

**Novel Bodies: Corporeality and Textuality
in Contemporary Women's Fiction**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis queries whether a relationship between bodies in texts and the narratology and stylistics of texts might be reconceived beyond metaphor. Specifically, it examines the textual politics arising from the representation of ambiguously-bounded bodies. Each of the four contemporary women's novels that I examine represents disorderly bodies in the first-person narrative voice, and the implications of this for considerations of identity, agency and feminism are considered. The thesis is divided into five chapters, the first introducing the reader to theories that frame the subsequent close textual analyses of the novels. Chapter One contextualizes my work in relation to the existing parameters of discussions of textual-corporeal relations and considers approaches to the ambiguously-bounded body and its symbolic function in society, ranging from the work of Mary Douglas and Mikhail Bakhtin to that of Susan Bordo and Julia Kristeva. In Chapter Two, the transsexual metamorph of Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) is examined in terms of its transformative properties and its relationship to intertextuality. The plural, fluid, lesbian bodies of Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (1973) are discussed in connection with the text's transitivity choices and manipulations of discourses, in Chapter Three. Chapter Four investigates the depiction of the ambiguously-gendered body of the narrator of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992) in comparison with the novel's depiction of sexed bodies through a discussion of concealment, cliché, synecdoche and focalization. Chapter Five examines the anorexic body of Jenefer Shute's *Life-Size* (1992) and the representation of its relationship to language on diegetic and narrative levels. In the Conclusion to the thesis, I indicate the ways in which taking a stylistic or narratological approach to textual-corporeal relations can be productive in illuminating textual politics, particularly from a feminist perspective.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the wealth of theorizations of the corporeal in recent decades, few critics have succeeded in identifying a textual-corporeal relationship pertaining to the specifics of narrative and style that goes beyond metaphor. It is commonplace, for example, to refer to bodies as texts and texts as bodies or to speak of ‘writing the body’. Immediately, the latter phrase recalls *écriture féminine* and its essentialist problematics if it is taken as anything other than a metaphorical exploration. Instead, in this thesis, I take a narratological approach to the question of bodies and texts, examining whether there can be a more direct or literalized relationship between bodies and the texts in which they appear. Specifically, I consider whether there is any dialogue that suggests a textual openness and interaction with the fruitful instability of the ambiguously-bounded body. The four primary texts that I examine handle very different, challenging ‘novel’ bodies: the transsexual metamorph of Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977); the plural, fluid lesbian bodies of Monique Wittig’s *The Lesbian Body* (1973); the ambiguously-sexed and concealed body of Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body* (1992); and the anorexic body of Jenefer Shute’s *Life-Size* (1992).¹ The interplay between the implied bodies and their respective texts is foregrounded by the fact that all four works employ first-person homodiegetic narrators.

Contextualizing the Body

Perspectives on ‘the body’ range from Judith Butler’s questioning of whether there is any body perceptible outside of discourse, to an essentialist idea of the body as the underpinning of

¹ Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago, 1982; Victor Gollancz, 1977). Subsequent references are to the Virago edition. Monique, Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, trans. by David Le Vay (Boston: Beacon, 1986); trans. of *Le corps lesbien* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1973). Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (London: Vintage, 1993; London: Jonathan Cape, 1992). Subsequent references are to the Vintage edition. Shute, Jenefer, *Life-Size* (London: Mandarin, 1993; Secker and Warburg, 1992). Subsequent references are to the Mandarin edition.

experience seen, for example, in the work of H  l  ne Cixous. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler asks: 'Is there a "physical" body prior to the perceptually perceived body? An impossible question to decide'.² In a later work, she states that 'insofar as the extra-discursive is delimited, it is formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself'.³ By contrast, and as Janet Wolff observes, the *  criture f  minine* proposed by Cixous depends upon a body that is constant, not subject to cultural modifications in ideology (Wolff, p.133). Although bodies possess certain physical compositional similarities, these similarities are elided by a very different kind of 'matter' – that of the cultural and material conditions in which bodies exist. Monique Wittig's critical writings precede those of Butler in advocating a committed social-constructionist position and, as I shall discuss in Chapter Three, an understanding of Wittig's critical work illuminates her challenging fiction. But Wittig does not extend quite as far as Butler in asking whether there is a body that exists that is pre- or extra-discursive, as Butler herself indicates (*Gender Trouble*, p.115). Wittig's materialist feminism critiques and distances her work from that of the more well-known French feminist theorists that comprise of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva as well as Cixous. Her distance from these theorists arises from a political aversion to psychoanalysis, which she sees as ahistorical and apolitical, as Diana Fuss observes.⁴ Butler's

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.114. Butler is far from the only feminist to consider this question but is possibly the most well known. See also Janet Wolff's chapter, 'Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics', in her *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp.120-141. Subsequent references to Wolff are to this work.

³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.11.

⁴ See Wittig's essay, 'The Straight Mind', in her *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), pp.21-32 (pp.22-23). Diana Fuss makes this point in her *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990; New York: Routledge, 1989), p.41. Although there are elements of a kind of essentialism in the ahistoric treatment of the psyche in traditional psychoanalytic discourse, as Wittig indicates, I do not agree with her that these feminists necessarily perpetuate this. Irigaray, for example, precisely questions the construction of femininity in psychoanalytic theory and in her complex but playful writings critiques Freudian phallogocentrism. See especially the opening section of *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); trans. of *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), pp.11-129, and 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine' in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); trans. of *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), pp.68-85. By juxtaposing her critique of Freud with one of Plato in the latter half of

insistent interrogation of the relationship between discourse and sexed bodies, where ‘discourse is not restricted to writing or speaking, but is also social action’ (*Gender Trouble*, p.166, n.26), requires us to recognize that,

To ‘concede’ the undeniability of ‘sex’ or its ‘materiality’ is always to concede some version of ‘sex,’ some formation of ‘materiality.’ Is the discourse in and through which that concession occurs – and, yes, that concession invariably does occur – not itself formative of the very phenomenon that it concedes? To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. (*Bodies That Matter*, p.10)

Experiences and views of embodiment are not transhistorical, transcultural or transgeographical. But to speak of sex difference, as with any difference, is not necessarily to fall into an essentialist snare from which one cannot escape but rather to recognize that the way that sexed bodies are constructed discursively has material repercussions. Instead of treating any idea of difference with suspicion for its essentialism, therefore, one can validly interrogate the female body as it has been ‘sedimented’ through discursive practices.⁵ Thus, when I speak of the female body in this thesis, I refer to an entity that by no means has anything like an uncontested ‘essence’ because any idea of this ‘essence’ is itself an illusive construction. My reading of the female body is therefore much closer to Butler’s position that in turn adapts, through the lens of sex and gender, Michel Foucault’s influential work on the discursive coercion of bodies.⁶ This emphasis on the role of discourse is already implicit from a feminist perspective in 1949, in Simone de Beauvoir’s statement that women become rather than are

Speculum (pp.243-364), Irigaray demonstrates how myths of ‘women’ are reworked, perpetuated and adapted for different historical periods.

⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p.10.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990); trans. of *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976).

born women.⁷ This fundamental feminist premise disinherits the myth of Woman from its illusory biologism to expose it as a sibling of an ideological, and patriarchal, framework. The body is placed at the centre of this exposition and has remained a core topic of deliberation for feminists. Susanne Kappeler's word of caution about embracing the popularization of focus upon the body in recent decades in 'malestream academicism and feminism',⁸ concerns the fact that women have always only been allowed to enter the social arena *as* bodies: 'It is nothing new for *women* to return to the body – we have never got away from being identified with it' (p.76, Kappeler's emphasis).

The body has risen to prominence in theory at a time when postmodern relativism has severely problematized the identity of the human subject. Although the body does not solely constitute subjectivity, it is an important component of our perception of it. It is not the topic of this thesis specifically to debate the relationship between postmodernism and feminism but it is worth reflecting here on their tense association, especially with regard to theorizations of the body. As I discuss in Chapters Two, Three and Four, Carter's *New Eve*, Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* and Winterson's *Written on the Body* have been discussed in postmodern as well as feminist contexts. On the one hand, the insinuation of the body into contemporary theoretical discourse may be seen as a defence against postmodern relativism. Maud Ellmann forwards this kind of argument concerning a response to poststructuralism, yet her comments are also relevant when considered in relation to a wider postmodern relativity:

In criticism, the cult of the body has arisen in defense against poststructuralism, and especially against the fear that 'history' and 'real life' have been overlooked in favor of a dangerous Gallic fascination with the signifier. In this context the body has come to represent the last bastion of materiality: if history is nothing but a narrative, 'a tale like

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by E.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1973), p.301; trans. of *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

⁸ Susanne Kappeler, 'From Sexual Politics to Body Politics', *Trouble & Strife*, 29/30 (1994/95), 73-79, p.74.

any other too often heard,' and if the universe is merely an effect of rhetoric, the body seems to stand for an incontestable reality, a throbbing substance in a wilderness of signs.⁹

On the other hand, the materiality of the body is questioned in a postmodern body image such as the cyborg, which literalizes relativity in 'one' body, demonstrating how postmodernism can take into its *oeuvres* even the most 'incontestable reality'.¹⁰ While there are many kinds of feminism, most are uncomfortably partnered with postmodernism because of the former's insistence on the active promotion of women and on a politics of identity, rather than being content solely with destabilizing current orthodoxies, as is postmodernism.¹¹ Although feminists and postmodernists may share strategies for disruption, an unapologetic desire to make statements underpins these feminisms, statements that are not as polemical or totalizing as those from which postmodernists retract. In some ways, there is an unsettling permission-granting quality in postmodernism that, in spite of itself, assumes an overarching position from which to grant this permission. Postmodernism seems to describe and legitimate that which has already occurred, and is occurring, through the politically-motivated actions of identity-specific groups and movements, feminism and the Black civil rights movements, for example.

Postmodernism has not brought about the recognition of multiple voices but provides a description of the situation after the struggles of these groups. As I shall elaborate in Chapters Two and Three, I see Carter's *New Eve* and Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* as taking feminist

⁹ Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (London: Virago, 1993), pp.3-4. The quotation, 'tale like any other too often heard', is applied to Irish history in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 (1922)), p.21 (Ellmann, p.115, n.2). Subsequent references to Ellmann are to this work.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the cyborg's relationship to the postmodern see Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), pp.149-181.

¹¹ Linda Hutcheon forwards this distinction in 'Incredulity Toward Metanarrative: Negotiating Postmodernism and Feminisms', in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. by Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp.262-267. Subsequent references to Hutcheon and to Mezei are to these works. Hutcheon draws on Barbara Creed, 'From Here to Modernity: Feminism and Postmodernism', *Screen*, 28.2 (1987), 47-69.

trajectories rather than postmodern ones because each of them has the social realities of women's positions at their foundations. The politics of Winterson's *Written on the Body*, however, is much more ambivalent because the narrative voice authoritatively objectifies or reduces the bodies of other characters whilst keeping its own body concealed, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four. Winterson's strategy of the ambiguously-sexed narrator removes the restrictions of reduction to sexed bodies, which can be positive from a feminist perspective, but her representation of bodies in this novel somewhat undermines this feminist potential.

Albeit that the cyborg is the quintessential body image for the postmodern questioning of subjectivity, bodily boundaries themselves are inherently unstable and ambiguous. In 1966, the publication of Mary Douglas's anthropological and theoretical study, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, crystallized the symbolic function of bodily boundaries in societies.¹² Douglas refers to the physical body as a 'symbolic medium' (p.128), and indicates that when societal boundaries are threatened, physical bodily boundaries are elevated and secretions seen as pollutants (p.124). Pollutants, like dirt, are 'matter out of place' and indicative of disorder (p.35). However,

Though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power. (p.88)

Douglas's recognition of the body's symbolic resonance and the Dionysian power of the disorderly, ambiguously-bounded body finds its correlative in work in disparate academic fields. For instance, in literary criticism, Mikhail Bakhtin's influential discussion of the grotesque body portrays its 'brimming-over abundance' [*sic*] as 'something universal,

¹² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966). Subsequent references to Douglas are to this work.

representing all the people', with a 'positive, assertive character',¹³ 'always conceiving' (*Rabelais*, p.21). For Bakhtin, '[t]he grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming' (*Rabelais*, p.24). An 'indispensable trait' of the grotesque body is 'ambivalence' (*Rabelais*, p.24). Like Douglas's polluting body, Bakhtin's grotesque body 'exceeds its own limits' through its apertures and 'eating, drinking, or defecation' are some of the processes associated with this positive symbolic excess (*Rabelais*, p.26). Here Bakhtin indicates that the exchange between the body and the external world occurs in two directions: both intake and output are modes of relating to the world that destabilize the fixed liminality of the body. Douglas also discusses the increased sensitivity to food pollution that occurs when social boundaries are threatened and refers to the 'exits and entrances' of the body (p.124), supporting this aspect of Bakhtin's work on ingestion as part of the contraflow between the body and the world.

Strict regulations placed upon the body, however, are an attempt symbolically to stabilize perceived societal disorder. The classical body that Bakhtin contrasts with the grotesque body emphasizes containment and a fear of exchange. For Bakhtin, a ' "classic" aesthetics' is 'the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed' (*Rabelais*, p.25). Grotesque images 'are contrary to the classic image of the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development' (*Rabelais*, p.25). The 'cleansed', sanitized body is like Douglas's body that has its boundaries monitored for fear of pollution. However, Douglas's work does not indicate that excessive monitoring of bodily boundaries is necessarily imposed out of a desire to dominate but that, 'when rituals express anxiety about the body's orifices the sociological counterpart of this anxiety is a care to protect the political and cultural unity of a minority group' (p.124). Nevertheless, the fact that members indigenous to the group can enforce boundaries may at times be more ambiguous than Douglas's perception of protection

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.19. Subsequent references will be abbreviated to *Rabelais*.

suggests. For instance, women play a significant role in the surveillance and regulation of other women's bodies, as well as their own. Rather than being protective, this is instead suggestive of fear and subordination for the lengths that women go to in order to adhere to the regulations are frequently self-destructive, as the situation of the anorectic so acutely exaggerates.

