canta el poeta en la despedida:

estas aguas que me aprietan  
suben en espiral  
me anudan la garganta  
mientras que anochece  
en la bambalina ilusoria  
del último eclipse. (105)

Figueroa-Meléndez ha cumplido, con este poemario, un tiempo poético que se corresponde a su tiempo vital; ahora sus lectores esperamos un nuevo registro poético y vital que traduzca el dolor en alegría.

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## BODY AS MENTALITY IN EDITH WHARTON'S *ETHAN FROME*

Tracy Wendt

In the introduction to *Ethan Frome*, Edith Wharton discusses her stylistic intention as an author to portray complex theory through relentlessly “simple” characters. Where “any attempt to elaborate and complicate their sentiments would have falsified the whole,” the characters’ representations are circumscribed through lack of education, finances, and communication reciprocated by their snowy, barren environment. The isolated figure emerges “scarcely more articulate” than his origins (4). Although bombarded with simplifying forces, the characters’ incapacity to express their “sentiments” “articulate[ly],” or possess strong communicative abilities, is one of the key strategies Wharton employs for a psychologically simple yet intense character who personifies his mute landscape. The townspeople first lack effective discourse, where conversation surrenders to colloquial language, brief description, and even silence. Wharton then parallels the characters’ stunted expression to restrained emotion, a pivotal reciprocity for her final dynamic. Finally, the characters’ emotionality, because they could not express it through verbal dialogue, cannot be experienced through internal monologue. Wharton does not lend lengthy introspective passages to Ethan’s philosophizing his emotions but, instead, renders his psychology through the language of the body.

In a life overcome by a treacherous, frozen environment and hard labor, awareness of the body’s needs supercedes that of the mind. Ethan’s physical deformity, Zeena’s ill health, and Mattie’s physical demise frame the text as focused, almost elementally, on bodily survival in an unforgiving setting. Going beyond the narrative device of having the characters’ bodies relay their thoughts (such as a blush expressing embarrassment or desire), Wharton instead applies the language of the body to reflection. Wharton is not using a physical reaction to express an underlying emotion but reversing the directional and recasting the mental/emotional within physical terms to

narrow her characters' psychological parameters. Wharton's hidden rhetorical strategy thus creates a new, subversive example of "environmental discourse." At the expense of limiting Ethan's "sentiments" to the only metaphor he's experienced, Wharton creates a character whose contemplative simplicity portrays the complex repercussions of a harsh, isolated atmosphere.

Wharton's introduction to *Ethan Frome* gives a synopsis of the "simple" character type she intends for the townspeople. While she later emphasizes their simplicity through *Frome's* themes of isolation, lack of education, and financial hardship, one can infer from the introduction's rhetoric that these more obvious elements are secondary to her deeper intention, as her word choice indicates, of their inability to communicate effectively. From the book's many simplifying themes, Wharton chooses to address discourse in her introduction:

It must be treated as starkly and summarily as life had always presented itself to my protagonists; any attempt to elaborate and complicate their sentiments would necessarily have falsified the whole. They were, in truth . . . scarcely more articulate . . . This was my task, if I were to tell the story of Ethan Frome . . . while an air of artificiality is lent to a tale of complex and sophisticated people . . . there need be no such drawback if the looker-on is sophisticated, and the people he interprets are simple. (4)

As an author, Wharton's "task" is to "treat" the characters narratively as their thematic life presents them. Meaning, because the townspeople live a "stark . . . life," an author who "complicates" their expression, or "sentiments," ultimately contradicts the story's true rendering and thus "falsifie[s] the whole." Wharton specifically focuses on communication to portray their simplicity. By choosing words and phrases like "sentiments" and "scarcely more articulate," Wharton points to verbal expression as her first, and possibly most important, venue for representing characters who lack "complex and sophisticated" properties. Wharton's "scheme of construction" is to portray "rudimentary characters" whose language would be naturally shaped, and therefore stunted, by their simple existence. While attributing colloquial language to small town folk seems an unnecessary explanation for Wharton to make, I believe this emphasis on inexpressibility develops into the characters' psychology as Wharton foreshadows a more complex narrative turn. She will ultimately inhibit their internal monologue to parallel a stunted external monologue by taking physical terminology, which reflects their life's focus on bodily survival, and apply it to their introspection.

Evidence of this development from external to internal dialogue must first be seen in regular speech. Wharton's characters' "senti-



ments” are in keeping with their necessary simplicity. The townspeople lack effective discourse, where conversation becomes less intelligible from colloquialism, brevity, and silence. Because Wharton frames the text with a narrator’s visit to the town and his attempts to understand Ethan’s story, the focus on recitation between people is immediate. Our narrator only picks up brief impressions of Ethan’s past from numerous townspeople’s disjointed stories: “I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story [...] Nevertheless, I might have contented myself with the story pieced together from these hints” (9,13). The people’s stunted dialogue consists of “bit[s]” and “hints” and their inconsistent storytelling is “different” every time. Therefore, the narrator only successfully receives the story, and undertakes the continuation of the book, by physically encountering Ethan and his home. Critics recognize the dialogue’s brevity as resulting from the friction between a quieted internal self and the pull for external expression for the narrator’s and the text’s advancement: “A novel that is subtly informed [...]. The work is profoundly concerned with the problem of an interior story that cannot be told. The common critical aim is to complicate the function of Wharton’s narrator” (Hutchinson 220-221). Ethan’s coworker, Jotham, mirrors both the colloquial language and its small vocabulary when he tries to refuse Ethan’s invitation to dinner:

“I’m obliged to you, but I guess I’ll go along back.” Ethan looked at him in surprise. “Better come up and dry off. Looks as if ther’d be something hot for supper.” Jotham’s facial muscles were unmoved by this appeal and, his vocabulary being limited, he merely repeated: “I guess I’ll go along back.” (58)

Peppered with contractions (“ther’d”) and incorrect grammar (“I’ll go along back”), Jotham’s ineffectual first rebuttal towards dinner is lost on Ethan. As if Jotham cannot construct a second sentence that more adequately explains his exit, he returns once again to the previous (“I guess I’ll go along back”). Even in this instance we see Wharton expressing the characters’ introspective moments through the language of the body. When “Jotham’s facial muscles were unmoved by this appeal,” he is both emotionally “unmoved” by standing firm to his original decision as well as intellectually “unmoved” when he cannot maneuver in his mind for new words or phrases.

Jotham’s and the townspeople’s speech, an expression of their emotionality, suffers from environmental constraints. Their dialogue’s “unmoved” “bits” are the manifestation of a simplified life that creates “simple” people. Many of Wharton’s themes, more obvious than the rhetoric of her characters, are limiting forces on her characters. Most

of these forces elevate the body's needs to the highest degree, even above intellect. Once Wharton establishes the metaphor of the body as above the mind, it now trumps the mind's expression and recolors it in physical language. Hence, our characters' speech, which denotes their emotions, is stunted as their later internal voice, or actual emotions, also become reformed within the constraints of their environment. First, Wharton makes the necessary connection between a character's dialogue as a surface expression of his deeper feelings. As an author, she recognizes that the characters' limited discourse ran the risk of interpreting them as unfeeling and entirely ignorant. Consequently she presents Ethan early in the piece as a silent figure, taciturn not because of his lack of understanding or emotionality but from a lifestyle set in restraint. The narrator recognizes Ethan's simple language and tells the reader that it masks a complex psychology:

He never turned his face to mine or answered, except in monosyllables, the questions I put [...] but there was nothing unfriendly in his silence. I simply felt he lived in a depth of moral isolation too remote for casual access [...] I hoped this incident might set up some more direct communication between us. Frome was so simple and straightforward [...] Such tastes and acquirements in a man of this condition made the contrast more poignant between his outer situation and his inner needs, and I hoped that the chance of giving expression to the latter might at least unseal his lips. But something in his past history had apparently driven him too deeply into himself. (15)

Ethan's "monosylla[bic]" speech and "silence" is immediately paralleled with his "moral[ity]." Therefore, the narrator wants us to know that his silence does not reflect emptiness but, instead, mirrors very present yet muted morals. He possesses "such tastes and acquirements" that seem unfitting for an intellect isolated, physically and psychically, in a place "too remote for casual access." Because this comment immediately precedes the men's difficult journey in the snow where the weather prevents them from reaching their destination, "casual access" of Ethan and the landscape are juxtaposed to relay their interconnection. Ethan's "outer situation" and his "inner needs" are linked to a point at which climate, physical isolation, and ill education constrict his inner psychology.