The bodies of women in the west are not only monitored in terms of what enters and what exits the body. Although women's eating is checked and the specifically female excrescence of menstruation is high on the list of taboos, emphasis on bodily boundaries is literally made flesh in the preoccupation with their bodies' sizes and shapes. Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, has been influential for its clarification of precisely these issues.¹⁴ Her chapter, 'Reading the Slender Body', in particular, follows Douglas's trajectory but with specific relation to the contemporary emphasis on the slim female body as a symbol of cultural anxieties (pp.185-212). Bordo highlights an attempt to negate femininity in the current idealized body shape in the west, a shape that emphasizes a boyish androgyny, hard lines and control of any 'excess' flesh. The necessity to place the female body under such pressure, suggests Bordo, stems from the anxiety surrounding gender roles brought about by the increased opportunities for women in recent decades. Like Douglas, then, strict policing of bodily boundaries has been provoked by a period of perceived instability and threat. In this case, the threat is to the specifically patriarchal entrenchments of western societies. If women have been freed of some restrictions in terms of their roles, their bodies remain the scapegoats of a system that needs to maintain some control. The slender, androgynous female body cancels out the perceived power of the female body that has the potential to give birth; the width of hips and size of breasts, for example, are reduced in the idealized slender body. Rather than being mannish, however, this body is boyish, because the former would symbolize too much masculine power.

¹⁴ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

This idealized slender body is also forced to guard itself from appearing too ambiguous in terms of its gender. From the perspective of the social order, such an uncertainty is unsettling as it disrupts the binary gender categories. Freud suggests that the first observation we make when first meeting someone is whether they are a woman or a man.¹⁵ Both Carter's *New Eve* and Winterson's *Written on the Body*, discussed in Chapters Two and Four, respectively, address this gender anxiety forthrightly, Carter through the protagonist's enforced sex change and Winterson by withholding the sex of her novel's narrator. Further, a degree of gender ambiguity is present in the two other primary texts I discuss. In *Life-Size*, the anorexic protagonist's body is a morbid exaggeration of the goals set out for the androgynous female body and even in Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, the author effects a lesbianization of male as well as female figures, as I detail in Chapters Five and Two, respectively. Carter, Wittig and Winterson highlight the instabilities of the social construction of both sex and gender in their novels as well as challenging the role of the body in the formation of sex and gender.

Bakhtin's, Douglas's and Bordo's approaches therefore, although from very different fields of enquiry, all perceive the body as a symbol of society's anxieties. Before moving on to discuss specific ways of relating corporeality to textuality, it will be useful to consider one further theoretical approach to the body and its boundaries. This is the psychoanalytic criticism of Julia Kristeva. My thesis does not take a psychoanalytic approach but Kristeva's work on abjection has been informative in recording bodily boundaries not only as symbolic of social anxieties but also of the instability of the concept of the self.¹⁶ While the idea of the subject has been problematized in a postmodern climate, each of the primary texts that I discuss tackles this

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1964 (1933)), 22, pp.112-135, p.113. For analyses of the cultural significance of gender ambiguity, see Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, eds., *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1993; Routledge, 1992).

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); trans. of *Pouvoirs d'horreur* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1980).

question of subjectivity and its relationship to the body. Carter, in *New Eve*, explicitly coordinates a grotesque exaggeration of psychoanalytic discourse, especially through the character of the castrating 'Mother' and the artificial womb over which she presides. Psychoanalytic approaches and socio-cultural approaches to the body are not mutually exclusive. The novels that I examine are concerned with subjectivity as well as social construction, and indeed, social construction of subjectivity.

Kristeva's study of abjection is an examination of the psychosomatic aspect of bodily boundaries. She sees abjection as the fear and loathing of the threat of the ambivalent and indefinable:

A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (Powers, p.2)

Like Douglas and Bakhtin, Kristeva focuses on that which is problematic for bodily boundaries. As 'primers of [...] culture', the abject and abjection function to support social systems as well as holding psychological significance. Kristeva's focus on excretions and ingestions further recalls the work of Bakhtin and Douglas. For example, she writes, '[f]ood loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection' (Powers, p.2). In addition, bodily waste is a threat: 'Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver' (Powers, p.3). However, Kristeva critiques Douglas and others' anthropological approaches, stating that her own reflections,

Make their way through anthropological domains and analyses in order to aim at a deep psycho-symbolic economy: the general, logical determination that underlies

anthropological variants (social structures, marriage rules, religious rites) and evinces a specific economy of the speaking subject, no matter what its historical manifestations may be. (Powers, p.68)

This evocation of ‘general, logical determination’ and ‘no matter what its historical manifestations’ is precisely the kind of talk that incenses Wittig and has her distance herself so vehemently from psychoanalytic theorists. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter Three, in *The Lesbian Body* Wittig depicts a society where identities are ever-changing according to the circumstances in which the subjects find themselves. Nevertheless, this very fluidity becomes a defining feature of the first-person narration in Wittig’s text, a consistent undercurrent like the fluidity of the postmodern. But *The Lesbian Body* is not wholly postmodern because it does formulate an identity that suggests a specific lesbian subjectivity, albeit inscribed with fluidity.

Each of these approaches to the body, be they socially orientated or psychosomatic, recognizes the body as unstable and fluid. Ellmann’s body’s ‘incontestable reality’ and ‘throbbing substan[tiality]’ is questioned if the body is seen as itself a sign, a product of discourse or by the fact that the very boundaries of the substance are permeable. Any approach to corporeality and textuality must take account of the instability of the body and its contentious status.

Textualizing the Body

We have seen above that the body can be ‘read’, as Bordo puts it, and act as a signifier or symbol. In the hysteric or anorectic, this is particularly foregrounded not only in the numerous theorizations about the figures but also in the fact that these figures are generally taken to have turned their bodies into narratives, to say with their bodies what they cannot say with their

voices.¹⁷ Here we encounter the idea of the substitution of a body for language. A different way of looking at bodies and language is to examine bodies as producing language, which Cixous's *écriture féminine* attempts to approximate.¹⁸ But if, as Wittig argues, the category of sex as well as gender is a social construction that upholds the heterosexual economy, then any attempt to reproduce a specifically 'feminine' writing is exposed as supporting this binary system. In one of the clearest practical analyses questioning whether there is a difference in writing between women and men, Sara Mills demonstrates that any perceived distinction is much more likely to stem from cultural stereotypes rather than an innate difference.¹⁹ Of course, this does not preclude the fact that women themselves might be influenced by those very stereotypes in their writing. Rather than looking at sex differences that elucidate cultural differentials, more convincing in this field of work on bodies emitting narratives is Michael Holquist's article, 'From Body-Talk to Biography: The Chronobiological Bases of Narrative'.²⁰ Whilst Holquist has 'no quarrel with' viewing 'bodies as signs for something else', he queries whether our contemporary 'obsession' with this approach occludes other equally productive ways of viewing the body (p.2). In this article, the author teases out the cyclical time of the internal systems of the body, which he sees as underpinning narrative since,

Time, not language as such, is the fundamental category of narrative [...]. Bodies are even more various than types of narrative, yet they are all ordered according to cycles of internal activity in respiratory, nervous, alimentary and other systems. (p.32)

¹⁷ See Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for our Age*, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1993), p.83. Subsequent references to Orbach are to this work.

¹⁸ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996); trans. of *La jeune née* (Paris: Générale d'Éditions, 1986).

¹⁹ Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.44-65. Subsequent references to Mills are to this work.

²⁰ Michael Holquist, 'From Body-Talk to Biography: The Chronobiological Bases of Narrative', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 3.1 (1989), 1-35. Subsequent references to Holquist are to this article.

This, then, might be one of the compositional similarities between bodies that I referred to earlier in this introduction. The transhistorical and transcultural implications of Holquist's observations do not cancel out historical or cultural variants, however. His view of the body acknowledges that the way we conceptualize both time and the biology of the body differs but that our interpretation of these ideas does not alter the actual biological processes of the body. Instead, the stasis-and-change trajectory that Holquist discusses in the systems of the body and in the plots of narratives can be enlarged to embrace elements of stasis-and-change between narratives of different historical periods and cultures. This pathway is discernible in my discussion of intertextuality and metamorphosis in Carter's *New Eve*, in Chapter Two of this thesis. I demonstrate how Carter employs the intertextual metamorph, Tiresias, in a manner that simultaneously maintains yet develops its identity for a different context.

Bodies 'in' narratives, however, are rather different from bodies 'in' the real world that produce narratives or are perceived as signs, predominantly with regard to their ambiguous materiality. This is because bodies in literature are formulated by language and are as chimerical as any other matter evoked in literature. An embodied narrator in a novel, for instance, epitomizes Butler's query of whether there is any body outside of discourse. This type of body, whose existence is problematic, is a representation of a speaking body as well as subject to readings as a symbol or sign. Bodies' very 'presence' *in* literature posits all of these concerns which, nevertheless, often go unspoken. Theories of the body in literature often treat the body as an object without problematizing its relation to the text. For example, both Peter Brooks and Elisabeth Bronfen focus on bodies as objects in narratives.²¹ Examining bodies *in* narratives is also the predominant approach of the essays in Avril Horner and Angela Keane's collection, *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality*, in which none of the contributors

²¹ Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Subsequent references to Brooks are to this work. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

tackles the question of 'textuality' in terms of narrative or style.²² And in articles by Robyn Warhol and Laura Doyle, bodies are seen as spatialized objects moving around within novels.²³ Warhol examines the body's relation to the gaze and Doyle focuses on the body as extending itself in relation to other objects, following the philosophical work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

It is critical work focusing on unusual bodies that comes closest to forwarding a relationship between bodies and their respective texts. For example, the fragmented body in texts has been discussed as the epitome of nineteenth-century fantastic literature's embrace of uncertainty,²⁴ of nineteenth-century realist literature's desire to record every component in order to totalize,²⁵ and of postmodernist literature's fragmentation of identity.²⁶ Whilst these observations correlate the bodies and texts as part of overarching ideologies, the correlation lies largely on the level of analogy. The question I ask of the primary texts that I discuss is whether there is any way of viewing this relationship between the bodies within texts and the texts in which they are represented beyond analogy or metaphor. More specifically, I look at whether the bodies can in any way be seen to influence the stylistic choices of the narratives. Daniel Punday is the only critic of whom I am aware even to raise the possibility of bodies within texts having an influence upon narratives representing them. In his article, 'A Corporeal Narratology?', he writes that we have, 'difficulty explaining how the objects represented shape the narratives that represent them. The human body, consequently, has rarely been studied as a narratological object'.²⁷ Punday suggests a model of analysing the body in narrative that

²² Avril Horner and Angela Keane, eds., *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

²³ Robyn Warhol, 'The Look, the Body, and the Heroine of *Persuasion*: A Feminist-Narratological View of Jane Austen', in *Ambiguous Discourse*, ed. by Mezei, pp.21-39. Subsequent references to Warhol are to this article. Laura Doyle, '“These Emotions of the Body”': Intercorporeal Narrative in *To the Lighthouse*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 40.1 (1994), 42-71.

²⁴ Deborah A. Harter, *Bodies in Pieces: Fantastic Narrative and the Poetics of the Fragment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). Subsequent references to Harter are to this work.

²⁵ Elana Gomel, 'The Body of Parts: Dickens and the Poetics of Synecdoche', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 26.1 (1996). Subsequent references to Gomel are to this work

²⁶ Roberta Rubenstein, 'Fragmented Bodies/Selves/Narratives: Margaret Drabble's Postmodern Turn', *Contemporary Literature*, 35.1 (1994), 136-155.

²⁷ Daniel Punday, 'A Corporeal Narratology?', *Style*, 34.2 (2000), 227-242.

privileges touch rather than sight or spatialization but although he discusses the implications for narratology, he fails to engage with a wider ideological significance.

Plainly, there are ideological implications. If an author can foster the illusion, and it is obviously always an illusion, of a body that has influence on the very language that creates it in the microcosm of the novel, we come close to an unbounded body that possesses revolutionary potential, a 'grotesque' body. But if the body appears to be controlled by its narrative, the body remains objectified, closed, 'classical'. To take a case in point, in Peter Brooks's discussion of the detached third-person realist narrative of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, he suggests that the narrative voice withholds information about Emma Bovary's physicality whilst concentrating on body parts and clothing (Brooks, pp.88-96). In my discussion of *Written on the Body*, in Chapter Four, I examine how Winterson's first-person narrator also withholds information about its corporeality, and not just its sex, and how the narrative enacts an authoritative control of other bodies in the text, too. There is thus a surprising authoritative undercurrent to Winterson's text, surprising because the novel is often spoken of in relation to postmodernism. However, this could be further evidence of the permission-granting trait of postmodernism that I discussed above. Flaubert and Winterson simultaneously uphold and thwart specular views of the bodies in their texts. Privileging vision, they pare down the bodies to produce concealed ones rather than ambiguously-bounded ones. Winterson's hidden body is not like an elusive or ghostly body of fantastic fiction, however, because there is no tension, diegetically, between whether it is real or imaginary. By contrast, the fantastic 'occupies the duration' of this uncertainty.²⁸ Carter, Wittig and Shute explore the potential of ambiguously-bounded bodies far more fully in their texts.

That there is not always a correlative between the threatening ideology of ambiguously-bounded bodies and their texts is made explicit in that unusual bodies are probably most popular

²⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), trans. of *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970) p.25.

in genre fiction. Science fiction, fantasy and detective fiction do make important contributions to ideas about the body but their challenging corporeal representations are not necessarily brought to bear on narrative form. Despite interventions in the traditions of these genres, from feminist authors for example, an adherence to certain aspects of form is expected, indeed definitive. Thus, in examining these texts by Carter, Wittig, Winterson and Shute, I do not intend to propose an overarching schema that is applicable to all texts. In choosing texts that represent a range of unusual bodies and that also experiment with narrative and stylistic conventions, I am attempting to address the relationship between the *type* of body and the form of these particular texts.

The way that I approach this question is by means of a close analysis of specific features of the bodies and the stylistics of the texts. The kind of close textual interrogation that I perform is as currently unpopular in literary criticism as 'the body' is popular. There is a hypersensitive retraction from the discussion of almost any element of form or a close reading discernible at present for fear of being labelled 'formalist', which has in many circles become a synonym for 'naïve'. Yet two rather different schools of thought have helped to raise and legitimate the profile of studying the ideological, political and cultural functions of language operating in novels. The first is the invigoration of interest in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. In 'Discourse in the Novel', in particular, Bakhtin illustrates that the novel is a battleground, not just the body, through his identification of heteroglossia, polyphony and dialogism.²⁹ Secondly, from a feminist perspective, Susan Lanser and Kathy Mezei have helped to excavate the gender politics of narratology.³⁰ Ideological implicatures of narratological and stylistic choices are

²⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp.259-422. The slogan, 'Your body is a battleground' first appeared on Barbara Kruger's poster advocating women's reproductive rights. The poster is depicted in Bordo's *Unbearable Weight*, p.264.