Ethan explains his brief exposure to education that he abandons for Starkfield's small population, rough weather, and similar sense of desertion. His intellect, though still present, is consequently constricted: "There are things in that book that I didn't know the first word about,' he said [...] 'I used to'" (15). Although the narrator knows Ethan has not been rendered completely ignorant because he "was sure his curiosity about the book was based on genuine interest," there is still a discrepancy between Ethan's previous and later abilities

(15). “More direct communication” and “expression” with Ethan beyond his “simple and straightforward” manner becomes impossible as Wharton, after giving her characters intellectual dimension, shows how it is restricted and somewhat lessened by their surroundings by making these shortcomings manifest in their speech. The final parallel between discourse, intellect, and environment occurs in the narrator’s first analyzed impression of Ethan: “He seemed a part of the mute melancholy landscape, an incarnation of its frozen woe” (14). Ethan is a “part” (or result) of the “landscape” (his climate and external forces) which leave him “mute” (or voiceless). Because Ethan “wouldn’t be sorry to earn a dollar,” has had “Sickness and trouble: that’s what Ethan’s had,” and “his loneliness was not merely the result of personal plight [...] but had in it the profound accumulated cold of many Starkfield winters,” his poverty, physical despair, and harsh climate leave him incommunicable (13-14). For Ethan’s survival, bodily needs dominate the intellectual as his introspection takes on physical description to reinforce his lifestyle’s limiting influence.

Wharton’s final stylistic device to portray simplicity is having Ethan internalize his voicelessness and only express his emotions in physical terminology. His psychology is not only constricted but reformatted within the only metaphor available to him in a physically trying existence. This method delivers necessary character insight while staying true to the theme of constriction: “In *Ethan Frome*, Wharton developed techniques to probe a character’s inner consciousness and incapacitating sense of isolation” (Singley 8). It is impossible to note the characters’ “consciousness” without coupling it with their general sense of “incapacitat[ion].” Thus, Wharton’s “technique” must reconcile the antithesis of explaining characters that cannot explain themselves. Wharton is not using the common narrative method of having characters’ bodies relay their emotions, such as a blush expressing embarrassment or desire. She is essentially reversing this device and applying the language of the body to reflection, not expressing reflection through the body. The common second technique allows the intellect freedom by using a physical reaction to express a greater underlying emotion that cannot be contained and therefore shows itself through the body. Wharton does not want such freedom for her simple characters and thus restricts burgeoning emotions by moving the body metaphor inward to the characters’ introspection instead of outward as a physical manifestation. The majority of her resultant word choices connote contemplation, not just unconscious emotion, to portray Ethan as a thinking yet inescapably constricted being.

Critics recognize this physical language as “speaking” for Ethan’s

consciousness: "Ethan becomes defined by the 'impulses near the surface' of his conscious responses. [...] The literary suicide, as Maragret Higonnet analyzes, is a metaphor for 'speaking silences'—a passion unexplored or unspoken, a mute and muted critique of sexual possibility. [...] Here, as elsewhere, Wharton substitutes the language of physical pain for the language of unfulfilled passion" (Singley 136). Ethan and Mattie's "unfulfilled passion," or feelings and emotions, are "substituted" for "the language of the physical." Hence, Ethan reads as a character with only "surface" expression, where his bodily "responses" connote mental realizations. His psychology is "unspoken," "mute," and "silen[t]" by adhering to this narrative template. While Singley argues the primary thoughts being suppressed are sexual, I believe she ignores Ethan's many scenes where he, albeit through physical language, nonetheless displays holistic, evaluative thought. He is aware of the numerous influences limiting his union with Mattie, including financial and moral circumstances. In the "suicide" scene, it is because of this hopelessness, reached by exploring his options (writing letters, borrowing money), that the final decision is reached. It is dangerous to limit Ethan's primary repressed emotion to sex because passion straddles the line between the psychological and physical. Therefore, when his emotions are expressed through physical language, it does not reflect a restricted mind but just the appropriate rhetoric for purely physical (sexual) thoughts. While "unfulfilled passion" may be Ethan's primary driving force, he nonetheless hints toward various other emotions and concerns which are not normally centered on the physical body.

Ethan's and Mattie's dinner scene applies physical wording to their questions of love for one another and subsequent conflicted emotions:

"Why, Puss! I nearly tripped over you," she cried, the laughter sparkling through her lashes.

Again Ethan felt a sudden twinge of jealousy. Could it be his coming that gave her such a kindled face? [...]

She nodded and laughed, "Yes, one," and felt a blackness settling on his brows. [...]

Her eyes danced with malice. "Why, Jotham Powell. He came in after he got back, and asked for a drop of coffee before he went down home."

The blackness lifted and light flooded Ethan's brain. (47)

Mattie's "laughter" denotes happiness she does not arrive at through rumination but, instead, only grasps as "sparkl[e] through her lashes." Ethan, in turn, "felt" his jealousy, not understood it. He wonders if his affection is reciprocated by analyzing Mattie's face, not her

words: "Could it be his coming that gave her such a kindled face?" When suspecting Mattie was visited by a suitor, Ethan's distress is described as "a blackness" he once again feels ("felt"), instead of a sadness he recognizes. It is impossible for Ethan's "brows" to express, or take on the look of, blackness. Wharton is not using Ethan's body to express his feelings because this image is too abstract. She purposefully chooses a physical expression that cannot be executed to differentiate how she imposes physicality on the mind, not the mind onto physicality. Putting the focus on Ethan's eyebrows, an almost physical semblance of the brain or just the feature most closely located, reinforces the theme of reflection. When finally "the blackness lifted and light flooded Ethan's brain," the darkness once associated with his brows is now likened to his mind, connecting the two images and their dynamic as one. When learning Jotham was the actual visitor, not a suitor, Ethan's happiness is a "light," an equally intangible image to blackness. It "flooded his brain," the closest Wharton will come to allowing Ethan a realization. She chooses the word "brain," not mind, to almost stay within scientific bodily terms and not enter psychological ones. Mattie's eyes "danced with malice," a figurative motion impossible to physically occur, as she consequently recognized Ethan's initial "scorn." Mattie's intelligent assessment of Ethan's feelings surrenders to the bodily realm of her eyes, not to dialogue or internal monologue.

Wharton comes full circle in a passage that traces her focus on reflection's physical rhetoric back to its original presence in discourse. Immediately following Ethan's regained happiness ("light"), the subject of Zeena arises and his intellect, described through bodily language, feels distraught and he is rendered inarticulate. The theme of inexpressibility resurfaces when Zeena is named:

Ethan, a moment earlier, had felt himself on the brink of eloquence; but the mention of Zeena had paralyzed him. Mattie seemed to feel the contagion of his embarrassment, and sat with downcast lids, sipping her tea, while he feigned an insatiable appetite for dough-nuts and sweet pickles. At last, after casting about for an effective opening, he took a long gulp of tea, cleared his throat and said, "Looks as if there'd be more snow." (47)

"On the brink of eloquence," Ethan almost grasps the capacity to speak philosophically to Mattie, not just through stunted conversational dialogue. He is about to break from his metaphor's constraints and reveal his emotions not in "simple and straightforward" language but in a newfound "eloquence." However, the subject of Zeena "paralyzed him." Wharton chooses the specifically physical word "paralyze" to abort Ethan's thinking as if his thoughts exist in

a strictly physical, not psychological realm. Because Ethan later becomes partially paralyzed with Mattie's physical strength also on this "brink," Wharton is not afraid to actualize her metaphors to reinforce their influence. Mattie "feels," instead of recognizes, Ethan's embarrassment. Accordingly, she feels, or experiences, this embarrassment through "downcast lids." Wharton links contemplation and bodily terms back to their root in dialogue when Ethan cannot find "an effective opening" and, from lacking communicative skills, gives a mundane comment on the weather. "Looks as if there'd be more snow" is not only a common expression about the weather but an inevitability for Starkfield. The comment is satirically biting in its obviousness yet tragically ineffectual for the true issues at hand regarding love, sex, finances, and marriage between Mattie and Ethan. Because there are not many options for the lovers and one cannot ignore legal and financial truths, it is almost poignantly astute to change a subject that cannot be rectified. Wharton's "simple" characters, by realizing their physical (symbolic of the actual) restricted life, seem to intelligently accept their limitations. Whether or not this is a conscious acceptance, Wharton's statement on the mind/body connection reinforces the subversive qualities of such absorption.