³⁰ Susan Lanser is credited as the first critic to raise the question of a relationship between narratology and feminism in her article, 'Toward a Feminist Narratology', *Style*, 20.3 (1986), 341-363. Kathy Mezei's *Ambiguous Discourse* is a collection of essays that integrates feminism and narratology and her

highly significant in their cultural contexts. They interrogate and reformulate a nexus between aesthetics and politics, a nexus at which the female body is also to be found.

I begin my investigation into the relationship between corporeality and textuality, in Chapter Two, with a discussion of the transsexual metamorph of Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*. A metamorphic figure is particularly interesting from the perspective of textual relationships because it is not only subject to metaphorical or symbolic readings, but is also a purely fictional body; having no literal correlatives in the 'real' world, its representation calls to mind fictional antecedents. In this chapter, 'Morphing Bodies, Morphing Texts: Angela Carter's Re-visions', I ask whether the metamorphic figure might therefore possess a special relationship to intertextuality and whether the significance of change through time that is present in the metamorphic figure resonates in the revisionary potential of intertextual references. My approach to intertextuality, rather than being a simple citation of sources, is in line with Kristeva's idea of 'transposition', which suggests that texts can incorporate and transform material in a manner that effects an altered subject position.³¹ In comparisons with its intertexts, I explore how Carter treats the body of the transsexual metamorph as ambiguously-bounded.

By comparison with *New Eve*, Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* makes Carter's extraordinary novel appear relatively conservative in terms of narrative style and the bodies depicted. The bodies in Wittig's text undergo a rapid succession of metamorphoses, fragmentations and conjugations that explore and explode any idea of bounded bodies. These innovative corporeal representations are effected by a text that equally challenges the boundaries of the 'novel' genre in features such as its segmentation, incorporation of lists of medical terminology, changes in typography, destabilization of concepts of character, narrative

introduction to the volume is a useful contextualization of the field of enquiry (pp.1-20). See also *Tessera*, 7 (1989), entitled 'Toward Feminist Narratology', for critical and fictional explorations.

³¹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); trans. of *La révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974), pp.59-60.

and plot. In Chapter Three, ‘“XX+XX=XX”: Monique Wittig’s Reproduction of the Monstrous Lesbian’, I examine how Wittig redefines the concept of ‘lesbian’ and her project of ‘lesbianization’, both in her critical writings and in *The Lesbian Body*. I ask whether *The Lesbian Body*’s stridency creates a dogmatic textual politics or whether an openness to dialogue can be discerned. To ascertain this, I look at the relationships between the protagonists as expressed through their bodies and the structure of the textual segments and I also explore how Wittig employs the wider discourses of medicine and religion.

As I indicate in Chapter Four, ‘Reading the Ambiguously-Gendered Body as Jeanette Winterson Writes It’, some textual similarities between Wittig’s *The Lesbian Body* and Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body* have inevitably led to comparisons between the two texts. Of the primary texts that I examine, the very title of *Written on the Body* suggests that this novel addresses the relationship between corporeality and textuality most overtly. The text is notable for withholding the sex of the first-person narrator but I investigate the implications this has on the representation of the corporeality of the character. Can we conceive of a body of which we do not know the sex and how does Winterson represent this in her fiction? I query whether the text is as radical in its bodily representations as it is in destabilizing narrative expectations. Because the novel is populated by many other characters who are sexed, I also examine the ways in which their bodies are represented to see how they contrast with that of the narrator and question whether the different modes of representation form a hierarchical relationship or one of exchange.

Jenefer Shute’s *Life-Size*, which I discuss in Chapter Five, ‘Being *Life-Size*: Jenefer Shute Diets with Words’, is rather different from the texts I consider in the preceding chapters because it is not explicitly about the construction of sex or gender and, although fictional, it concerns a body that is all too familiar from the ‘real world’, an anorexic body. Rather than celebrating ambiguous boundaries, the protagonist of this text pares down her bodily boundaries and monitors her body’s intake. I explore whether the disordered relationship that the character

has in relation to her body affects the language employed, both diegetically and on the level of narrative, since Shute's novel portrays a body and a text that have both been fashioned from the subjective perspective of the central protagonist. The text is predominantly an internal monologue interspersed with extracts from diet books and from questionnaires which, with varying degrees, are infiltrated by and infiltrate the narrator's voice. I consider how this somewhat unwieldy text seems to render the anorectic's voice so accurately, whilst paradoxically she is obsessed with control.

The relationship of embodiment to subjectivity and agency is illuminated in my discussions of these texts, particularly because the texts represent unusual bodies in the first-person, from the perspective of the disorderly bodies. The authors' questioning of whether there is a connection between sex, gender and embodiment in their work makes investigating the corporeal-textual politics of ambiguously-bounded bodies fruitful in unearthing the types of feminisms, or otherwise, presented by the novels. A narrative that demonstrates the process of transformation from one type of sexed or gendered body to another, Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, is a fitting place to begin considering these questions.

CHAPTER TWO

Morphing Bodies, Morphing Texts: Angela Carter's Re-visions

The central protagonist of Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* undergoes a corporeal reconfiguration from a male to a female body, nominally from Evelyn to Eve. It may appear oblique to begin a discussion about Eve(lyn) in relation to metamorphosis, a form of corporeal transformation that does not exclude debates concerning gender but that does not emphasize them either.³² Nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate that highlighting the 'metamorphic' properties of the character illuminates aspects of textual revision that in turn have a bearing on the politics, gender and otherwise, of the novel.

Metamorphosis is a fitting motif with which to begin considering the relationship between corporeality and textuality because it is both emphatically corporeal and predominantly fictional. It is an event which produces a corporeal reconfiguration of a particular character diegetically, yet the reconfiguration can also work on an intertextual level by revising a metamorphic figure that has been employed in prior texts.³³ Indeed, metamorphosis has such an established literary tradition that it is difficult to see the metamorphic figure without evoking comparisons and contrasts with its textual precedents. The figure is almost *de facto* intertextual.

Even more palpably, Carter's works are inherently intertextual compositions.³⁴ This is manifest both by the copious number of specific literary sources upon which the author draws as well as the overarching discourses alluded to by her texts, particularly debates

³² Throughout this chapter, I use the name 'Eve(lyn)' and gender inclusive pronouns ('s/he' and 'her/his', for example) to refer to the central protagonist except when alluding to the character's specific 'maleness' pre-metamorphosis. My reasons for this choice will become apparent in the course of my argument, that the metamorphosis allows for a continuation of identity rather than a straightforward replacement of a male with a female character.

³³ For a discussion of metamorphosis and transformative textuality, see Kai Mikkonen's 'Theories of Metamorphosis: From Metatropé to Textual Revision', *Style*, 30.2 (1996), 309-340. Subsequent references are to this article. Mikkonen does not make reference to the significance of the corporeal emphasis of metamorphosis, which I want to explore here. Even if the figure is transformed into an incorporeal being, in the case of Echo for example, the defining feature of metamorphosis remains a change in corporeal status.

³⁴ Linden Peach has rightly suggested of Carter that 'intertextuality becomes a boldly thematised part of her work'. Linden Peach, *Angela Carter* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p.4.

concerning gender. For Carter's work exhibits a broad understanding of intertextuality, along Kristevan principles of the 'transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another' (*Revolution*, pp.59-60, parentheses Kristeva's). This does not necessarily insist that the transferred material originate from the same medium as that of its new context but that it may undergo a physical transformation of its own:

The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material; in language, for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials: the transposition from a carnival scene to the written text, for instance. In this connection we examined the formation of a specific signifying system – the novel – as the result of a redistribution of several different sign systems: carnival, courtly poetry, scholastic discourse. (*Revolution*, p.59)

Such an understanding of intertextuality releases us from what Kristeva terms 'has often been misunderstood in the banal sense of "study of sources"' (*Revolution*, p.60). This facilitates a close analysis of texts simultaneously with the social and cultural concerns with which they engage. In *New Eve*, as in much of her work, Carter incorporates a wealth of specific pre-existing literary characters, which become crossbred with figures from psychoanalytic theory and history. However, she also transposes the metanarratives which devotees of both postmodernity and feminism, to different ends, have diligently destabilized, including stories of gender relations and storytelling itself.

The effect is the repositioning of a speaking subject. For Kristeva, 'the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality' (*Revolution*, p.60), the thetic being the threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic where the subject is constituted through positing (*Revolution*, pp.43-45). What is interesting about this aspect of Kristevan theory for my purposes here is its assertive empowerment of 'transposition' (her preferred substitute for 'intertextuality' to avoid the latter's reductive connotations (*Revolution*, p.60)), wherein the

process unequivocally activates a positional reconstitution of the subject who speaks. There appears to be no scope for remaining in the same location if one's speech encapsulates transposition as Kristeva describes it.³⁵ In this respect, *New Eve's* highly intertextual composition is predisposed to revision of its speaking subject's position, even were the novel not diegetically *about* an altering of the central protagonist's subject position by means of metamorphosis.

The novel has been criticized, however, for not repositioning a subject but instead for ambulating through contemporaneous debates regarding androgyny, bisexuality and essentialism indecisively. For example, Roberta Rubenstein concludes that the new Eve remains trapped in and defined by the framework of dominance and submission.³⁶ A search for a feminist paragon in the persona of Eve is thwarted by Carter's rebuttal of any form of didacticism: 'I try, when I write fiction [...] to present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and to leave the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions'.³⁷ Rubenstein's construction of the fiction of *New Eve* is negative largely because of its insensitivity to Carter's emphasis on processes rather than end points. Carter illuminates these processes by virtue of the ongoing metamorphosis and socialization of the central character as well as presenting the reader with an essential role in the creative dynamic – 'reading is just as creative an activity as writing' ('Front Line', p.24). In this way, *New Eve* resists replacing the old patriarchal myth of Woman with a new feminist myth of Woman because to do so would be reductive and dictatorial. In 'Notes from the Front Line', Carter adamantly distances herself from 'bourgeois fiction' that functions 'to teach people how to behave in social circles to which they think they may be able to aspire'

³⁵ My comparison of *New Eve* with T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' toward the end of this chapter will interrogate this idea further.

³⁶ Roberta Rubenstein, 'Intersexions: Gender Metamorphosis in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Lois Gould's *A Sea-Change*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 12.1 (1993), 103-118, p.116. The article's focus is gender and the term 'metamorphosis' is not closely interrogated despite the title's suggestiveness.

³⁷ Angela Carter, 'Notes from the Front Line' in *Critical Essays on Angela Carter*, ed. by Lindsey Tucker (New York: G.K.Hall, 1998), pp.24-30, p.24. Essay reprinted from *On Gender and Writing*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983), pp.69-77. Subsequent page references to 'Notes' are to Tucker's collection and subsequent references to Tucker are to this collection.

(p.29). In this frame she places both Jane Austen's 'fictionalised etiquette lessons and a lot of the fiction that has come directly from the Women's Movement', stating that 'Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* is really an instruction manual for the older woman post-graduate student' ('Front Line', p.29). Rather, Carter aims to highlight the damaging cumulative effect of myth repetition in *New Eve*, her 'one anti-mythic novel' ('Front Line', p.25). Instead of modelling her fiction as 'an instruction manual' to be mimetically adhered to, Carter attempts to create a turbulent effect by 'transforming actual fictional forms to both reflect and to precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves' ('Front Line', p.29).

In Carter's insistence on the transformative power of (inter)textual form, we can perceive an empathy with the Kristevan speaking subject who becomes resituated as a result of transposition. *New Eve* self-consciously succeeds in putting the author's 'new wine in old bottles' ('Front Line', p.29), by taking the devices of the metamorphic figure and path-of-life narrative and blasphemously inserting into this framework a feminist awareness in the form of a de Beauvoirian manufactured woman. The Tiresias figure that results collides the idea of woman as made-not-born with literary precedents such as the totemic modernist text, Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and the epitomic metamorphoses text, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Transsexuality and Metamorphosis

Whilst narratives of transsexuality shadow *New Eve*, the novel's differences from such narratives are illuminating and lead to a view of Eve(lyn) as a metamorphic figure. Carter adopts nothing so realist as a customary transsexual trajectory to critique sex and gender construction but instead envelops the topic in the fantastic and dystopic climate of an apocalyptic America. The subject who has undergone metamorphosis against their will, like Eve(lyn), does find an analogy in that of the pre-operative, extra-fictional transsexual in terms of the levels of corporeal dysphoria. Kafka's Gregor Samsa is an example of this type

of corporeal alienation after his transformation into an insect.³⁸ However, a central difference lies in agency, for the enforced metamorphosed subject experiences dysphoria after alteration whereas the by-choice transsexual has these feelings before the realignment of sex with their subjectivity.³⁹ The new Eve's response to seeing her/his completed female body for the first time makes clear the sensation of a split between a speaking, thinking consciousness and its physical embodiment:

When I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself. (p.74)

Eve(lyn)'s psyche is previously fully formed and is at one with a definitively corporeal and sexed masculinity which persists: 'the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself' (p.75). Jay Prosser notes the predominance of mirror scenes in transsexual autobiographies and his own description of the prospective transsexual's experience makes use of mirror imagery similar to that of *New Eve* to portray the gap between self-perception and material reality:

The transsexual autobiographer sees in the mirror an/other, a body/face that is not me, not the gender I imagine myself to be/already am: the mirror thus lies about my gender. In altering my body, I correct the mirror image, project the truthful image of who I am.⁴⁰

Eve(lyn), therefore, experiences similar feelings but in a reverse timescale to that of the transsexual and more akin to an enforced metamorphosed subject. Although levels of

³⁸ Franz Kafka, 'Metamorphosis' in *The Complete Stories*, ed. by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1983).

³⁹ Obviously, the transsexual subject and the metamorphosed subject are not alone in experiencing corporeal dysphoria but are rather extreme instances of the phenomenon.

⁴⁰ Jay Prosser, 'No Place Like Home: The Transgendered Narrative of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 41.3-4 (1995), 483-514, p.497. Subsequent references to Prosser are to this article. Prosser focuses on a fictional autobiography in this article but relates it to non-fictional autobiographies.

dysphoria may persist during the transsexual process,⁴¹ Prosser notes that '[t]ranssexual subjects themselves have traditionally figured their transition as a final going home', and the subtitle of Nancy Hunt's autobiography implies a journey with an ending: *The Odyssey of a Male-to-Female Transsexual* (Prosser, pp.488-9).⁴² The sense of a definitive point at which the transition is complete, and subjectivity is aligned with corporeality, is corroborated in the autobiographies discussed by Sandy Stone in 'The *Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*'.⁴³

By contrast, the sense of an ending is much more ambivalent in an enforced metamorphosed subject for the subjectivity might never be aligned with the new corporeality.⁴⁴ There is, moreover, the possibility of further 'surprise' metamorphoses beyond the control of the subject. If the narrative journey and the corporeal journey are coterminous in transsexual autobiographies – and Prosser has noted that the autobiographies usually end at the point of realignment – there is the strong implication at the end of *New Eve* that Eve(lyn) will continue to encounter adventures in a similar picaresque manner to those we have witnessed within the novel's diegesis and that her/his body is not finitely stable. The character has notably already travelled *through* two very Freudian 'homes', the

⁴¹ As Jay Prosser notes of the period of transsexual transition, '[t]he subjective experience of this period [...] is quite different from the way in which queer theory translates it into discourse. In their transsexual autobiographies, Jan Morris describes this "precarious condition" as a time when she was "a kind of nonhuman, a sprite or monster"; Katherine Cummings, as a time when she had no name as she "was living a totally secret existence and did not need a name"'. Prosser (p.489) quotes from Jan Morris, *Conundrum: An Extraordinary Narrative of Transsexualism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1986), p.110 and p.114, and Katherine Cummings, *Katherine's Diary: The Story of a Transsexual* (Port Melbourne, Australia: William Heinemann, 1992), p.xi.

⁴² The full title exploits the utility of the mirror also: Nancy Hunt, *Mirror Image: The Odyssey of a Male-to-Female Transsexual* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978).

⁴³ Sandy Stone, 'The *Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*' in *Body Guards*, ed. by Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, pp.280-304, pp. 286-287. Subsequent references to Stone are to this article. Although the sense of an ending is paramount in these autobiographies, there are, inevitably, transsexuals who fall outwith this schema. For example, Lisa Tuttle refers to a three-times transsexual who appeared on the *Phil Donahue Show* in 1992, having changed from female to male, male to female and female to male again, in the introduction to *Crossing the Border: Tales of Erotic Ambiguity*, ed. by Lisa Tuttle (London: Indigo, 1998), p.10.

⁴⁴ Lisa Tuttle has observed that use of metamorphosis to explore different ways of being is one of the reasons for its popularity with women science-fiction writers recently, whose plots tend to begin with metamorphosis rather than feature it as an end point as occurs in the guilt-punishment trajectory of Ovid, for example. Lisa Tuttle, 'Pets and Monsters: Metamorphoses in Recent Science Fiction', in *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction*, ed. by Lucie Armitt (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.97-108, p.99.

symbolic wombs of Beulah and the cave in California, most definitely not places of domicile but of rebirth as the experience in the Californian cave clearly indicates:

I have come home.

The destination of all journeys is their beginning.

I have not come home.

I emitted, at last, a single, frail, inconsolable cry like that of a new-born child.

(p.186)

Whilst the transsexual might be said to experience a kind of final rebirth with the realignment of their sex and gender, the end of their journey is the goal. Pointedly, Eve(lyn)'s journey does not end for as the narrative closes s/he sets sail from the Californian coastline 'to the place of birth' (p.191), or as Carter has more sardonically and bathetically described it elsewhere, roughly in the direction of the Philippines.⁴⁵

The place of birth to which Eve(lyn) is heading is ambiguous on several points. Significantly, it is unclear who or what is to be born – another rebirth for Eve(lyn) or the birth of a child by Tristessa. Either Eve(lyn)'s rebirth or a pregnancy would indicate that the corporeal journey as well as the geographical one is to be continued but there are important questions of agency raised here. For it is Mother and Lilith who imply the pregnancy, not Eve(lyn). Mother and Lilith attempt to continue to impose Eve(lyn)'s future upon her/him by invoking the pregnancy as fact through their speech and thoughts. Lilith is the first to raise the question and then factualize it: “What if Tristessa made you pregnant?” she said. “Your baby *will* have two fathers and two mothers” (p.187, my emphasis). Mother later refers to Eve(lyn)'s 'little passenger' (p.190). After Lilith starts to make plans for Eve(lyn) under the assumption that the pregnancy is factual, Eve(lyn) neither confirms

⁴⁵ Angela Carter interviewed by Lisa Appignanesi, *Writers in Conversation* (ICA video, 1987).

nor denies the suspicion and initially almost passively accepts it as true: 'Lilith, then, took it for granted that I was pregnant' (p.187).⁴⁶

Notably, Eve(lyn) does not see the implied imposition of the pregnancy as further punishment, which is a markedly altered response to that of the loss of agency prior to the metamorphosis. At that time, the male Evelyn turned to the logic of guilt and punishment in a quest for self-definition:

The matriarchs, I surmised, had captured me; and they perceived me as a criminal since they did not organise the world on the same terms as I did [...]. I knew I was a criminal because I was imprisoned, although I knew of no crime which I had committed. But as soon as I defined my own status, I was a little comforted.

(p.53)

Carter, therefore, might be seen as aligning this logic, found in both the transsexual experience and the metamorphic one, with a masculine and realist trajectory anachronistic to the fantastic matriarchal society within which Evelyn finds himself.⁴⁷ His attempt to regain some agency through self-definition operates as a kind of 'thought-act', a correlative of Lilith's 'thought-act' which determines Eve(lyn) as pregnant. It is the beginning of the defamiliarization process for the male Evelyn, prefiguring the metamorphosis and falling within a tradition whereby metamorphosis forms a punishment for a crime or sin committed, like that of Tiresias. When he realizes that he is to be transformed into a woman and

⁴⁶ The narrator has indicated Eve(lyn)'s pregnancy earlier in the text (p.142 and p.148) but the fact that Mother and Lilith impose their assumptions, negating Eve(lyn)'s agency, remains pertinent.

⁴⁷ Eve(lyn)'s sense of guilt is another interesting contrast to that experienced by transsexuals which demonstrates a reversed timescale. He senses he ought to feel guilty but does not do so because he cannot see what he has done wrong, though his awareness of his misogyny alters after the metamorphosis. Meanwhile, transsexuals from an early age often feel they have done something wrong when they have not: '[No] ACT was committed – they've *done* nothing wrong. They are fundamentally guilty of BEING, guilty of being the way they are. It seems, therefore, in the final analysis, one might call this an existential guilt resulting from an existential "crime" (the self perceived crime of existence)', Leah Cahan Schaefer and Connie Christine Wheeler, 'Guilt and Cross Gender Identity Conditions: Understanding, Recognizing, Diagnosing, and Its Treatments', unpublished essay, 1992, pp. 5-6, cited in Jay Prosser, p. 511, n.9, emphasis and parentheses in Prosser.

impregnated with his own sperm, Evelyn's soliciting of the guilt-punishment line is exacerbated by one of the Beulah women, Sophia, for he is given a vocal punishment:

When I asked her [...] of what crime I had been guilty to deserve such a punishment, she answered me, with a voice like a slap in the face:

'Is it such a bad thing to become like me?' (p.68)

In Lilith's invocation of the pregnancy and Sophia's stern reprimand, the incantatory power of the vocal, its neo-physical effect, is suggested. These examples shadow the corporeal inscription of agency-loss and concretization of Mother's ideology upon Eve(lyn) through surgery.

There is a suggestion that the present narrative voice, the retrospective Eve(lyn), has revised the notion of the change as a punishment:

I felt I scarcely deserved [Sophia's] rare, stern compassion for I guessed that somewhere, in the darkness and confusion of the city, I had transgressed and now I must be punished for it.

But, then, why *should I have thought* it was a punishment to be transformed into a woman?

Sophia may have been sorry to see my pain but she never pitied me because she knew I *felt* that I was being punished. (p.74, my emphases)

This passage produces a narratological disorientation analogous to that experienced by the character precisely at the moment in the diegesis when s/he goes through the process of change. These subtle manipulations of tense result in a diffusion of the unity of time and space, which prefigures the narrator's self-description late in the novel as an 'interrupted continuum' (p.167). The question here takes us into the present in which the narrative voice is located: why I should have thought it *then* is implied, which concomitantly evokes a *now*. Meanwhile, the evocation of this narrator's present contrasts with the use of the present tense immediately preceding, '*now* I must be punished', which itself removes us from the

predominantly past-tense narrative. Whilst all retrospective narratives infer two times and spaces for the present, that is the chronotope of narration and of that which is narrated, this quotation juxtaposes these 'presents'. In this way, first-person retrospective narration through the metamorphosed subject can be seen not only as a trope for the focalizer's existence in the tensile space between past and present identities but also as a trope which permits the mechanics of textual revision to be seen.

When the retrospective narrative voice evident in this passage is contrasted with that of the passage where Eve(lyn) first sees her/his new female body in the mirror, that I discussed above (*New Eve*, p.74), it appears that the masculine-associated patterns of thought have dissipated over time. However, this does not lead to an embracement of New Eve's femininity, either. For instance, the suggestion (imposition by Lilith and Mother) of maternity at the novel's close needs to be seen in the light of Carter's destruction of the myth of the maternal in the figure of Mother. This makes any stereotypical suggestion of the New Eve as a complete female when and if s/he gives birth negligible. Instead, the binaries of male and female are refuted in the final scenes of the novel, aided subtly and effectively by the placement of the paragraphs discussing Eve(lyn)'s pregnancy and her/his rejection of her/his male former genitals. For, over the course of little more than a page, a dialectic oscillation is set up between Eve(lyn)'s male and female experiences, projected as options for the future by Lilith. It is when Eve(lyn) is reborn from the cave as the '[s]peleological apotheosis of Tiresias' (p.186), that Lilith first raises the question of Eve(lyn)'s pregnancy and the hypothetical child's uniquely gendered parentage, the baby having two fathers and two mothers (p.187). Immediately subsequent to this highlighting of Eve(lyn)'s duality, and the suggestion that paternity and maternity are not necessarily linked to biology, follows Lilith's offer to Eve(lyn) of her/his male former genitals, a literalized symbol that reinscribes the essentialism of sexed identities once more. Therefore, the choices offered by Lilith are ultimately reduced to Eve(lyn)'s becoming a male again or concretizing her/his femaleness by virtue of having a baby. The promise of a combined identity in Lilith's initial posing of the parenting question seems to be lost. Eve(lyn)'s

response to this imposition of the binaries is to free her/himself from it, and to begin to think of another way to continue her/his own journey beyond the dictates of Lilith: 'She gave me my exile, since I did not want my old self back; as soon as I realised this, I began to wonder if I might not in some way escape' (p.188). Rather than finality of sex, gender, corporeality or geographical destination, Eve(lyn)'s tale closes on a note of continued regeneration. The birth-death-birth cycle is reinforced by the imagery of Eve(lyn)'s travelling to 'the place of birth' in the vessel intended as her/his own mother's 'coffin' (p.189).

The suggestion of regenerative possibilities is, then, a significant departure from a transsexual narrative that leads toward a fixed end point and corporeal state. The transsexual's corporeal journey reinscribes the binaries of male and female, whereas *New Eve's* trajectory suggests other possibilities. For whilst proving that biological sex is not destiny because of the sex dysphoria and the fact that sex can be altered, the transsexual experience paradoxically substantiates the dependence of gendered identity upon biological sex by virtue of undergoing a realignment procedure.⁴⁸ This leads Prosser to suggest, nonjudgementally, that transsexuals are bound up in essentialism, conflicting with Judith Halberstam's elevation of transsexuals as emblems of postmodern fluid embodiment.⁴⁹

Instead, fluid embodiment might better be captured in the metamorphosed subject, which has inscribed into its corporeality a capacity for multiple changes, not an either/or

⁴⁸ Interestingly, Sandy Stone has observed that '[i]n current medical discourse, sex is taken as a natural physical fact and cannot be changed', and subsequently '[g]ender reassignment is the correct disciplinary term' (p.300, n.20, my emphasis). Medical discourse rather paradoxically thus obliterates the very concept of a *trans-sexual* whilst the practice of surgery itself brings about what is generally understood as such. The discourse works in partnership with the British legal system, which currently refuses to recognize post-operative transsexuals as their sex of choice. The vocabulary is even more palpably rooted in an ideological position than Debbie Cameron recognizes in her discussion of the loss of the original feminist differentiation between the words 'sex' and 'gender' through the substitution of the latter for the former. Cameron suggests that the 'term "gender dysphoria" is itself an example of the way *gender* is persistently reduced to *sex*' because people experiencing it '[t]ypically have to prove to the doctors that they are *not* ambivalent or confused about their "true" gender' (Debbie Cameron, 'Body Shopping', *Trouble & Strife*, 41 (2000), 19-23, p.23, n.3, Cameron's emphases). Instead, from Stone's observations on medical discourse we can gather that medicine perceives bodily alteration as a form of social constructionism, reinforcing, albeit problematically, the traditional feminist distinction that sex is biological and gender social.

⁴⁹ Judith Halberstam, 'F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity', in *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. by Laura Doan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 210-228. Discussed by Prosser, pp.486-488. Subsequent references to Doan are to this collection.

dichotomy or a finite ending. Ovid's Tiresias demonstrates this in the two metamorphoses from male-to-female and female-to-male. In narrative terms, the metamorphosed subject's story has the open-endedness and capability for multiple reinventions, revisions of history and plethora of narratives associated with postmodernity but metamorphosis's endurance throughout literary history demonstrates its own tropic malleability and trans-historicism.⁵⁰ Importantly, metamorphosis's emphasis on the continuation of a subjectivity, albeit an amalgamated or altered one, extracts it from the fragmenting plurality of identities that postmodernism describes. It also needs to be borne in mind how readily postmodernism itself has become a magnet for figurative representation. Postmodernism is particularly ripe for figurative representation because to pin it down literally is to destroy it. Almost any kind of disorderly or fragmented body might be hijacked as an ambassador for postmodernity.⁵¹

Carter's work is problematically postmodern and *New Eve* typically exhibits the tensions between a feminist trajectory and a postmodern one, whereby the former proffers an identifiable position and the latter refuses to.⁵² Although *New Eve* takes up the arms wielded by postmodern literature – a high degree of intertextuality, irony, playfulness, demythologizing, the subversion of a singular subject position – the novel identifies and dissects the patriarchal impulse behind certain myth perpetuations such as the manufacture of images of women. Its firm belief in patriarchy as the shaping force is what lends the novel its material impact and positionality, as opposed to the agnosticism advocated by postmodernist works which can stretch eclecticism into nihilism. While Carter states that she takes a non-dictatorial stance toward her readers, her work nevertheless necessitates an engagement with the plurality of feminist ideas that she tackles. And even though aspects

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the history of the functions and critiques of metamorphosis, see Kai Mikkonen's article, 'Theories of Metamorphosis'.