*Ethan Frome* is often coupled with Wharton's short story *Summer* because of the texts' numerous overlapping themes. Wharton writes, "The fact that *Summer* deals with the same class type as those portrayed in *Ethan Frome*, and has the same setting" often prompts critics to juxtapose their analyses (272). The texts share themes of environmental influence over self-definition, constricted realities, and inevitable capture: "The weather is warmer in *Summer* than *Ethan Frome*, but are not the two works the product of the same spirit of reductiveness in Wharton? [...] Escape for both Charity Royall and Ethan Frome is impossible" (Vita-Finzi 105). While these thematic similarities would seem to predispose Charity to Ethan's "reductive" physical metaphor, Charity's narrative expression is much freer and continually attributes her thoughts to her own understanding. Charity, while feeling both a liberating connection to the countryside and an oppressive one from her Mountain birth, is not intellectually circumvented through an environmental and, hence, bodily medium. While her naivete and limited education from her small town life results in a more "simple" interior, she is allowed to express that interior without symbolic constraints. Charity claims ownership over her realizations when Wharton uses philosophical, not physical, terminology for her main character. Comparing texts recognized as similar in this respect reveals a divergence in Wharton's stylistics that submerges Ethan even deeper into his physical self by contrast with a female counter-

part whose realizations, unfortunately, cannot free her either.

Psychology-based terminology describes Charity's mentality. While, as in Ethan's case, the environment limits Charity's understanding, Wharton instead describes these limitations directly, keeping them from "subtly" manifesting in other areas and undermining her character. Additionally, these limitations are paired, often within the same sentence, with Charity understanding a different aspect of the topic in question. Wharton describes Charity's rumination directly, not through a metaphor that subverts her control:

Charity was disappointed; but she understood. [...] Charity suspected him of being glad of the chance to make a little money [...] and she immediately guessed that the unwonted present—the only gift of money she had received from him—represented Harney's first payment. [...] She wondered what if he were musing on what Mr. Royall had told him, and if it really debased her in his thoughts. [...] And she knew it was out of regard for her that he had kept silent. (108,131,137)

Charity "understood," "suspected," "guessed," "wondered" and "knew" the various situations. These particular verbs show her domain over her own intellect, where she consciously recognizes circumstances instead of unconsciously displaying that recognition. Her understandings are direct, not expressed indirectly through metaphor. Additionally, Charity's contemplation becomes more layered and complex when she considers the "thoughts" and "musing[s]" of other individuals. She is not only able to think, but to think philosophically. Ethan does think but loses control over his thoughts through metaphor and its displacing dynamic. Charity, like Ethan, is extremely constrained by many forces, and her intellect suffers from lack of scholastic knowledge and varied experience. However, Wharton states Charity's shortcomings directly, often with Charity's own knowledge of her limitations.

Charity is aware of her deficiencies and gains at least some degree of power from that awareness. Additionally, Wharton often matches her confusion with realizations, subduing the severity of complete obliviousness: "Charity had only a dim understanding of her guardian's needs; but she knew he felt himself above the people among whom he lived. [...] She was blind and insensible to many things, and dimly knew it; but to all that was light and air, perfume and color, every drop of blood in her responded. [...] Charity was never very clear about the mountain, but she knew it was a bad place (101,131,106). Charity's "dim understanding" of Mr. Royall's and the mountain's specific relevance to her future leads her to difficult experiences in the end. However, she knows Mr. Royall "felt himself above the people" and the mountain "was a bad place," pertinent

information about Royall's superior status and subsequent feelings of entitlement to marry Charity as well as the mountain's ominous influence over Charity's return to her poor, ignorant past. Many of Charity's decisions show her reverting psychically, like returning to the mountain to face her animalistic birth and childhood as well as forfeiting her power over Royall to a "blind" marriage. However, some of the confrontations she consciously seeks out as she retains awareness over her emotional self: "But though her actual behavior may be regressive, her self-awareness, including ashamed bewilderment at her own behavior, shows how far she has developed in spirit. To complete her emotional education, she has after all, paradoxically to go back to her beginnings" (Walton 268). While seemingly moving backward in "regressive" actions, Charity is nonetheless "self-aware" of her "developed" spirit and emotionality, even when her decisions and resultant feelings are negative, "shame." This portrays an "emotional education" even within seemingly uneducated, poor decisions. Ethan never obtains dominion over his emotions because they are displaced to his physical, not mental, self. Most importantly juxtaposed are Charity's general "blind[ness] and insensibil[ity] to many things" against her more enlightened feelings toward nature, "but to all that was light and air, perfume and color, every drop of her blood responded." Inescapably connected with nature, Charity, like Ethan, finds her life defined by the environment.

Charity's association with the land is intrinsically antithetical because her "regressive" connection with the mountain matches her liberating bond with the landscape. While positive and negative environmental sketches holistically define her, Ethan remains one-sided (in setting and mentality) and cannot benefit like Charity in her summer surroundings. Critics view *Summer* as framed by its setting: "The emotional arc of this tale is figured by the landscape itself- the long vistas over the hillsides, the fragrance of wildflowers, the heat of the sun" (Singley 39). Charity's "emotional" self is "figured" by natural elements of "air, perfume, and color." While Ethan's physical contact with the landscape causes strife and ultimately disfigurement, Charity takes "pleasure" in the sensations of inviting grass and hills:

She loved the roughness of the dry mountain grass under her palms, the smell of the thyme into which she crushed her face, the fingering of the wind in her hair and through her cotton blouse, and the creak of the larches as they swayed to it. She often climbed up the hill and lay there alone for the mere pleasure of feeling the wind and rubbing her cheeks in the grass. (106)

This passage's language presents Charity as interacting with her surroundings. Ethan, however, is acted upon by his surroundings.



Hindered by the snow, his journey with the narrator must prematurely end, his home becomes an isolating prison, and his emotions are “frozen woe.” One could argue that the weather imposes a stationary life and fixed emotionality on Ethan. His one attempt to interact or use the landscape for his benefit results in an ironically crippling accident; almost a lesson against manipulating nature that leaves him even more succumbed to it. Nonetheless, Charity “loved,” “smell[ed],” “climbed,” and “lay” in her natural surroundings in no way victimized. Furthermore, her “pleasure” is so heightened by sensation, one might argue the scene is sexual in nature. The language is sexually charged by verbs that connote stimulation: “roughness,” “crushed,” “fingering,” “swayed,” “feeling,” “rubbed.” Also, the particular areas of Charity’s body that experience these sensations imply sex: “palms,” “face,” “cheeks,” and “through her cotton blouse.” If Wharton not only liberates Charity through the environment but sexually liberates her, *Ethan Frome*’s primary theme of sexual repression is even further intensified.

*Summer* includes *Ethan Frome*’s themes of difficulty in verbal expression and the body expressing interior emotions. However, like the shared environment theme, their use dramatically diverges from *Frome*’s. When Charity cannot communicate her feelings she is again aware of these limitations. She recognizes her silence and considers the consequences for her listener’s interpretation. *Frome*’s characters are not only unaware that the unintelligible “bits” of their stories are often contradictory but cannot predict they will not suffice a complete story to our narrator who ultimately abandons this dialogue altogether. Charity is also intellectually aware in scenes in which her body indicates her feelings. This is impossible for Ethan’s interpretation as only psychically present through his body. Additionally, only one part of Charity’s physicality expresses her emotions, so that her entire body does not become a primary theme from repeated and varied references. Charity cannot articulate herself yet is conscious of this failure: “She felt the pitiful inadequacy of this, with a sense of despair, that in her inability to express herself she must give him an impression of coldness and reluctance; but she could not help it” (206). Not directly addressed within *Frome* except from a more objective stance in the introduction, Wharton writes poignantly of the “pitiful inadequacy” and “sense of despair” in the simple characters of *Summer*. “[Charity’s] inability to express herself” is charged with emotional language where the reader too “piti[es]” this shortcoming. Critics will later argue that *Frome*’s lack of sentiment, either due to the author’s interjection or to the character’s interiority, is “relentless” and “cruel” (Trilling qtd. in Killoran 49). However, I relate this criticism

to others which insist that “sensibility” is present but in indirect ways (as in my theory on the physical body). Nonetheless, Charity, possibly like the author, is aware of and saddened by her “inadequate” communication. Allowing more intellectual depth for Charity, she analyzes the “impression” her silence will give. Charity is not only conscious of her silence, but the impact of that silence. Although “she could not help it” like *Frome*’s characters, she can contemplate it.

Similarly, Charity also “understood” a scene’s complexity when, viewing Harney from his bedroom window, Charity’s body reflects her feelings yet her mind is still actively addressed: “Charity’s heart sank. [...] Her heart jumped and then stood still. He was there, a few feet away; and while her soul was tossing on seas of woe [...] but something kept her from moving. It was not the fear of any sanction, human or heavenly; she had never in her life been afraid. It was simply that she had suddenly understood what would happen if she went in” (138,150). Only Charity’s “heart” reveals her emotions, unlike *Frome*’s many mentions of minute, almost inconsequential parts like “eyelids.” Charity’s feelings are rendered in larger metaphoric items, like the traditional “heart” and “soul.” These mentions are not meant to lend focus on her body but, because the two items are internal, point more towards her interiority and feelings than her external physicality. Even in a reference to Charity’s body the focus is redirected to her psychology. When “the mention of Zeena paralyzed him,” Ethan’s fear prevents further interaction with Mattie. However, Charity “had never in her life been afraid” and, unlike Ethan, “it was not the fear of any sanction” that precluded her contact with Harney. In these similar scenes of lovers in close proximity yet restraining their contact, Charity is much more liberated in her physical depiction and how she “simply [...] understood,” or exhibits conscious awareness of, the consequences. Ethan, while also understanding why he cannot interact intimately with Mattie, is nevertheless shown as recognizing this through his body by becoming “paralyzed.” Wharton employs many of the same themes in the two texts but *Summer* allows moments of direct introspection, enjoyment and desired contact with the environment, and the freedom to move in and out of physical metaphor. When read as lacking the opportunities *Summer* exhibits in the very themes the texts share, *Ethan Frome* becomes even more “paralyzed” by Wharton’s intentionally restrictive narrative.