⁵¹ A popular example of the postmodern body trope is, of course, the cyborg. In her seminal essay, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', Donna Haraway terms the 'cyborg myth' a 'postmodernist strateg[y]' (p.152). An article which links the fragmented body with postmodern narrative is Roberta Rubenstein's 'Fragmented Bodies/Selves/Narratives: Margaret Drabble's Postmodern Turn'.

⁵² For a clear and concise discussion of this distinction, see Hutcheon, in *Ambiguous Discourse* and Creed's 'From Here to Modernity'.

of these feminisms themselves come under scrutiny, a constant touchstone of Carter's work is the unwavering feminist principle of raising consciousness with regard to women's positions.

A Baroque Accrual of Sources

It is not simply the non-finite ending of *New Eve* that aids its metamorphic trajectory. The novel's high level of intertextuality is testament to its being riddled with 'openings' throughout, pores that permit exchange between the text, other texts and discourses. These textual openings are analogous to the bodily vulnerabilities highlighted by metamorphosis in that they can occur at any moment and bring about a renegotiation between an existing linear narrative (the pre-metamorphic subject's intended path-of-life) and external influences. Intertextual references can operate centrifugally yet cyclically by diverting attention away from the primary text in order both to encourage re-vision (in the sense of looking at again rather than improving or replacing) of earlier texts and discourses as well as refreshing a reader's engagement with the primary text with a re-contextualized perspective.

In *New Eve*, Carter recycles the inexhaustibly intertextual motif of the mirror with a mocking awareness of its functionalism – in psychoanalytic discourses in particular – coupled with a genuine commitment to its symbolic utility. We have already seen the employment of the mirror in transsexual autobiography and for similar reasons, described here by Lucie Armitt, the mirror is extremely serviceable to women's writing and literature of the fantastic:

Central, indeed, to women's writing as a whole and fantasy fiction in particular, this symbol derives versatility from its ability to permit or deny entry into alternative realities, to function as an interrogation marker for identity and its particularly oppressive potential for women under patriarchy.⁵³

⁵³ Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 169.

We do indeed see the mirror used to explore each of these issues in *New Eve*, both in Eve(lyn)'s relationship with the symbol and with Leilah's. Something that Armitz does not concern herself with, though which surfaces from the preponderance of symbolic use of the mirror, is its intertextual resonance. For, like the metamorphic subject, the mirror is enormously provocative and evocative of prior instances of its use. This referentiality operates both between fictional texts and crosses boundaries between theoretical and fictional texts, too. It becomes not simply a mirror but a 'mirror', the latter encompassing a superfluity of representational inferences. For instance, for many late-twentieth and early twenty-first century academic readers, the mirror melds into a synecdoche for Lacanian theory. In one of *New Eve*'s most significant mirror scenes, where Eve(lyn) first sees her/his new female body, the situation echoes that found in other fiction, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*,⁵⁴ for instance, but more predominant, I think, are Carter's eclectic theoretical interests. A primary reference point is the de Beauvoirian social construction of the myth of Woman, but also evident are the possibilities afforded by androgyny, Joan Riviere's womanliness as masquerade,⁵⁵ as well as a wider recognition of the split between the mind and the body attributed to the work of Descartes.⁵⁶ The novel prefigures Judith Butler's work on the discursive construction of the corporeal. This list, by no means exhaustive, of possible theoretical intertexts borne out of one scene is characteristic of *New Eve*'s baroque accrual of sources (as well as its proleptic inclination toward later developments). In particular, Carter's allusions to a multitude of psychoanalytically influenced trajectories are noticeable throughout the course of the novel.

⁵⁴ Orlando's transformation from a male to a female is represented as a natural phenomenon: after a long sleep the male protagonist wakes up female. Orlando's mirror scene is a striking contrast to Eve(lyn)'s: 'Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath' (Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Penguin, 1993 (1928)), p.98. Subsequent references are to this edition. The dissonance here occurs mainly for the reader, for masculine pronouns are used to refer to a female body the reader has just been presented with.

⁵⁵ See Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929), in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp.35-44.

⁵⁶ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vols. I and II, ed. and trans. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

However, Kristeva's cautionary note on reference-spotting is invaluable when discussing Carter's work precisely because Carter obviously deploys and subverts wider discourses rather than singular texts. Her element of pastiche makes Armitt's droll comment on Lewis Carroll's *Alice* texts also applicable to *New Eve*: 'the only problem facing [a Freudian] critic lies with finding symbolism that is sufficiently encoded to make it worth the effort of fully unravelling' (*Theorising the Fantastic*, p.152).⁵⁷ My intention is not to be scathing but rather the opposite. Carter's parody of psychoanalytic readings is manifested in her excessive borrowings of their symbols, forming a pastiche of psychoanalytic theory and, pre-emptively, of the psychoanalytic readings which her novel stimulates.⁵⁸ Her employment of intertextuality needs to be discussed with an awareness of the cultural contexts of the prior discourses that she envelops into her novel. Raising intertextuality to the level of theme astutely echoes the polyvocal clamour impacting upon the formation of a postmodern subject's identity and re-enacts the loss of agency experienced by Eve(lyn). Yet, a metamorphosed subject does strive toward a coherent identity, unlike the postmodern subject which revels in fragmentation. The metamorphosed subject is a corporeal literalization of Kristeva's enunciating subject whose position is altered by intertextuality or transposition.

Tiresias – An 'Interrupted Continuum'

Carter's employment of Tiresias brings together the strands of intertextuality, corporeal metamorphosis, sex and androgyny. This in turn leads to a reinvestigation of the corporeal and textual in relation to the modern and postmodern. Tiresias appears in *New Eve* in the form of three characters: Eve(lyn), Mother and Tristessa. As I shall discuss in detail below, Eve(lyn) explicitly refers to her/himself as Tiresias at several points in the narrative (p.71, p.73, p.186); Carter in interview with Appignanesi refers to Mother on the beach at the end

⁵⁷ Armitt discusses *New Eve* alongside the *Alice* texts in a chapter in *Theorising the Fantastic* entitled 'Changing the Narrative Subject: Carroll's *Alices* and Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*'.

⁵⁸ For an example of one such psychoanalytic reading, see Maria Aline Seabra Ferreira's 'The Uncanny (M)other: Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*', *Paradoxa* 3.3-4 (1997), 471-488.

of the novel as Tiresias; Tristessa's experiences as living as a sex other than that which s/he was born is a distorted echo of Tiresias's experience, her/his name a near-anagram of Tiresias; together Eve(lyn) and Tristessa are referred to as Tiresias (p.146). Carter's interest in the figure is not solely limited to this novel, for Tiresias has previously made an appearance in the short story 'Reflections' from the collection *Fireworks*.⁵⁹ I shall look at 'Reflections' in relation to *New Eve* and also consider as a further counterpoint the employment of Tiresias as narrator of Eliot's 'The Waste Land', which Grover Smith has declared is the last in a long tradition of uses of the figure.⁶⁰ Although this claim is refuted by Carter's use, she not having been canonized sufficiently to have warranted Grover Smith's attention in 1983, the absence otherwise of the figure in literature post-Eliot is surprising. This is particularly so because it would seem pliable to the extra-canonical 1970s' feminist interrogations of gender roles, essentialism and particularly androgyny, precisely the manner in which Carter employs it.⁶¹ Obviously, one reason for its eclipse may be the professed elitism of references to classical mythology, sustained in high modernism, that a movement toward a perceived democratic postmodernism rejects. But, in her profession as demythologizer, Carter actively engages with myths.

Firstly, a brief reminder of the story of Tiresias as consolidated by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, in which Tiresias is called upon to settle a debate between Jove and Juno regarding whether women or men gain more pleasure from sex.⁶² We are told that Tiresias's experience of having lived as both male and female came about because the male

⁵⁹ Angela, Carter, *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (London: Virago, 1988; Quartet, 1974), pp. 81-101. Subsequent references are to the Virago edition.

⁶⁰ Grover Smith, *The Waste Land* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p.99.

⁶¹ Tiresias remains a popular figure in critical discussions of ambiguous sexuality or androgyny, however. For example, Lisa Tuttle's introduction to *Crossing the Border* begins by evoking the myth of Tiresias (p.9) and she also refers to Marjorie Garber's discussion of the figure (p.11) in Garber's *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1997). Carter's 'Reflections' is reproduced in *Crossing the Border* and is the only story that explicitly refers to Tiresias. Tiresias almost appeared in a vignette accompanying Zadie Smith's *The Autograph Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002). In a reading of the vignette, 'A Pretty Girl Gets a Haircut', prior to the novel's publication, Tiresias is a barber but the published tale within the folds of the novel's cover has been rewritten and Tiresias no longer features. The reading, by Smith, was broadcast on Radio 3's 'The Verb', 13 April 2002.

⁶² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), Book III, ll.314-342. Subsequent references are to this edition.

Tiresias killed a female snake as it copulated and was punished by being transformed into a female. After seven years, Tiresias saw a pair of copulating snakes again, this time killing the male, subsequently being changed back into a male. The story develops as Tiresias states that the female gains more pleasure and is blinded by Juno for the insult yet given long life and the gift of prophecy by Jove as compensation. Some versions of this myth, including that which is employed by Eliot in 'The Waste Land', has Tiresias retaining breasts after he has been formed back into a man.

The story of Tiresias clearly demonstrates a marked temporal development and an accumulation of experience over time. Unlike a conventional *bildungsroman*, which also possesses these traits, the metamorphic narrative specifically foregrounds the foundational role that the body plays in experience. The body's temporality and spatiality is interrupted but a reworked, amalgamated subjectivity continues. In *New Eve*, the temporality of Eve(lyn)'s change is specifically apparent in the duration of a series of surgical operations and socialization. The narrative first invokes Tiresias explicitly when Eve(lyn) undergoes these in Beulah:

The plastic surgery that turned me into my own diminutive, Eve, the shortened form of Evelyn, this artificial changeling, the Tiresias of Southern California, took, in all, only two months to complete. (p.71)

Instantly, several revisions of the existing myths of Tiresias can be discerned. Evidently, Eve(lyn)'s transformation is 'artificial' and the 'plastic surgery' describes a more tangibly invasive procedure than that implied in *Metamorphoses*, in which Tiresias is mysteriously 'transformed (a miracle!) from a man/To woman' (l.326, translator's parentheses).⁶³

Whereas we witness Eve(lyn)'s transformation in some detail as if it is occurring presently, Ovid's two metamorphoses of Tiresias (male-to-female and female-to-male) appear at an

⁶³ Woolf's *Orlando* follows this kind of seamless metamorphosis pattern: 'The change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it' (*Orlando*, p.98). Orlando's apparent lack of corporeal dysphoria is thus unlike that of an enforced metamorphic subject transformed against their will. Rather, Woolf focuses on the change in Orlando's 'precarious and embarrassing' social position (p.98).

even further remove because the metamorphoses tale is actually an embedded analepsis; we only encounter Tiresias in the present as he settles Juno and Jove's argument. Carter's more protracted narration is suited to her emphasis on the artificial yet perpetuating construction of the myth of Woman and the process of becoming rather than end points. It is also suited to its materialist implications. For although Mother's performance of the procedure is couched in aggrandizing ritualistic symbolism, the material reality is represented by the movement between symbolism and literal description of the same scene or objects. For example, Evelyn is led 'like a sacrificial animal, to the *altar*' which becomes 'the *operating table* where Mother waited with a *knife*' (p.69), which in turn becomes 'a *phallic symbol!*' (p.70, my emphases). The symbolic womb deep down below the desert, 'the dark [...], soft, still, warm, inter-uterine symmetrical place hung with curtains of crimson plush', houses 'a white bed' (p.69) and, 'a perfectly twentieth-century enamelled trolley' (p.70). Such a mingling of registers displays the transposed discourses – mythical, religious, medical, psychoanalytic – and helps to elevate Eve(lyn)'s experience as a summation of these discourses coming together.⁶⁴ Just as Eve(lyn) the character becomes corporeally more than one subjectivity as s/he becomes Tiresias, the narratorial Eve(lyn) speaks an amalgam of discursive positions. Each of the discursive practices invoked here has its sex and gender delineations interrogated. This is strengthened by Carter's specific highlighting of the

⁶⁴ An interesting transposition between discourses also occurs in a passage anticipating the transsexual operation from Jan Morris's autobiography, *Conundrum*. The passage bears remarkable similarities to Carter's fictional depiction. Whereas Eve is led downwards into the womb of Beulah, Morris is led upwards into the Casablanca clinic but both accounts mingle an aura of mystique and ritual with the reality of the operation and the style of language helps to mythologize the experience. As it mythologizes, it lends an air of fiction to the factual experience and the boundaries between fiction and fact are made indistinct. Morris writes: 'I was led along corridors and up staircases into the inner premises of the clinic. The atmosphere thickened as we proceeded. The rooms became more heavily curtained, more velvety, more voluptuous. Portrait busts appeared, I think, and there was a hint of heavy perfume. Presently I saw, advancing upon me through the dim alcoves of this retreat, which distinctly suggested to me the allure of a harem, a figure no less recognizably odalesque. It was Madame Burou. She was dressed in a long white robe, tasseled I think around the waist, which subtly managed to combine the luxuriance of a caftan with the hygiene of a nurse's uniform, and she was [...] carefully mysterious [...]. Powers beyond my control had brought me to Room 5 at the clinic in Casablanca, and I could not have run away then even if I had wanted to' (Morris, p. 155, cited by Stone, pp.280-281 (my ellipses)).

archetypal Christian myth of Woman, Eve.⁶⁵ Tiresias's very specific location in Southern California is notable for Eve(lyn) has not reached California at this point in the narrative but is firmly apprehended below ground in mid America. This makes us aware that '*this* artificial changeling' is the retrospective narrator and that some retrospective judgement might well be involved in the narrative. The rather prophetic Tiresian prolepsis reminds us that the narrating Tiresias has accumulated experiences over time.