In light of the freedoms *Summer* portrays, critics argue that *Ethan Frome* lacks this sensibility towards Ethan’s plight. The characters’ circumscribed interiority presents the reader with verbal and psychological brevity that leave the characters no room to solve problems and the readers no emotionality from which to build a connection.

Thus, Lionel Trilling states “the mind can do nothing with” *Ethan Frome* because Wharton finds “nothing to say of the events of her story” (qtd. in Hutchinson 223). The reader cannot analyze beyond the story’s concise instances because Wharton does not allow her characters or the narrator to analyze them. The text’s philosophical void inhibits the reader simultaneously with the characters. In addition, the lack of emotionality which (I argue as present yet projected through the body) constitutes a second critique against an author creating “morally inert” characters. However, a popular opposing argument focuses on the narrator as possessing, instead, the “sensitivity of a poet.” While the text realistically coincides with the harsh restriction of its environment, our narrator’s storytelling abilities differ dramatically from the rudimentary townspeople. Thus, *Ethan Frome* must be told through an outside party with eloquent “professional” skill that contrasts its simple subject matter. Therefore, the text is poetic, sentimental writing about sentimentally constricted people. While the two theories differ on the rhetoric’s ultimate impression, both recognize the inherent division between the narrator and the characters’ skills. This discrepancy stems from Wharton’s immediate premise in the introduction that “there is no such drawback if the looker-on is sophisticated, and the people he interprets are simple.” Therefore, critics analyze this narrative philosophy as either satirically written, or telling of Wharton’s decision to create an “outsider” narrator as a medium for the piece.

The first set of critical dialogues on *Frome* responds to the characters’ one-dimensional personalities, and their lack, as well as the narrator’s, of “sentiment:”

Ethan is ‘helpless as a child to combat the forces that bind him.’ [...] ‘Banality’ is the sum of Mattie’s personality. In Trilling’s view, ‘The mind can do nothing with’ Ethan Frome, since Wharton herself finds nothing to say of the events of her story: ‘nothing whatever.’ [...] A writer thoroughly suspicious of sentiment [...] barrenness [...] The passage had an immediate force, but since Wharton makes no attempt to place what it says, immediacy is all there is. The narrator, who would aid perspective, is invisible, leaving us to conclude that Wharton herself wants this moment to be an absolute explanation. (Hutchinson 223)

For this interpretation one must ignore the expression of psychological complexity through other media besides directly stated introspection. However, on a superficial reading (no less important than an analytical one), Ethan is “helpless” and “the sum of Mattie’s personality” is “banality.” Wharton has “nothing to say” philosophically about the characters because philosophy and introspection are not present, on the narratorial level, within the text. Therefore, “nothing

whatever” comes of “sentiment” in the characters and accordingly elicits only a sense of “barrenness” in the reader. Wharton “makes no attempt to place what it says” and, therefore, stunts the reader’s own analytical interpretation. Finally, the “narrator” does not “aid perspective” in this unsentimental, direct recitation. He is therefore “invisible” leaving only the “immediacy” of the scene’s factual happenings without an explanation of its more complex, layered implications. When “Wharton herself wants this moment to be an absolute explanation,” I argue that one must turn to the rhetoric itself for depth. In the short story, instead of dismissing its brevity for incompleteness or insubstantial characters, I find Wharton’s psychology encoded in the very “suspicious[ly] sentiment[al]” language critics decry. It is too extreme to label *Frome* as without merit: “Lionel Trilling, well respected in academia, tagged *Ethan Frome* a ‘dead book’ because he found it morally inert” (Killoran 49). While Ethan’s and Mattie’s demise is “cruel,” it is not without moral implications toward self-empowerment, self-fulfillment, and the valuing of one’s mortality. Also, it can be read as a sketch on the moral stance of Wharton’s society. Finally, if we must find morality within the text and not through inference, Ethan’s hesitancy to abandon his sick wife in poverty and borrow money under false pretenses reveals a moral side that, although not directly pondered by our narrator, is nonetheless thematically present. In conclusion, I place my argument against the concept of *Ethan Frome* as a “dead book” by referencing physical metaphor as revealing character psychology and “sentiment.”

However, I do not completely surrender to the theory of an all-expressive narrator argued by a second vein of criticism. These critics’ emphasis on sensibility, while correct, is not written as straightforwardly by Wharton as they imply. As stated before, it is indirect through environmental, bodily, and even animal metaphors. Arguing against “Odd structural patterns and unsatisfactory detail” in *Frome*, a second theoretical stance does not believe “the narration poses serious difficulty because ideally Ethan would tell his own story” but views the surrogate narrator as enlightening the storyline and its stylistics (Killoran 53). The once “invisible” narrator who complicates the narrative because “ideally Ethan would tell his own story” is conversely viewed as a highly skilled writer and undeniable presence. “Unsatisfactory detail” becomes “thoroughly informed [...] sensibility” when critics view Wharton as implementing an outside narrator, not a town member, to introduce a more elevated spoken and written voice:

For the close reader readily discerns that the engineer-narrator did not readily gather this story “bit by bit, from various people,” but having been inspired by a few bare hints and scraps of information, created

his “vision” [...] out of the stuff of his vivid imagination. In short, the narrator who presents himself as an engineer in the realistic framework of the novel is actually a writer in disguise with the technical skill of a professional novelist and the sensibility of a poet. (Brennan 261)

The “engineer-narrator” uses his more sophisticated standing, according to Wharton, to create a “vision” not a fragmented recitation. The narrator’s “vivid imagination,” while written into the “realistic framework” of the novel, extends beyond any other character’s capability. He expresses Ethan’s story almost in an oral format, directly to the reader, which is a fitting rendition against his less communicative company. While simple characters speak in “bare hints and scraps of information,” our narrator “is actually a writer in disguise.” Whether Wharton is writing herself into the text we cannot know. However, she continually divides the character and reader’s abilities, both in the introduction and in her narrator’s “technical” and “professional” skill. It is difficult to read her introduction as satirical when she immediately presents us with a sophisticated narrator who is reliable for the remainder of the story. While he cannot delve into character psychology, it would be both unrealistic and contradictory to Wharton’s constrictive tone for him to reveal those interiors.

The question of Ethan’s self-expression cannot be separated from the narrator’s identity: “We have to deal here with an overt fiction within a fiction. [...] The account of Ethan’s tragic love, in fact, is so thoroughly informed by the sensibility and imagination of its narrator that the story can be adequately analyzed only in terms of that relationship” (Brennan 265). The narrator’s “sensibility and imagination” imply a fused relationship with the text, where it is “informed” through, and only through, this sophisticated voice. Ethan himself could be interpreted as divided into his actual, incommunicable self versus his unrealized future self—the learned, articulate narrator. Why Wharton must displace Ethan’s story from him into the hands of another is controversial. Criticism asks if the subaltern can speak, so we must ask why Ethan is powerless to portray his own story. I argue that the poignancy of Ethan’s story influences the narrator and, hence, Ethan’s individual mark does touch the piece directly. While the narrator and Ethan physically interact, I believe there are emotional exchanges and understandings as well. Therefore, Ethan influences the narrative by impacting its writer. While the teller maintains narrative control, Ethan posits the emotional germ of the piece. Just as Wharton subscribes Ethan’s feelings to physical metaphor, so does the narrator speak for Ethan’s incommunicable past. Silent emotion passes through literary stylistics to gain a voice: “to convert intellectual and moral experience into the material of art, means that

the pictures of conscious and unconscious processes of story-telling are blurred,” Wharton explains (qtd. in Vita-Finzi 51). Therefore, while Ethan is not a “conscious” writer or even character, like our narrator, his “unconscious” influences the “story-telling” as well. In addition, because Ethan’s unconscious mind is continually expressed in a “material” realm, i.e., the body, it is consistent to manifest his “muted[ness]” in an indirect yet material narrative. The text must partly consist of Ethan’s voice because the body metaphor is the only language in which he can speak and the primary one presented to us. Therefore, when critics argue whether the writing is limited or expressive, whether the narrator and characters are distant or united, I argue they are both.