Having set in the mind of the reader this equation with Tiresias, the reference is soon followed by a second which nevertheless creates a distance between Eve(lyn) and Tiresias, not only in terms of a difference from the traditional myths but also subtly through a manipulation of verbs:

The injustice of it all left me speechless. And Sophia must know it was unjust; she knew I'd never seen the copulating snakes, the crime of Tiresias. (p.73)

Here, the narrator invokes Tiresias in order to distance her/himself from the figure and emphasize her/his own comparative innocence. Despite a professed speechlessness and helplessness, as narrator, Eve(lyn) is fully in control of her/his representation. There is a transition from an imposed surmise with '*Sophia must know*', to one of certainty: '*she*

⁶⁵ As the titular 'New Eve', Carter's protagonist clearly revises the Christian myth more overtly than the myth of Tiresias but I have chosen to focus on the latter primarily for its metamorphic, transsexual and androgynous blurrings. However, Carter's employment of Eve, like that of Tiresias, draws attention to the previous versions of perpetuating myths, in this case of the construction of the first woman. Genesis is challenged by Carter's inclusion of Lilith as a revised Leilah toward the end of the novel because Lilith in one Talmudic story is the first wife of Adam. Carter reworks both the Christian and Jewish myths in this novel and highlights that there is not one true version. In some versions of the myth, Lilith is a threat to children and new mothers, which makes her assumption of Eve(lyn)'s pregnancy poignantly sinister. Further qualities of the Lilith of Jewish folklore that Carter adapts are her role as instigator of sex dreams and the association of the word 'Lilith' with that of the Hebrew word, 'layelah', meaning 'night'. *New Eve* makes material and corporealizes further the myths of Lilith and Eve, having the former take the shape initially of a seductress, 'the night's gift' (p.25), 'black as [Evelyn's] shadow [...], the darkness in the room made flesh' (p.27), and creating the latter from a male body as the Biblical Eve was created from Adam's rib. The idea of a New Eve also aligns Carter's protagonist alongside a tradition whereby the Virgin Mary is viewed as a second Eve, a revision providing an impossibly pure model to atone for Eve as the origin of sin. Indeed, Sophia explicitly designates Evelyn's fate to be not just a new Eve but "the Virgin Mary, too" (p.70), since the intention is to impregnate the new Eve, immaculately, with Evelyn's sperm. For a discussion of Mary as a second Eve, see Marina Warner's, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1985; Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), pp.50-67 of the Picador edition.

knew'. Although the subjects of the verbs describing Sophia's knowledge differ, the movement from the narrative voice's forceful suggestion to certainty is readily perceptible. There is a temporal, narrative development evident in ascription of knowledge to Sophia. This is a very subtle act of re-vision that persuades the reader to accept the finalized version. The sentence's thrust is analogous to that of the metamorphosed body: there is a cumulative development and an indistinct fusion of voices. In turn, this emphasizes the narrative characteristics of the metamorphic body itself, its dependence upon change over time and space. Subsequent to this quotation, the narrative invokes directly the myth of Eve alongside that of the ready potential of Evelyn's name to be altered. This effects a further motif of revision and a sense that Eve(lyn)'s fate is predetermined, for it is implied that if his name can be so readily castrated, so can he. This also implies that s/he is a hapless victim:

Unless, when I saw [the snakes], I had not recognised them.

Perhaps, I thought, they had utilised my tender body because they couldn't resist the horrid pun of my name, with all its teasing connotations. Evelyn. Why had my parents chosen to call me Evelyn, of all the names in the world? (p.73)

As Eve(lyn) struggles to find justification for the 'punishment', during the course of which s/he blames her/his ignorance and then his parents by alighting on the irony of the name, the narrative attempts to consolidate an empathy with the protagonist. However, Carter's active reworking of the traditions shows that Eve(lyn) is not simply to live out the fate of previous narratives. This is testified when Eve(lyn) chooses not to return to a male form, refuting Ovid's Tiresian trajectory.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ This idea of refusal to live out the fate of previous narratives is perhaps most explicitly seen in Carter's revisions of fairy tales and folk tales in *The Bloody Chamber*. For example, the (predominantly) first person narrative of 'The Erl-King' is told by a female protagonist who, it is implied, is burdened by the trajectories of past narratives to become a victim, a character who adopts the role of perpetrator as a defence to a perceived, though possibly non-existent, threat (*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, London: Vintage, 1995; Victor Gollancz, 1979), pp.84-91. In an engaging article, Harriet Kramer Linkin demonstrates how the narrator is seen mid-way to revise her account of events already narrated in order to justify her forthcoming actions, the murder of the Erl-

Tiresias is also at the centre of another of the most symbolic moments of the novel. The name of Tiresias is ascribed to Eve(lyn) and Tristessa as a couple: 'I know who we are; we are Tiresias' (p.146). This realization comes when the pair is about to consummate their relationship willingly for the first time, having previously been forced to have sex following Zero's grotesque parody of a marriage ceremony (p.138). The first consummation by choice, however, is superbly hyperbolic in its symbolism, as not only is Tiresias evoked but also 'the great Platonic hermaphrodite'(p.148). These classical iconographies are again juxtaposed with the Biblical:

I, in my sumptuous flesh, was in myself the fruit of the tree of knowledge;
 knowledge had made me, I was a man-made masterpiece of skin and bone, the
 technological Eve in person. (p.146)

This baroque collection of mythologies – classical, philosophical and religious – is brought together to be debased. For a transvestite and a transsexual metamorph having sex in the desert is far from the mystical seer, Tiresias, or the ideal Platonic hermaphrodite. Neither is this new Eve the Godly second Eve like the Virgin Mary. Eve(lyn)'s 'technological' manufacture permits her/him not only to become conscious of her/himself as a sexual being, which s/he shares with the Eve of Genesis, but to objectify her/himself to such an extent that we may perceive the perpetuating male identity at work in her/his fantasy of her/himself:

I saw myself. I delighted me. I reached out my hand and touched my own foot in a sudden ecstasy of narcissic [sic] gratification at its delicacy and littleness. I drew

King. See Harriet Kramer Linkin, 'Isn't it Romantic?: Angela Carter's Bloody Revision of the Romantic Aesthetic in "The Erl-King"', in Tucker, pp.119-133; first published in *Contemporary Literature*, 35.2 (1994) 305-323. The narrator of 'The Erl-King' interrupts the perceived trajectory of her own fate by choosing not to be a victim but only because she senses she is within a story with a prescribed ending that she must alter. She paradoxically carves out a new trajectory for herself because she has adopted the established trajectories initially. Whereas the narrator of 'The Erl-King' remains within a binary system, seeing only the alternatives of victim or perpetrator, Eve(lyn)'s character at the end of the novel represents a blend that goes beyond a binary framework. The framework of 'The Erl-King' is akin to the transsexual narrative with its fixed endpoint that differs from that of the individual's original trajectory. Whilst there is a certain liberating thrust in that the equation of victim with female and perpetrator with male is reversed in 'The Erl-King', the categories of victim and perpetrator remain fixed and recall Rubenstein's criticism of being trapped within a framework of dominance and submission.

my discoverer's hand along the taut line of my shin and my thigh. My yellow hair spilled out over the cushion in voluptuous disarray.⁶⁷ (p.146)

Here, s/he touches and sees the female body of Eve as if distant from it. This can be read in at least three ways: as evidence that the male Evelyn's consciousness persists; as evidence that the female Eve has adopted a woman's status as object of the male gaze; as evidence that the character takes pleasure in her/his own body regardless of sex identity. Each of these possibilities is implicated in the scene.

Describing the female body as a land to be plundered is a familiar trope that is mined explicitly here, since it foreshadows and contrasts with the colonialist history of the United States traced in the subsequent gradational description of the cushions upon which Eve(lyn) lies. The first cushion is,

Covered in red, yellow and blue Indian cotton sewn with little discs of mirror that gave it a tinkling look. And there was another cushion with a brown and black paisley print. And another Amerindian hand-woven abstraction. And a fourth made out of an enormous American flag (the stars and stripes forever). (p.146)

Although these cushions are scattered in a melting-pot fashion at the scene, the linear composition effected by the narrative performs a revised metonymic history of the United States from the (native American) Indian colourful 'tinkling', presumably hand-sewn design, as it becomes dulled by the 'brown and black', British-manufactured, uniform 'paisley' print. The hybrid 'Amerindian hand-woven abstraction' attempts to combine colonizer and colonized but is ultimately conquered by the envelopment of the 'enormous' American flag, an infinitely-reproduced, and rather garish, homogenizing blazon. The parenthetical comical, jingoistic statement appears to be almost involuntary at the sight or mention of the flag, and the automaton response befits the manufactured character of

⁶⁷ There is a further intertextual curlicue to this narcissistic episode for in *Metamorphoses* Tiresias predicts the fate of Narcissus and the story of Narcissus and Echo is immediately subsequent to that of Tiresias in Ovid's text.

Eve(lyn) as well as suggesting a blanketing of diversity generally. When we consider that Eve(lyn) is British, and indeed was mocked for his 'cut-glass vowels and prissy English accent' (p.13) when he first arrived in New York, the statement becomes particularly double-voiced. To suggest that Eve(lyn) has been Americanized after her/his rebirth would be to oversimplify the hybridization of the character. The fact that this flag is debased alongside the emblems of the other groups demonstrates the lack of power that can be accredited to the nation and adds politics and history to the metanarratives that are challenged. For the chaotic civil war that is a backdrop to this novel is symbolized by the gross condition of these cushions that originated from Zero's helicopter, 'stained with food and drink and dribbling and crusted sexual moistures, all filthy, all faintly, mustily redolent of old incense and pot' (p.146).

Since the corporeal merger of Eve(lyn) and Tristessa to become Tiresias occurs within this setting, the idealization of their union, like that of the States of America, is bathetically challenged. Indeed the couple's time together is short-lived, for they are broken up by the band of young soldiers and Tristessa is shortly dispatched, shot for defiantly kissing the Colonel. The soldiers are also the bearers of the news that 'California had seceded from the Union' (p.159), an indication that the stars and stripes are definitely not 'forever', the very composition of the American flag being dependent upon the number of States. Eve(lyn)'s belief that their 'child was conceived on the star-spangled banner' (p.148) rather than from the enforced sex overseen by Zero where pregnancy is first mentioned (p.142), not only aids in the romanticism of the couple's union, but also ascribes the child symbolically a special place in history. But the idealization in this context is parodic.

Whilst this suggests the continuum of momentum, Tiresias's amalgamation with the Platonic hermaphrodite in this romanticized and overly-symbolic scene nevertheless associates the former with the latter's ability to stop time:

We had made the great Platonic hermaphrodite together [...]; we brought into being the being who stops time in the self-created eternity of lovers.

The erotic clock halts all clocks. (p.148)

This experience of suspended time contrasts significantly with that described when the pregnancy is first mentioned as Tristessa and Eve(lyn) are about to leave Tristessa's ruined house. With this prior mention of the imminent child, there is again an intriguing connection made between the child and the American continent as Eve(lyn) considers that the house will soon be an archaism:

The quick time of this continent would subdue the waterlogged wreck of the house with the spiral staircase and turn it, before our child quickened in my belly, into a ruin with the air of pre-history about it. (p.142)

This sentence captures and succinctly mocks the sense of accelerated time and collapse of spaces associated with postmodernity.⁶⁸ The merger of spaces is exacerbated by the near-repetition, and rather atypical uses, of the words 'quick' and 'quickened', performing an implied simile likening the two very different places of the continent of America and the artificial womb of Eve(lyn). Not only does this achieve the traditional comparison of the female body to land but, more importantly, the sense of speed and rapid decay consolidates Carter's critique of the ephemeral artifice superimposed on this continent. Carter's critique is thematized in the ready dissolution of the United States and of the self-imaged figures of Mother, Zero and Tristessa and their respective self-created dwellings, for since leaving New York Eve(lyn) has 'lived in systems which operated within a self-perpetuating reality; a series of enormous solipsisms, a tribute to the existential freedom of the land of free enterprise' (p.167).

⁶⁸ For a thorough investigation of the relationship between time and space in postmodernity, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). Subsequent references to Harvey are to this work.

The iconography of Tiresias is somewhat removed from these emblems that fail. In some respects, Eve(lyn) and Tristessa's child may be viewed as a new Tiresias, generated from the Tiresias formed by the couple themselves. Tiresias in *New Eve* possesses a certain timelessness through the adoption of plural as well as singular identities and through its/their malleability. Importantly, rather than being destroyed, the figure is open not only to successive incarnations but also to simultaneous ones, being embodied by Eve(lyn), Tristessa, both of these characters together, their child and Mother (I shall say more on the latter below). This framework replicates Carter's transference of the figure from other texts, moulding the figure to her purposes. Although Tristessa and Mother die, either literally or figuratively, they are not the only characters that represent Tiresias and therefore the mythical figure's immortality remains. Although, as I have indicated, Carter states that *New Eve* is her 'one anti-mythic novel', she revises rather than destroys the myth of Tiresias, unlike the myths of the maternal and naturally-born Woman, which are destroyed ('Front Line', p.25).

When Eve(lyn) is reborn from the cave at the Californian beach, s/he identifies her/himself as Tiresias for the final time and Tiresias's traditional wisdom from having lived as both sexes is given a wider implication. As Eve(lyn) exits the cave, her/his 'inconsolable cry' is unanswered except by her/his own voice's 'small echo' (recalling the mythical figure, Echo) and 'the resonance of the sea':

I called for my mother but she did not answer me.

'Mama – mama – mama!'

She never answered.

Speleological apotheosis of Tiresias – Mother, having borne her, now abandons her daughter forever. (p.186)

The 'quick time' of America has been reversed inside this series of caves where Eve(lyn) experiences time moving backwards and arrives at 'the leisurely pace of Eocene time' (p.184). However, the regression in the cave is actually very rapid. Eve(lyn) sees objects in

the cave, such as the perfumes breaking from bottles which ‘instantly resolved to sand’ (p.185), and then sees visions on a continental scale, employing a simile that recalls the artifice of the Hollywood system that fostered Tristessa’s ‘specious triumph over time’ (p.5):

Rivers neatly roll up on themselves like spools of film and turn in on to their own sources [sic]. The final drops of the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Hudson, tremble on a blade of grass; the sun dries them up, the grass sinks back into the earth. (p.185)

Here, then, the continuum of the fast time of the continent is not simply interrupted but reverses and the space is again distorted so that the womb/cave is magnified to the geography of America. In this rebirth as a new version of Tiresias, the metamorphic trajectory of a tension between sameness and difference is sustained yet fittingly reversed. For here it is the consciousness that changes rather than the body. In Plato’s *Republic* VII, prisoners who escape from a cave represent the process of philosophical enlightenment.⁶⁹ Eve(lyn)’s rebirth as Tiresias is therefore not only from another Freudian symbolic womb but also from ignorance to enlightenment in Plato’s terms.