The physical self is a predominant metaphor of a text filled with illness and labor. Wharton’s characters internalize this focus, speaking in a more rudimentary manner and thinking within physical language. Because escape cannot be made psychically, Ethan’s and Mattie’s attempted suicide is fitting. However, Wharton does not release them from their bodies but plunges them deeper into its awareness through injury. Compared with *Summer*’s similar themes though liberating dynamic, Wharton appears even more intensely aware and purposeful in limiting *Ethan Frome*. Critics interpret this as being either a “morally inert” text or “thoroughly informed by sensibility and imagination.” Interpretive differences do concede that the narrator is divided from the text. I feel that in this division one can find a balance between absence of sentiment into restricted sentiment, and an all-knowing narrator into an influential yet character-driven one. These reconciliations are originally present and operating when Wharton portrays real and present character psychology filtered through literary metaphor.

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## THE FEMALE GROTESQUE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE

*Anna Kérchy*

"If Barbie is a monster, she is our monster, our ideal."  
(Anne DuCille 565)

Western culture's obsessive male gaze (Doane 180) seems always to have outlined the female body antagonistically: object of scopophilic desire and enigmatic vessel of life and death, sublime essence of beauty and abjectified (Kristeva 9), uncanny other against which the speaking subject can define himself. Tempting and threatening, sacred and profane, corporeality associated with femininity remains an unresolved paradox. This trend seems to accelerate radicalized in 21<sup>st</sup> century Western societies, interpellating the female body as simultaneously idealized *and* normativized, decorporealized *and* pathologized, eroticized *and* asceticized, producing via the impossible expectations of the engendered body discipline grotesque female bodies. Contemporary America is the hotbed of the female grotesque by being home of the anatomically deformed Barbie doll, the excessively skinny anorexic or the abnormally obese fast food junkie, of steroidized female body builders, of plastic surgery-addicts, of hyper-technological cyborgs, of maniacally stylized and designed, tattooed, pierced, dyed, shaved, "made-up" female bodies. This ever-expanding spectacular society of simulacrum (see Debord 3 and Baudrillard 10) hatching unrealistic, un/superhuman grotesque bodies elicits "female body dysmorphia" also known as "body image distortion syndrome" (BIDS), a new form of female malady (succeeding hysteria and depression) that nevertheless can be interpreted as a manifestation of dis-ease and as such a mode of radical transgression. Accordingly, the current grotesque body modifications may be read as body-controlling manipulations of the Foucauldian technologies of biopower (Foucault, *Power* 58) of the

dominant patriarchal ideology influenced by the economic interests of consumer society's major business fields targeting woman in the form of beauty industries. But they might also signify innovative technologies of the self (Foucault, "Technologies" 16), (re)writing the body as a mode of feminist empowerment, creating a subversive anti-aesthetic carved onto one's very flesh. The aim of this article is to examine whether these current forms of female grotesque are desperate attempts at the carnivalesque destabilization of the conventional social order and of traditional ways of seeing, enacted by victims of the inevitable scenario of the ideology of representation or whether they are, on the contrary, self-reflexive, ideology-critical subversions of woman warriors rewriting myths of "American beauty" and femininity via performative identities and heterogeneous, self-made selves in monstrous metatexts. Thus, the feminized body may be examined both as a point of struggle over the shape of power and a site of production of new modes of subjectivity. The paper, inspired by and relying on Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*,<sup>1</sup> analyzes the female grotesque body as it emerges in various business branches of the beauty myth, such as fashion, diet, fitness, plastic surgery body disciplining industries, and also studies subversive forms of the female grotesque in photographs by contemporary American women artists, Diana Thorneycroft and Cindy Sherman.

Mattel's Barbie doll, a more than 50-year-old toy with an unbreached popularity, remains an icon of authentic white femininity, insidiously interpellating its young owners into Naomi Wolf's "iron maiden of beauty myth" (Wolf 30) embodied by the unchanging plastic mould of this anatomically deformed, biologically impossible, culturally mythicized collectible. The paradoxical femininity inscribed on Barbie's idealized and normative body certainly causes feminist concerns, as the trademark Barbie features are likely to be traumatizing for young women-to-be. Barbie's grotesque body is extremely sexualized, with her hourglass figure, big breasts, long thighs, full lips, and great hair she resembles an inflatable sexual prop destined to fulfill male desires, yet her sexuality is veiled, hidden, her pleasure zones are erased as she has no nipples, and her

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<sup>1</sup> From Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1993) see especially the chapters entitled "Whose Body is This? Feminism, Medicine, and the Conceptualization of Eating Disorders," "Hunger as Ideology," "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture," "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity," and "Reading the Slender Body."

genitalia are also entirely missing (while Barbie's male counterpart, Ken and company have simulated plastic underwear with suggestive bulges). Thus, Barbie embodies both the stereotypical (and theoretically incompatible) whore and madonna image. Instead of being the traditional baby doll encouraging an easy identification or at most the rehearsing of parenting in little girls, she is an adult doll, a fashion doll, an insidious tool of the "ideological technology of gender" (De Lauretis 18), designed as a role model teaching didactic lessons about femininity, sexuality, corporeality, fashion and socially available subject positions. The "Mother Barbie" has a detachable prosthetic stomach, hiding a perfectly flat, desirable, "feminimized" abdomen. The "Presidential Candidate Barbie" comes with adorably feminine red, white and blue inaugural ball gowns, costumes worthy of her princess-like figure put on display. Alternative versions of Barbie, such as the black or the disabled Barbie, instead of rendering visible as an autonomous entity on its own right the marginalized other, contain and (re)interpret it according to the "logic of the same" by using the very same mold of the classic blonde, white, and beautiful Barbie, keeping the trademark long, silky hair and the flexible, feminine limbs, and merely changing the props and costumes, or the shade of the plastic used. Barbie remains Barbie, and so it would be, according to comic fan websites, were there more radical Barbie versions, such as the "Shock Therapy Barbie (car battery and wires included)," the "Homeless Barbie (complete with stolen K-Mart shopping cart)," the "Junkie White Trash Barbie (complete with needles)," the "Bulimic Barbie (feed her then make her throw it back up!)," or the Alcoholics Anonymous Barbie (with coffee mug and 12-step guide). My personal favorites of all the on-line suggestions, particularly highlighting the grotesque nature of Barbie, are the "Cadaver Barbie (with removable internal organs)" and the "Realistic Teenage Barbie (with flat chest, braces, and acne)." The collectible Barbie doll's paradoxical world is that of perfection and simulacrum, idealization and normativization, aestheticization and eroticization, consumption and anorexia (the Titanic Barbie turns actress Kate Winslett's roundness into culturally prescribed super-slimness).

As Anne DuCille has highlighted, Barbie is a gendered and racialized icon of contemporary commodity culture, engulfing cultural difference as a merchandisable commodity, framing Nigerian, Chinese, Indian or Eskimo female bodies in the mold of the prototypical Caucasian doll as "dye-dipped versions of the archetypal white American beauty" myth (553). In DuCille's view, the multicultural Barbie is a symbol and symptom of what multiculturalism has become at the hands of late capitalist commodity culture: a Euro-centrism that

apparently faces cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference: consumerism and commodity culture ruling over intercultural awareness: profit orientation and marketability predominating over realistic representation of authentic and autonomous difference: othering, containment, universalization prevailing over heterogeneity, solidarity and veritable multiculturalism.

Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, while depicting the catastrophic effects of the white beauty myth on a black female child, also outlines a challenging subversion of the ideological process of consuming, containing, controlling/producing the other in order to reinforce the norm, the normalized self. Here, it is the marginalized heroine, a black little girl, Pecola who maniacally and cannibalistically devours food associated with icons of normative white femininity: gulping milk from Shirley Temple mugs, sucking on Mary Jane candies, she devours "that which is not-me" in order to give birth to her self, regurgitating, amidst the abjectification of the subject (Kristeva 9), which finally leads both to her nervous breakdown, to the dissolution of the white Dick and Jane primer's narrative, constituting narrative cornerstones (de)composing the black feminist text, and to the thorough destabilization of the status of the other.

New editions of the eternal Barbie toy-doll collectibles and the changing trends of fashion-industry-parading mannequins mutually affect each other, to propagate doubly reinforced their sexist, racist, ageist feminine ideal associated with an image of beauty, power and success. Catwalks like beauty pageants permit merely touches of the exotic framed (black models have white bone structure, black skin is associated via stereotypical props as ethnic fabrics or jewelry with "racial features" as animal instincts), yet the beauty industry's obsession with the numericalization of bodies, identified by the numeric data of chests, waist, hips, height and weight uncannily recall the slave market's logic by relying on the objectification of the subject. Moreover, the corporeal parameters prescribed are pathological, causing the new disease of fashion models coined "vocational bulimics" (Bordo 66), which heightens an epidemic of anorexia among women in a country of overweight majority, and contributing to the apparition of perhaps the most shocking example of contemporary American female grotesque: 8-year-old Barbie alter-ego beauty queens going on diet: living patchwork dolls made up of stereotypical clichés of femininity, sparkling singular personalities speaking from the uniform mold of Barbie, uttering the compulsory lines wishing for world peace in a world that belligerently eliminates difference.

Symptoms of eating disorders induced by psychosomatic

illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa usually appear in young female patients, seriously frustrated by the social expectations of femininity associated with slimness and eternal beauty. The patient, unable to conceive her objective body image and tormented by unrealistic phantasmagoria of her irreducible obese corporeality, feels a compulsion to over-eat, elicited by obsessive thoughts about the desired food that paradoxically also provokes an emotional, psychic disgust in her. The patient becomes an addict of “binge and purge,” a compulsive devouring and disgorging of food, a recurring over-eating followed by (spontaneously or consciously produced) vomiting or diarrhea, which results in fatal digestive disorders, a drastic loss of weight at accelerated speed in excessive amounts, and may even lead to death.

As Helen M. Malson’s and Susan Bordo’s descriptions of the disease suggest, the major characteristic of the grotesque body of the anorexic and particularly the bulimic patient is a painful oscillation between the binary gender (op)positions (see Bordo 170, Malson 233, 239). On the one hand, drastically influenced by the patriarchal beauty myth, she *over-internalizes* the traditional masculine ideal of slender, suffering *femininity*, while, on the other hand she wishes to compensate for her lack of status and power in society, to gain empowerment, by *becoming masculinized*, synonymous with the agency of autonomous subjectivity, that is by accomplishing a triumph of the mind and the will over the ruthlessly controlled body. On the one hand, her disgust at disorderly fat, at erupting stomach, unwanted protuberances and excess flesh signals her *disgust of traditional femininity* confined to the domestic sphere and maternal nurturing. Her self-starvation, purging, self-purifying vomiting marks an *attempt to disappear as feminine excess*, to reach a complete disembodiment, a *dematerialization* of the threatening and the traditionally over-eroticized *feminine body*. The ceasing of female corporeal functions like menstruation and the appearance of masculine bodily attributes like facial hair are often heralded as a *triumph of masculine self-management, eliminating the pathological, fragile, emotional aspects of femininity* and gaining complete mastery of the self. In the meanwhile, she *embodies exaggerated stereotypical feminine traits* in an unlimited excess, becoming a caricature of the standardized visual image of the norm of feminine hyper-slenderness, “a virtual, though tragic parody of 20<sup>th</sup> century constructions of femininity” (Bordo 170). On the one hand, the patient obsessively *incorporates the stereotype of femininity as physical and emotional nurturer of others*, developing a totally other-oriented emotional economy, suppressing her own desires for self-nurturance,

hunger, independence, and considering self-feeding as greedy and perversely excessive via her strict control of female appetite. On the other hand, her compulsive over-eating marks her female hunger for public power, independence, sexual gratification, public space, autonomous will, and her insatiable voracity, her unrestrained consumption *stages exactly the stereotypically uncontrollable female excess*, uncontained desire, combined with all-wanting determination, and unbound free will. The bulimic's traumatic vacillation between compulsive over-eating and purifying vomiting, between insatiable appetite and ascetic self-starvation, between bingeing and purging, devouring and disgorging marks the paradoxically positioned feminine subject's vertiginous oscillation between the socially, culturally available gender positions, between the ideologically prescribed passive or excessive femininities and the always already masculinized autonomous self-mastering subjectivity.

According to Bordo, the bulimic body-politics reflects, besides the politics of gender, the unstable double bind of consumer capitalism's oscillation between consumption and production, non-productive expenditure and accumulative restraint, desire and its controlling containment (199). The neurotic bodies of anorexic or bulimic female patients also constitute texts making ideology-critical statements about the violently ambiguous social construction of femininity, while virtually and dramatically embodying the dizzying see-saw of the paradoxically interpellated feminine subject always already associated with corporeality and suffering, incompatible with the pleasures of masculinized agency, doomed to sway between mutually exclusive, antagonistically engendered identity positions, bingeing and purging herself in the passion of becoming a woman. In a recent trend elegantly designed, highly self-conscious pro-Ana (anorexia), pro-Mia (bulimia) and pro-ED (eating disorders) web sites, with names like "Anorexic Nation," "Invisible Existence," and "I Love You to the Bones," have become more and more widespread (today numbering around 400), constituting solidarious Internet communities, which feature extreme dieting tips, such as consuming only celery, diet soda and cigarettes; "thinspirational" slogans, such as "Anorexia is a Lifestyle Choice, Not a Disease;" photo galleries of emaciated women; and chat rooms where visitors share personal stories intended to help one another embrace eating disorders and reach their dangerously low weight goals<sup>2</sup> (Zwerling 11) .

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<sup>2</sup> Suggestions found at the site "Good Anas Never Die" included: "Swallow two tablespoons of vinegar before eating to suck the fat out of your food; use Crest White Strips (you can't eat when they're on); make your mind think that the pain from being

Nevertheless, as Bordo points out, even though these “duly” modified bodies may suggest androgynous independence, by fulfilling their “challenging” aims and incorporating both genders’ archetypal traits, yet in a “*pitiful paradox*” their parody exposing the interiorized contradictions finally becomes a “*war that tears the subject in two,*” destroying her health, imprisoning her imagination. Body dysmorphic patients, unlike Judith Butler’s revolutionary gender-troubling performers (1-35), merely mark “*pathologies of female protest*” “written in languages of *horrible suffering,*” functioning “paradoxically, as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produce them, yet reproducing them rather than transforming, precisely that which is being protested” (Bordo 174, 176, 177) .

Although female body builders seem to be very far from anorexic patients, as Bordo notes, their pleasure in the experience of embodiment, in building up the body is overruled by maniac fantasies of absolute control, perfection, purity, will and independence, realized through a masochistic, ascetic modification of the body, characteristic of anorexics. Accordingly, female body builders are compulsive exercisers, new puritans conceptualizing the body as an alien entity to be ruthlessly mastered, shaped, chiseled, constantly conquering physical pain, exhaustion, and bodily limits in the obsessive quest for the perfect body, which has more to do with a disembodied, purely aestheticized mental concept than the actual, materially present, corporeal reality. The muscular body is no longer an exclusive attribute of pure masculinity, or of the animalistic, uncivilized, uncultured proletarian, racialized, marginalized lower class; on the contrary, the finely built, muscled body becomes a symbol of intelligent (self-)managerial abilities, a glamorized cultural icon of androgynous, metrosexual yuppies workaholically “working out” in a body-fetishizing society of spectacle and simulacrum. As Bordo underlines, body building plays a significant role in the reinforcement of ideologically governed social fictions, consolatory illusions: it constitutes a fantasy of self-mastery in an increasingly unmanageable culture—in reality merely contributing to pathological disembodiment, body dysmorphia, a neurotic loss of

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hungry is just really that you’re full; (and) water, water, water! . . . Remember no one can know about Ana, so if you stay hydrated, you are less likely to pass out.” “Metabolism shutting down, need advice!” began a recent entry on the “Pro-Ana Suicide Society” Web site’s chat room. “Okay, I’ve been doing the fast/restrict thing very meticulously for a little over a month now, and I’m nine pounds above my lowest weight ever. That was still way too high, but c’est la vie . . . However, I’ve been on about 150-300 calories a day and stayed the same for about one week now. Metabolism’s absolutely gone. I guess it’s time to refeed? How many calories do you recommend, and for how long should I do it before starting my ‘diet’ again?” (Zwerling 12-13).

the self—a fantasy of (self)transformation and rearrangement promising the effacement of social inequalities—in reality merely effacing non-normative, individual, cultural differences—a fantasy of alliance with culture against all reminders of the decay and death of the body—in reality merely submitting to the decorporealized, illusory, economically/ideologically manipulated icons of the ageist beauty myth. Annette Kuhn heralds the cinematographic representation of female body builders body as a source of scopophilic pleasures of the female gaze, allowing for the possibility of identification with strong women, challenging gender standards, an enabling experience shared by a solidarious community of feminist spectators (198). Nevertheless, Bev Francis and Diana Dennis, iconic American female body builders, seem to remain trapped within conventional gender norms, by keeping compulsory feminine corporeal features and props, such as make-up, great hair, long nails, sexy underwear, jewelry, stiletto shoes, staging the muscular body in stereotypically stylized feminine poses.