Eve(lyn)’s perceived abandonment by, and individuation from, Mother in this cave scene prefigures her/his meeting with a Mother who has been stripped of her symbolism and who contrasts markedly with this maternal womb of the landscape as well as with her former self. By the end of the novel, Mother has undergone a metamorphosis of her own, a metamorphosis that takes her corporeally from the fantastic closer to the everyday, a reversal of the more frequent use of metamorphosis which explores the alternative experiences resulting from existence within an altered corporeal state. The extra tier of breasts which she had grafted onto herself in Beulah (p.59) results in some memorable descriptions: ‘[h]er nipples leaped about like bobbles on the fringe of an old-fashioned, red plush curtain at a french [sic] window open on a storm’ (p.64). This image is deflated with

⁶⁹ *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.128, following J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), ch.10.

her appearance on the beach, with her 'sunken dugs' (p.190) and the fact that she wears a two-piece bathing costume with no apparent inconvenience (p.177). The grotesque fertility goddess of Beulah has become a 'lone, mad old lady' (p.176). But some of her status as grotesque is maintained in that she appears as a different parody of a woman, with her hair 'dyed a brave canary yellow and piled in an elaboration of many tiers of curls, giving the general impression of a very expensive ice-cream sundae' (p.177). Her two-piece bathing costume is of red and white spots and she wears 'a stole of glossy extravagant blonde fur but her flesh was wrinkled and ravaged and sagged from her bones' (p.177). The descriptions suggest the masquerade and artifice of an older woman attempting to look younger, a performance artist (and Mother is depicted singing Broadway hits) or a man in drag. Although the Beulah Mother is the embodiment of male fears of female supremacy, her femaleness is so exaggerated it is by no means 'feminine' in terms of gendered social behaviour. Even more threatening than her grotesque female body is her lack of femininity. Largely, her realization and exaggeration of myths of women as, for example, 'the Castratrix of the Phallogentric Universe' (p.67), fashions a matriarchal dystopia based around male fears of female sexuality and sisterhood, which extracts her from the socially-inscribed subordinate feminine position. She is however, the epitome of the subconscious 'monstrous-feminine',⁷⁰ which the Mother in California subverts. Beulah is a microcosm aligned with these masculine-ascribed myths of the maternal, particularly psychoanalytic-based myths, and the downfall of Mother demonstrates the myths' fragility and lack of foundation. Carter produces a parody and the society is not an exploration of the possibilities of a female-only society, which she considers more positively in *Nights at the Circus*.⁷¹

⁷⁰ This term is from the title of Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), in which the concept is explored.

⁷¹ In *Nights at the Circus*, a group of women who have murdered men for perpetrating rape and other violent crimes against them break out of prison and begin new self-defined lives free of men. The snowy landscape into which they journey is promisingly described as 'a blank sheet of fresh paper on which they could inscribe whatever future they wished'. See Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (London: Picador, 1985; Chatto & Windus, 1984), p.218. Page references are to the Picador edition.

Speaking about the end of *New Eve*, Carter has said that the figure who waves farewell to the new Eve on the shore 'is Tiresias'.⁷² As Mother gulps down her vodka on the California beach, her Adam's apple is 'prominent as that of an old man' (p. 178). Later, Eve(lyn) realizes this figure is blind and 'old enough to have been either a man or a woman' (p.190). These latter characteristics subtly allude to Tiresias and the hints of Mother's masculinity here recall the 'false beard of crisp, black curls' that she wore in Beulah, and which the narrator likens to that worn by Queen Hatshepsut (p.59).⁷³ Mother surfaces somewhat surprisingly, therefore, as a faintly androgynous figure even when she is the epitome of the powerful matriarch in Beulah. The coupling of roles is not, however, as paradoxical as it might first appear, for what is perhaps most feared of the powerful matriarch is indeed the fact that she takes on the power customarily associated with male leaders. Traditionally, the possession of such power inherently questions her femininity for she steps out of the subservient role ascribed to women.

The Tiresias of 'Reflections'

Carter's own renditions of totemic figures are by no means concretized but as equally open to reworkings as those presented by other authors. The short story 'Reflections' in *Fireworks*, published three years prior to *New Eve*, provides a skeletal framework and intertext for the novel in terms of both plot and character. In terms of plot, the male protagonist of the story is led by a woman to find a character called Tiresias at the centre of a labyrinthine dwelling, correspondent with Beulah but which also possesses resonances of the Minotaur's lair and Miss Havisham's derelict house.⁷⁴ The unnamed first-person

⁷² In interview with Appignanesi. Mother's position on the shore suggests Carter may well be revising Homer's Tiresias here, since Odysseus visits Tiresias on the water's edge in the Kingdom of the Dead before setting sail once more, like Eve(lyn). See Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 2001), Book XI, ll.100-172.

⁷³ The Egyptian Queen Hatshepsut (1520-1483 B.C.) proclaimed herself pharaoh and adopted the dress code of pharaohs. She is famous for building an extravagant mortuary temple for herself. Carter hereby emphasizes Mother's self-aggrandisement and, as leader of a people, her usurpation of a powerful role traditionally conferred upon males.

⁷⁴ Miss Havisham appears in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin, 1965 (1860-61)).

narrator is also 'raped', but by Tiresias's female minion (Sophia's or Leilah's counterpart in *New Eve*) rather than the Tiresias figure itself. In this story, Tiresias is an androgyne with male genitals, breasts of a female and 'one of her profiles was that of a beautiful woman, the other that of a beautiful man' (p.87). Yet, the first-person narrator and male protagonist concludes that s/he portrays a more feminine than masculine appearance:

It is a defect in our language there is no term of reference for these indeterminate and undefinable beings; but, although she acknowledged no gender, I will call her 'she' because she had put on a female garment, a loose negligee of spider-coloured lace. (p.87)

This Tiresias is further represented as a kind of maternal figure, for s/he literally knits the two worlds of the story together, the familiar world and the reversed world beyond the mirror, connecting them by means of a giant 'umbilical cord' (p.101). The figure's physicality is eclipsed by the actions and modes of dress in order for the protagonist to categorize her/him. This provokes some rather paradoxical descriptions when s/he shows the protagonist her/his phallus 'of redoubtable size' with its 'towering erection' (p.91). The portrayal of her/his physicality takes a deliberately stereotypical form, whereby femininity is beautiful and non-threatening, for her/his 'soft, pale breasts' are contrasted with the 'phallic insignia of maleness', 'savage and barbaric in their rude, red-purple repose' (p.89). This parodic display of gender stereotypes in the first-person male narrator's voice makes the character somewhat misogynistic.

One of the most significant differences between *New Eve*'s and Ovid's Tiresias figures and that of 'Reflections' is the latter's *simultaneous* balance between two sexes in one body. The temporality inherent in the change through which a metamorphic subject travels is not present in the androgynous body of this Tiresias. Indeed, Carter halts time by having the Tiresias of 'Reflections' suspend her/his ageing process and that of her/his environment. The protagonist's physical attack upon Tiresias, which results in the latter's death, restarts time:

Time must have started again and now moved with such destructive speed that, before my eyes, that ageless being withered – a quick frost touched her. Wrinkles sprang out on her pale forehead while her hair fell from her head in great armfuls and her negligee turned brown and crumbled away, to reveal all the flesh that sagged from the bone as I watched it. She was the ruins of time. (p.100-101)

As when Eve(Iyn) and Tristessa formed Tiresias or the Platonic hermaphrodite, androgyny is aligned with the perceived halting of time but the idealism is easily destroyed by the intervention of a character from outside of the microcosmic scene and resumption of 'quick' time. In both works, an androgynous ideal is shown to be incapable of survival in an externally controlled environment. The Tiresias of 'Reflections' is literally fixed in space as well as time since s/he is 'crippled' and confined to 'an old-fashioned wicker Bath chair' [sic] (p.87), a forerunner of Mother's 'wicker garden chair' in *New Eve* (p.176), and s/he must remain at the borders of both worlds to knit them together. Combining two sexes, an androgyne also remains fixed within a binary dichotomy, for it is the identification of female and male elements in one body that makes it an androgyne. The androgyne does not so much blur the boundaries between male and female but, in some respects, paradoxically sustains them. Suggestively, *each* of the androgyne's faces is 'snapped clean in two' by the protagonist's blow at the end of 'Reflections', destroying the categories of female and male (p.100). Compared to the metamorphic figure, an androgynous figure is inflexible and easily broken. For this androgynous Tiresias, there is no rebirth trajectory but, instead, death.

Carter metamorphoses the tradition of Tiresias as well as the body of the character in a manner that formulates a new subject position through the conduit of this intertextual figure. Resident in the new position is a critique of any quasi-omniscience accorded the androgyne. Carter's emphasis on process has her reject the category of the androgyne as a useful symbol for it is, for her, a closed category. Her ideas prefigure Marjorie Garber's differentiation between the openness of the idea of a 'third' as opposed to an 'androgyne':

The 'third' is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis [...]. The 'third term' is *not a term*. Much less is it a *sex*, certainly not an instantiated 'blurred' sex as signified by a term like 'androgyny' or 'hermaphrodite' [...]. The 'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a place of possibility.

(p.11, Garber's emphases)

The metamorphosed Eve(Iyn) is a more fruitfully problematic image with which to interrogate sex binaries.

Conclusion – 'The Waste Land' as Contrast

Before closing this chapter, I want now briefly to consider one of the most totemic uses of the quasi-omniscient androgyny of Tiresias of the modernist period, that of the figure's appearance in T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. Eliot's use of the figure provides an excellent contrast to many of the features I have observed in Carter's employment of it. In 'The Waste Land', Tiresias is presented as an 'old man with wrinkled female breasts', having become androgynous through past transformations leaving their mark on his body.⁷⁵ Eliot describes the figure in his notes thus: 'Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character", is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest' (p.82). The poet expands that the male characters in 'The Waste Land' blend into one another, as do the female characters, and 'the two sexes meet in Tiresias' (p.82). Although Eliot states his Tiresias is not a character, the figure in 'The Waste Land' is nevertheless not a disembodied voice but a corporeal presence, with the characterizing blindness (l.218) and twice-metamorphosed body: 'old man with wrinkled dugs' (l. 228). S/he is a corporeal observer, an extradiegetic focalizer who sees rather than participates in the action of the poem. Disparate times and spaces are described but are not physically traversed by Tiresias but rather united by what s/he sees in accord with, and facilitated by, Ovid's characterization of the figure as seer and possessor of long life. Her/his mythical ancestry is foregrounded,

⁷⁵ T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974 (1963)), pp.61-86, (l.219). Further references are to this collection.

having 'sat by Thebes below the wall/And walked among the lowest of the dead' (ll. 246-7). These characteristics indicate that Eliot brings into his poem a prefabricated character to observe rather than participate, leaving Tiresias's mythology intact, not changing it materially and thus reinforcing pre-existing traditional stories. Tiresias in 'The Waste Land' is modernized or revised only in terms of being made narrator and focalizer. The figure is obviously employed very differently by Carter, who instead moulds it into her central protagonist as well as narrator, a participant whose fate diverts from that of Ovid's Tiresias both corporeally and in terms of plot. These different modes of employment by Eliot and Carter evidently reflect the writers' wider *oeuvres*, whereby the former sees himself as an inheritor of tradition and the latter sets out deliberately to demythologize traditional archetypes.

It can be posited, then, that Carter's text acts as a further palimpsest layer that is superimposed upon previous versions of the story of Tiresias but that it does not overwrite them completely. *New Eve* draws comparisons and contrasts at several points in the narrative, weaving in the intertextual references throughout, recurrently engaging with and transforming the prior stories. By contrast, Eliot takes the figure from Ovid's text, post-both metamorphoses; he stretches or continues the Tiresias tradition but treats the starting point as fixed. Eliot's use demonstrates a regard for the classical containment, to use a Bakhtinian concept, of both the prior texts and the body of Tiresias. Only the end of Ovid's plot is treated as 'open' by Eliot. Indeed, even this is questionable because Eliot's employment of Tiresias is rather like a coda to the prior traditions, an afterthought to their containment, and Grover Smith's observation that Eliot has the final word on the tradition maintains this fallacy. In marked contrast, *New Eve's* textual openings facilitate a percolation between new and old, cognisant of an enriching dialogism that can result from a positive grotesque intermingling. This is the kind of transposition capable of forming a new speaking position that interrupts yet regenerates former texts for a new context. Eliot does not metamorphose Tiresias but propels her/him forward whereas Carter's text makes full use of the potential of a metamorphic, transpositional figure.

Rewriting is also a significant theme and compositional element in the work of Monique Wittig that I discuss in my next chapter, where I explore Wittig's radical reconceptualization of lesbian corporeality and textuality.

CHAPTER THREE

'XX+XX=XX': Monique Wittig's Reproduction of the Monstrous Lesbian⁷⁶

The *chic* attributes of increasingly visible lesbians in popular culture in recent decades might be seen as the realization of Monique Wittig's project of 'lesbianization', were it not for the uncompromising manner in which Wittig presents her concept of 'lesbian'. For although Wittig's work at times shares the cheeky bravado and humour which characterizes an image like that of k.d.lang having her face 'shaved' by Cindy Crawford, which appeared on the cover of an issue of *Vanity Fair* in 1993, one senses that to 'lesbianize the [...] goddesses' in this manner is not quite in line with Wittig's more dangerous, material, and visceral, vision.⁷⁷ Wittig has written:

'I' has become so powerful in *The Lesbian Body* that it can attack the order of heterosexuality in texts and assault the so-called love, the heroes of love, and lesbianize them, lesbianize the symbols, lesbianize the gods and goddesses, lesbianize the men and the women. (*The Straight Mind*, p.89)

By transforming the noun to a verb, 'lesbianize', Wittig emphasizes creativity, activity and change as opposed to any imagined stability of fixed identities. The verb suggests that lesbianism can be transferred or can insinuate itself into unsuspecting heterosexual practices and icons. This is, of course, a gleefully corrupt adoption of the stereotype of the predatorial lesbian from which society once needed to be protected by censorship, notably at the time of the initial publication of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), for example. But the power of the 'out' lesbian to 'turn' a 'straight' woman, the suggestion of the *Vanity Fair* cover, resonates and is eroticized in contemporary television shows, media and film. For example, in Britain, Channel Four's *Brookside* was the first soap opera to

⁷⁶ The genetic equation is from Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, p.128.