Another significant branch of the beauty industry is cosmetic surgery, perhaps the most radical form of contemporary feminine body management, producing paradoxically judged grotesque corporealities. *The American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, the most powerful cosmetic surgery lobby, understandably presents itself as a protector of difference and individual choice fighting against global homogenization, normative universalization. Yet, it is much more interesting that even many feminists regard cosmetic surgery as a feminist gesture synonymous with taking one's life into one's own hands, and consider the proposal to ban or regulate health-risking silicone implants as a totalitarian interference with feminist self-determination, choice and freedom. The problem is that cosmetic surgical interventions are becoming more and more ordinary and popular—shockingly, especially among women as young as in their 20s or 30s—usually reinforce the normative, idealized, ageist, racist, sexist beauty ideal (no-one wishes for a Jewish or African nose or Chinese eyes). Influenced by the “knife-styles of the rich and famous,” surgically transformed women paradoxically want “to become like” in order to realize oneself, to gain Angelina Jolie's lips, Liz Taylor's nose, Pamela Anderson's breasts, which are not natural given, but surgically created images, empty abstractions, hyperreal simulacra of ideal feminine features. The artificially reconstructed bodies fit into the contemporary compulsory omnivisibility of oversexualized bodies yet, lacking individual eroticism, they are also androgynous “cyborg” bodies—like Cher's or Michael Jackson's monstrous faces—plastic products of excessive surgeries. The plastic surgery industry sells



the illusory “postmodern construction of life as plastic possibility and weightless choice,” comparing easy and fast cosmetic/surgical interventions—such as tattooing of eyebrow/eyeline/mouth contour, collagen implants for fuller lips, breast enlargement, liposuction, cellulite management, botox treatment—to consumable, changeable fashion accessories enabling the rewriting of the image of one’s self. Nevertheless, the average plastic surgery patient or addict is probably very far from cosmopolitan multimedia performance artist, Orlan who uses cosmetic operations for self-conscious ideology-critical ends: having ideal traits of femininity carved on her very flesh only to deconstruct her autoportrait, this immaculate essence of femininity, by complementing it with features borrowed from alternative aesthetic ideals of foreign civilizations, squinting eyes, cranial protuberances and nose supplements of Maya and Aztec cultures (see Bourgeade 23, Orlan 51-80). Contemporary poly-surgical addicts, who “return for operation after operation in a perpetual quest of elusive yet ruthlessly normalizing goal, the perfect body” (Bordo 248), are very likely to become victims of their self-deconstructing, body-rearranging obsession, which leads to fatal consequences like the monstrous ‘cat-woman’ Jocelyne Wildenstein’s or the androgynous Michael Jackson’s facial decomposition and neurosis or to Lolo Ferrari’s painfully deformed freak-show body, her over-inflated 54G size breasts (each silicone implant weighing 6lbs 20oz, the equivalent of six pints of beer, as calculated by a men’s magazine), leading to her suffocation.

Despite the paradoxical interpretation of the contemporary American female grotesque body, photographers Diana Thorneycroft and Cindy Sherman have tried to provide subversive re-readings of grotesque femininity through their own daring and defaced auto-portraits.

Canadian artist, Diana Thorneycroft, in her 2001 exhibition, a survey of her last 10 years, tellingly entitled *Diana Thorneycroft: The Body, Its Lessons and Camouflage* explores issues of gender, identity, sexuality, (self)representation and their limits at the site of the troublingly denuded human body, a telling striptease of the artist herself. In her Untitled Self-Portrait series with Masks, she portrays herself as members of her family, hiding her face beneath masks made from relatives’s photographic portraits and using stereotypically engendered, emotionally loaded props like toy guns for the brother, kitchen utensils for the mother, and sometimes more radical appendices like plastic male sex organs, to costume her own androgynous body, which by transcending the compulsory feminine body-frame, becomes apt to enact shifting, heterogeneous identity positions, to challenge corporeal frames, gender limits, and contained desires.

Thorneycroft's *Self-Portrait in Field of Dolls* (1989) demythologizes the Barbie doll's unproblematic femininity by recalling the cruelty of body-managing practices through its presentation of a disillusioning and uncanny self-portrait: her own hopelessly vulnerable luminescent naked body, lying among denuded dolls, recalling victims of a mass massacre, addicts of the beauty myth, dazed by Sleeping Beauty's false daydreams—all mutilated by picture frames, floating out of the focus like vanishing selves. The *Doll Mouth Series* (2004) shows a collection of toy dolls' mouths represented in nauseating excess, where these premier plans of plastic female oral orifices perform a revision of the female body as they reveal beneath the mythical kitsch, miniaturized, infantile, light and pleasurable hyper-femininity a disturbingly erotic, tempting-threatening abject aspect incorporated by stereotypically feminine icons like the *vagina dentata*, the abject grotto-like, grotesque cave of the mouth of the womb, while they also highlight beyond the grotesque fragmentation, libidinal territorialization, objectifying *othering* of the female body the possibility of viewing female anatomy in its abstraction as an infinite sublime landscape, providing an other view. As Vivian Tors has pointed out, Thorneycroft's art is grotesque as it paradoxically combines stylistic beauty with repulsive content; it uses traditional artistic conventions to explore unconventional terrains, draws on autobiographical experience and obscures itself in overplayed, theatricalized stagings, photographs the photographer's own denuded body as an alienated other, arouses intense emotions and remains emotionless, melts an impartial objectivity into surrealistic dream scenes, while it generates volumes of questions and avoids authoritative answers (1729-30). Likewise, contemporary American photographer Cindy Sherman is heralded as a "quintessential postmodern artist" "advocating a deconstruction of the power-structures embedded in late capitalist patriarchal society" (Lemmon 2). She is applauded for "making pop culture image into a whole artistic vocabulary" (Galassi 4) and is admired as a feminist, boldly confronting issues concerning the female body, the male gaze, and the socio-cultural constructedness of femininity in ambiguous and eclectic series of photos all featuring herself. Already her 1978 *Untitled Film Stills*, on display since 1995 at the New York Museum of Modern Art, frames Sherman herself in shots from imaginary black and white B grade films of the 1950s, reflecting archetypal representations of Woman engendered by phallogocentric ideology, trapped in clichés like the sexy schoolgirl, the docile housewife, or the femme fatale. Sherman performs a feminist revision by providing a parodic and political repetition of the patriarchal icons of femininity, making ideologically interpellated female

spectators recognize their misrecognition, as she playfully acts out photographer/model/imaginary actress/mythical Woman/and singularly heterogeneously “a-woman” (De Lauretis 124) in her series of grotesquely defaced auto-portraits of simulated femininity, where the fictional selves’ gaze consistently transgresses picture frames and the borders of patriarchal imagination, violating representation’s limits, thriving for revision, a view from elsewhere, a view beyond. Her *Disaster Series* (shot from 1985 to 89) as well as her 1992 *Sex Picture Series* uses plastic surrogates, doll parts or prosthetic body parts to complement or substitute for her own, while she portrays female corporeal reality (dis)appearing among abject body fluids, like vomit, blood, and feces, tracing a violent disintegration of the body shattered by compulsory social fictions of femininity, sexuality, beauty, ageing, etc. The self-sufficient presence of the reassured, homogeneous, Cartesian subject is substituted by a grotesque subject in disappearance, mirroring the (dis)ease of the paradoxically and painfully positioned feminine subject, and reflecting a De-Manian defaced auto-portrait in the mirror of Sherman’s shattered glasses (see *Untitled* 1987). In her *Historical Portraits Series* (1988-90), Sherman casts herself again in archetypical feminine roles on simulacra of canonized masterpieces where she defamiliarizes representation by deconstructing familiar yet non-existent originals on her subversive copies, thus successfully creating a space for the heterogeneous ever-changing feminine self. Her most recent show at her New York gallery, Metro Pictures, still displays a series of mock-portrait images of herself in the guise of stereotypical women from California, like *The Personal Trainer*, *The Divorcee* or *The Neurotic*. Sherman’s auto-fictionalizing work is paradoxical as it uses conventional portrait techniques like setting the figure against a neutral background, yet she utterly depersonalizes her work by repeatedly performing a grotesque masquerade of photos consistently titled “Untitled”.

Both Thorneycroft’s and Sherman’s photography recalls Susan Rubin Suleiman’s concept of bifocal vision. The contemplation of these contemporary art works elicits a view that combines a restful, classicizing contemplation of a reassuring aesthetic ideal and a restless, contemporary struggle with and against an inventive, irritating, witty alternative anti-aesthetic (Suleiman 147). Their photography thus implies a parallel perception of traditional femininity and of (its) ironically grotesque, feminist metatext.

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**POESÍA / *POETRY***





## SOÑADOR

Es el inicio de la vida  
es el palpar de un nuevo ser  
es el principio de la imaginación  
verdades que hay que reconocer.

Existen sueños en mil de fantasía  
pensamientos que hay que lograr  
sueños en oír por cada realidad  
y pensamientos que hay que mostrar.

Una mente con una ventana de originalidad  
una educación de sabiduría ideal  
un trabajo de energía y no material  
y sobre todo una dama sideral.

Una mente con lógico pensamiento  
el poder de la palabra está enfrente  
expulsar consejos alrededor  
un tesoro que es ya aparente.

La educación con tecnología  
tendrá perfección en las ciencias y las artes  
muy lejos de mi origen  
logrará fruto en los caminantes.

El trabajo de energía y no material  
una transformación entonces de utopía  
corolario al esfuerzo de generaciones  
será ya el producto ese día.

Ella, la personalidad espacial  
un rostro sereno y paciente

su mirada inteligente con luz  
iluminará el mágico reino y toda mente.

Una creatividad en cadena  
un hecho en poder de consejo  
sin ayuda hasta la cima será  
secreto del enorme modelo en manejo.

Con mis ojos puedo ver  
las imágenes en toda área venir  
apoyado por la perseverancia de la ciencia  
con dramática dedicación hay que conseguir.

Para el paraíso terrenal  
el mal hay que eliminar  
toma forma de villano  
pero con la verdad se puede exterminar.

Se logrará decir “no a la guerra”  
el hambre algún día en el mundo terminará  
será como una decoración de naufragios en evolución  
y entonces las naciones sin fronteras se originarán.

El engaño y la mentira se podrán vencer  
el conocimiento en las ciencias aumentará  
la riqueza y el dinero no valdrán  
el misterio mental aparecerá.

Surgirán ciudades sin atardecer  
y como gigantes en el espacio se verán  
los viajes galácticos serán fáciles de formar  
y a la velocidad de la luz caminarán.

Fuentes sin final vislumbro varias  
de energía en el núcleo será  
un poco del sol de ayer conjugado  
la vida eterna tal vez nunca se verá.

Como consecuencia, una estrella con espacio así  
fácil una computadora puede aparecer  
pero muy en el fondo consciente  
el instinto humano hay que mantener.

A través de los años  
los sueños habrán todos de verlos  
tomarán forma propia en vida  
y solo habrá que reconocerlos.

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**RESEÑA / *REVIEW***



Walter Jost. *Rhetorical Investigations: Studies in Ordinary Language Criticism*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004. 346 pp.

Mary Leonard

The title of this book makes clear its focus on rhetoric but does not signal to the reader its equally important engagement with philosophy and literary criticism focused on Modernism, nor its revisionary reading and championing of the poetry of Robert Frost as an example of “Low Modernism.” As Jost discusses, the canonization of “High Modernism” by the New Critics in the years following World War II, elevated writers such as Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Woolf into the pantheon while dismissing more accessible writers like Frost as lacking the linguistic sophistication and philosophical complexity which would make them worthy of serious study. Jost argues that there is as much to unpack in the texts of populist writers like Frost as there is in the more arcane texts of the High Modernists, proposing that, rather than see the camps of High and Low Modernism in “opposition” to each other, we should conceive of Modernism as a “continuum of possibilities” and view the different approaches which fall under its umbrella in “aposition,” in complementary juxtaposition.

Beginning in the 1970s, when feminists began to challenge the exclusion of many women writers from the Modernist canon, there has been a slow breaking apart of those rigid criteria which once excluded much of the rich and plural production of the Modernist period from serious consideration. Since then, Modernism has been defined and redefined against definitions of Romanticism, of Realism, Postmodernism, and the Avant Garde. Some have questioned whether it is even a useful term for describing the full range of literary and artistic production of the period. This book engages in this ongoing discussion by seeking to expand the definition of Modernism, not by focusing on issues of gender, race, or class, as has often been done, but by seeking to rehabilitate the literary value of that “ordinary” language first devalorized in the textually-focused analyses of the New Critics and then ignored in those poststructuralist readings which glamorously associated the hermetic or experimental language of the High Modernists with “subversion” and “revolution.” For Jost, this resulted in a skewed critical accounting of the period which continues to require redressing: “the low now requiring greater theoretical definition, and the high a more practical reassessment.”

Writing like Frost’s, he argues, is clearly Modernist because of “its irony, its multiple perspectives, its ironic lack of controlling authorial

authority, its troping of traditional subjects and materials, its 'darker mood,' and so on." But since it is neither experimental nor concerned with the issues of cultural alienation typical of High Modernist texts, Frost and writers like him are better seen as "Low Modernists." In contrast to the difficult language often considered a hallmark of High Modernism, "Low Modernism makes language deceptively easy and pleasurable in order to entice us into tripping over connections we had habitually overlooked."

Instead of employing familiar postmodern or poststructuralist approaches, the author seeks to rehabilitate rhetorical theory as a tool for reading the function of this ordinary language in Frost, arguing that, despite criticisms levied by those in literary studies, "rhetoric is neither anachronistic or naively presumptuous on the one hand nor incipiently nihilistic (radically skeptical) on the other." Rather, that which he terms "rhetorical thought" in the poetry of Frost is "an instrument for disseminating information in a modern world" and "a means of taste and judgement of the *sensus communis* (Cicero) or the 'ordinary' (Wittgenstein) in an increasingly postmodern world."

A key concept Jost uses to define how Low Modernist texts function rhetorically is "epideixis," which he contrasts with "epiphany." Whereas Romantic literature privileged a transcendental "epiphany of being," High Modernist literature has been said to substitute for this an "epiphany of form." However, a persistent critical fascination with those illuminating moments of revelation and intense personal experience in this literature that have been defined as epiphanic, he argues, has resulted in the neglect of the "epideictic" function characteristic of Low Modernist texts. These latter foreground not the exceptional moment but rather the accumulation of patterns, premises, and rhetorical strategies that compose the fullness of everyday experience, and continuously come into play in our interpersonal relations and dealings with the world. Unlike the epiphanic, the "epideictic presupposes a fundamental identity of values and beliefs with one's interlocutors, so that it is not an adversarial relationship but a cooperative understanding." It is "the activity not of the nervous or enervated but of the energetic, not of the alienated but of the ambulant and ambitious." In Frost, speakers typically situate themselves epideictically in the world and with respect to others in the kinds of homely conversations which take place between husbands and wives, neighbors, or co-workers. In contrast to that literature which foregrounds alienation and exceptionality, the "unsystematic rhetorical metaphysics" that unfolds in these poems concerns itself with how speakers, despite their differences and disagreements, engage in the mundane task of creating meaning together.



Close readings of selected poems serve to illustrate characteristic rhetorical elements which are the building blocks of Frost's poetry: his tendency to focus on conversation rather than on oratory or soliloquy; his use of the first person singular and, particularly, of the first person plural; his exploration of the nuances of how we employ the rhetorical functions of naming, calling, saying, retrieval, reminding, and playing to continuously situate ourselves in our worlds and make sense of them; his emphasis on the importance of cultivating practical judgment, taste and *kairos*, the Greek principle of moderation, as tools for successfully negotiating life; his affinity for strategies of wit and inventiveness reminiscent of seventeenth century metaphysical poetry over the seriousness of much High Modernism; and his interest in the dynamics of everyday discursive forms like gossip, arguments, and jokes.

*Rhetorical Investigations* slowly advances its arguments via densely woven engagements with rhetorical theory, philosophers from Aristotle to the present, and literary criticism. This is not a book for the casual reader, nor will it be an easy read for literary critics steeped in the more usual debates about Modernism but unfamiliar with the body of rhetorical theory and the critical apparatus applied here. It *will* be useful for those interested in considering how this critical approach opens up alternative approaches to reading and interpreting texts like Frost's, and how, via its reconsideration of Frost's work, it participates in the ongoing debate about exactly what it is that constitutes a Modernist text.

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## NÚMERO ESPECIAL - CONVOCATORIA

**LA JUNTA EDITORIAL CONVOCA A LA ENTREGA DE TRABAJOS** (ensayos, poemas, cuentos, reseñas) relacionados con **los humanos y el ambiente** para la publicación de un número especial (junio 2006) de la revista.

Los ensayos pueden referirse a una amplia variedad de tópicos relacionados con el ambiente (incluyéndolo, pero no limitándose sólo a esos temas), tanto el ecocriticismo y el ecofeminismo así como la relación de los asuntos ambientales con la literatura, la política, el postcolonialismo, el género, la globalización, el capitalismo, el marxismo, los alimentos y los derechos de los animales

Fecha límite para entrega: 1 de septiembre de 2005. Véase las normas para entrega de manuscritos en <http://www.uprm.edu/atenea> para información sobre el formato de manuscritos.

## SPECIAL ISSUE - CALL FOR PAPERS

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