⁷⁷ This *Vanity Fair* image is referred to by Barbara Creed in 'Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts', in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. by Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.86-103, p.86.

represent this storyline in 1993-1994, and, more recently (2001) the voguish American show, *Sex and the City*, had its most predatory straight character, Samantha, succumb to a same-sex fling. Moreover, Wittig's desire for her lesbian subject to 'attack' and 'assault' finds a literal correlative in the murderous transgressions of lesbians in films such as *Butterfly Kiss* (1994) and *Bound* (1996).⁷⁸ Wittig's emphasis on active transformation is also an inheritance of the tradition of looking for lesbians in the gaps and silences before direct representations were acceptable to a more mainstream audience. As she states in her note prefacing *The Lesbian Body*, lesbianism, for the most part, is 'a theme which cannot even be described as taboo, for it has no real existence in the history of literature [...]. The lesbians [...] are silent' (*The Lesbian Body*, p.9). Even with lesbian voices being heard in recent decades, the desire to imagine lesbians in the fissures exhibits itself in the lesbianization of films that are superficially 'straight' with only hints of 'diversion'. For example, *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *Single White Female* (1992) are discussed by Lynda Hart in *Fatal Women*, and are also mentioned by Clare Whatling, whose titular 'fantasising', like Wittig's lesbianizing, emphasizes her book's active creation: *Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film*.⁷⁹ Off screen 'goddesses' are, of course, subject to lesbianization, too.⁸⁰

Even though *The Lesbian Body* was published in 1975 (1973 for the original French edition), this brief contextualization demonstrates that its concerns remain important and contentious in relation to more recent popular culture. The text, along with Wittig's critical ideas, is in some ways a harbinger of the discussions surrounding specificity of identity versus the plasticity of surfaces so well-represented in debates concerning the relationship

⁷⁸ The relationship between representations of lesbianism and violence in film is the subject of Lynda Hart's *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark Of Aggression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁷⁹ Clare Whatling, *Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

⁸⁰ For instance, Whatling's *Screen Dreams* has a chapter on the widely-discussed ambivalent sexuality of Jodie Foster both on and off screen yet also 'fantasises' about and 'appropriates' celebrities such as Meryl Streep, Vanessa Redgrave, Sigourney Weaver and Joanna Lumley (p.2). A famous and contentious appropriation is that of Sandra Bernhard who refused to 'confirm the intimations' she made on the television show, 'Late Night with David Letterman', in which 'she seemed to "out" [herself and Madonna] as lesbian gal pals' (Jean Walton, 'Sandra Bernhard: Lesbian Postmodern or Modern Postlesbian?', in Doan, pp.244-261, p. 245 and p. 244, respectively).

between feminism and postmodernism. Despite the fact that Wittig's aesthetics exhibit a playfulness with the surfaces of representation, the existence of a deeply-rooted identity politics enmeshed within these strategies presents a violent challenge to the acceptable postmodern 'face(s)' of lesbianism. *The Lesbian Body* and Wittig's ideas have indeed been central players in emergent discussions concerning the relationship between lesbian identity and the postmodern.⁸¹ The text stands in stark contrast to more palatable images of lesbians, by virtue of the former's violence in language and its depiction of the lesbian body as simultaneously gruesome, grotesque and without bounds as well as erotic and celebratory. Wittig's insistence on materiality, on identifiable political positions and her unfoundering belief in her own truth of what a lesbian identity is, or can be, contrasts with the uncertainties and disavowals of truths that characterize postmodernity. However, her writing strategies share the disruptive tenor of texts that are called postmodern, albeit that a disruptive tenor has been a style of feminists far longer than postmodernism has been operative.

Writing Lesbian

It is vital to comprehend Wittig's use of the word 'lesbian'. The terminology she uses to describe lesbians replicates and exaggerates that promoted by the heterosexual patriarchal order. For example, her collection, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, is infused with direct references to lesbians as 'not women', 'for "woman" has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems' (p.32). Elsewhere in this collection, Wittig describes the lesbian as 'a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society' (p.13), as 'runaways, fugitive slaves' (p.45), 'standing at the outposts of the human' (p.46), 'located philosophically (politically) beyond the categories of sex' (p.47, Wittig's parentheses).

⁸¹ See, for example, Judith Roof, 'Lesbians and Lyotard: Legitimation and the Politics of the Name', Cathy Griggers 'Lesbian Bodies in the Age of (Post)Mechanical Reproduction', both in Doan, pp.47-66 and pp.118-133, respectively; and Penelope Engelbrecht, ' "Lifting Belly is a Language": The Postmodern Lesbian Subject', *Feminist Studies*, 16.1 (1990), 85-114.

These provocative descriptions are used positively by Wittig because this neo-human position 'represents historically and paradoxically the most human point of view' (p.46). Indeed, the power of the lesbian is unique:

Lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically.

(p.20, Wittig's emphasis and parentheses)

Wittig is a severe critic of what she sees as the artifice of the categories of sex, the division between sex and gender being extraneous, as she views both as ideological constructs. Her concept of the lesbian possesses some surprising similarities to the work of perhaps the most contentious and well-known theorist of sexual difference: Luce Irigaray. In a manoeuvre similar to that of Irigaray in reformulating a position from which women can speak, Wittig deploys hyperbole, parody and humour to redefine from the lesbian point of view the position already ascribed to the lesbian by the mainstream order. Unlike Irigaray's, however, Wittig's concept of difference is not based on sex or gender. The lesbian becomes a trope for the ambivalent monster excluded from the heterosexual system.⁸²

It is important to note here that Wittig's disavowal of the categories of sex and gender divorces her from notions of *écriture féminine* and sets her apart further from both Irigaray and Cixous, who capitalize on sex difference in their work. Wittig writes,

That there is no 'feminine writing' must be said at the outset, and one makes a mistake in using and giving currency to this expression. What is this 'feminine' in 'feminine writing'? It stands for Woman, thus merging a practice with a myth, the myth of Woman [...]. 'Feminine writing' is the naturalizing metaphor of the brutal political fact of the domination of women, and as such it enlarges the apparatus

⁸² The monstrosity of the figures Wittig presents is the topic of Clare Whatling's 'Wittig's Monsters: Stretching the Lesbian Reader', *Textual Practice*, 11.2 (1997) 237-248.

under which 'femininity' presents itself: that is, Difference, Specificity, Female
Body/Nature. (*Straight Mind*, pp.59-60)

Nevertheless, Wittig's writing in *The Lesbian Body* is 'different' in ways not based around sex or gender but ways that innovatively challenge conventional narrative forms and grammar, as well as being confrontational in terms of subject matter.

Some of Wittig's techniques illuminate the very physicality of the text itself, even before one considers the semantic content. For example, her 'bar in the *j/e* of *The Lesbian Body* is a sign of excess. A sign that helps to imagine an excess of "I", an "I" exalted' (*Straight Mind*, p.87). It is this pronoun that, according to Wittig, has the power to lesbianize the heterosexual iconographies. 'J/e', even more so than the italicized 'I' of the English translation, becomes more than a word, exceeds language to become a graphic, like the illuminated letters of ancient manuscripts. Because the 'j/e' of Wittig's text is politically resonant, yet, as Margaret Crosland states in her introduction to *The Lesbian Body*, 'the typographical implausibility of splitting our English monosyllabic "I" is obvious', the translator's decision is highly significant (p.7). Indeed, although Crosland's intention is to point out the problem of the one letter of the English pronoun, 'monosyllabic' is problematic for 'je' itself is monosyllabic; it is not the sound of the word that causes the difficulty. The error is interesting for it points up the important fact that the violence to language is effected on the level of the physical typographic disruption to the text and its visuals, not aural or oral sensations.⁸³ There is no lesbian accent with which Wittig infuses the language but the focus instead is on textuality itself.⁸⁴ This substantiates Wittig's credence in the literary *text* as 'The Site of Action', the title of one of her essays expanding

⁸³ Erika Ostrovsky indicates that an aspect of the French text that is lost in translation into English is the grammatical gendering of all nouns relating to living beings, human or animal, as feminine, which is 'arresting or even quite shocking for the francophone' reader, in *A Constant Journey: The Fiction of Monique Wittig* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), p.95. This certainly helps to accentuate *Le corps lesbien*, for the sounds as well as the typography are altered.

⁸⁴ This contrasts with works that attempt to effect a regionalization of language by writing in dialect and accents, a strategy that disrupts both the visuals and, for those external to the accents, the sounds. In this respect, writers such as James Kelman and Irvine Welsh might be said to attempt to 'Scot' their texts. See James Kelman, *How Late It Was, How Late* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994), Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993).

on literature's function (*The Straight Mind*, pp.90-100). Some critics have questioned the 'implausibility' of splitting the 'I', Emily Culpepper suggesting that a crossed 'I', one with a line drawn through it, would fittingly resemble a broken or cut phallus.⁸⁵ Perhaps this option would be reductive, however, and cancel Wittig's desire for the pronoun to represent 'excess'. It is not only the 'I' that is disrupted but each of the first person singular pronouns is split with a bar: 'm/on' and 'm/oi', for example and 'm/y' and 'm/e', in the translation. The physical slashing of the first person singular pronouns is particularly pronounced because of the sheer volume of them, since the text is structured as a series of addresses from an 'I' to a 'you'. In the translation, the italicized 'I' replicates graphically the slash in the other pronouns effectively: 'I lose my/self, I go astray, I am poisoned by you who nourish m/e' (p.24). Thus, visually the text is cut through in as many instances as the French text and Wittig's idea of 'excess' is aided.

An unconventional structure also disrupts the physicality of the text, which consists of segments of frequently poetic prose, of approximately a page in length, separated both semantically and typographically from one another. These are interspersed with eleven lists, primarily of body parts and emissions, again of approximately a page in length and differentiated from the prose segments by their large font and bold capitalization. Even in terms of physical appearance, then, *The Lesbian Body* is no conventional 'novel', and the unusual textuality echoes the fresh approach to the depiction of bodies semantically. The text defamiliarizes language, structure and subject matter. A critical vocabulary is also complicated. For example, Shaktini, throughout her work, refers to the non-list sections as

⁸⁵ Emily Culpepper, in conversation, 1977, referred to by Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p.327. This remark was first brought to my attention in Namascar Shaktini's doctoral dissertation, 'The Problem of Gender and Subjectivity Posed by the New Subject Pronoun "j/e" in the Writing of Monique Wittig', Diss. University of California, Santa Cruz, 1981, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1983. DAI-A 43/10, p.34. Shaktini is one of the most comprehensive commentators on Wittig's pronoun. See also her 'Displacing the Phallic Subject: Wittig's Lesbian Writing', *Signs*, 8.1 (1982), 29-44 and 'A Revolutionary Signifier: *The Lesbian Body*', in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, ed. by Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (London: Onlywomen, 1992), pp.291-303. Wittig's linguistic innovations have obviously received much critical attention. See also Karin Cope, 'Plastic Actions: Linguistic Strategies and *Le corps lesbien*', *Hypatia*, 6.3 (1991), 74-96 and Marthe Rosenfeld, 'The Linguistic Aspect of Sexual Conflict: Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien*', *Mosaic*, 17.2 (1984), 235-241.

'poems', but the small narratives that make up the text are not set out like poems. They are discrete units of description, usually of a particular scene or event, separate from one another, yet building up a picture of life on apparently female-only inhabited islands. The term 'prose segment', which I shall be using, conveys this feeling of being part of a larger scheme, yet simultaneously separate. As with the bar in the pronouns, both fragmentation and unity is suggested.

These physical textual challenges underline some of the reasons that *The Lesbian Body* is placed centrally in discussions of the 'lesbian postmodern'. The text, however, is overwhelmingly 'lesbian' enough not to appear in any mainstream discussion of the 'postmodern', to my knowledge. Its retort to the conventional idea that a 'novel' must have a 'plot', 'characters' and a 'narrative', categories whose interrogation has become *de rigueur* in postmodern novels, could not be more virulent. There is no formal characterization in the form of giving names, attributing specific characteristics or consistency of behaviour. The term 'protagonist', rather than 'character', seems more fitting, not in its literary sense of meaning 'central character', but to be used equally of all participants in Wittig's text. The reader is never sure if the first person speaker of each segment is the same persona in each case or whether there are two or more speakers. Most segments take the form of an address to an other, or others, who is, or are, at times absent, at times present. Again, there is no characterization to indicate whether the addressee(s) is or are singular or multiple. Martha Noel Evans reads the protagonists of *The Lesbian Body* as the same couple throughout,⁸⁶ but Jean H. Duffy is more accurate, I would suggest, in her remarks that 'a traditional plot- or character-based interpretation [is neither] fruitful or apt [...]. The trials and tribulations of a single, identifiable couple hold no interest' for Wittig.⁸⁷ Instead, Duffy continues, the protagonists 'are representative figures who are constantly adopting, dropping and qualifying the multiple poses and personae of love' (p.225).

⁸⁶ Martha Noel Evans, *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in Twentieth Century France* (London: Cornell University Press, 1987), p.187.

⁸⁷ Jean H. Duffy, 'Monique Wittig', in *Beyond the Nouveau Roman: Essays on the Contemporary French Novel*, ed. by Michael Tilby (Oxford: Berg, 1990), pp.201-228, p.225. Further references to Duffy are to this essay.

Lesbian Embodiment

Although love is a theme, the corporeal is foregrounded in *The Lesbian Body* often in such abject and violent descriptions that the text distinguishes itself from any clichéd notions of utopic lesbian relations. Whilst parts of the female body not conventionally eroticized are eroticized in this text, it is also true that most parts of the body become abject. This co-existence of the abject and eroticism thwarts any reading of the text as a simplistic ideal. The 'I' and the 'you' frequently traverse one another's bodily boundaries. In *The Lesbian Body*, bodies dissolve, fragment, metamorphose and incorporate. They are anything other than stable. For example, the addresser can painstakingly peel away the skin of the addressee to envelop the contents of the skull in her hands: 'Now m/y fingers bury themselves in the cerebral convolutions [...], m/y hands are plunged in the soft hemispheres, I seek the medulla and the cerebellum tucked in somewhere underneath' (p.17). In a further segment, cannibalism and metamorphosis are encountered:

I make an opening into the maxilla, I study the interior of your cheek, I look at you from inside yourself, I lose m/yself, I go astray, I am poisoned by you who nourish m/e, I shrivel, I become quite small, now I am a fly, I block the working of your tongue, vainly you try to spit m/e out, you choke, I am a prisoner, I adhere to your pink and sticky palate, I apply m/y suckers to your delicious uvula. (p.24)

Characteristically in this example, it is ambivalent who is incorporating whom and the quasi-sexual tone of the language of intrusion and surrender is paramount. The description combines a strange eroticism with the parasitic imagery. One more example will suffice to demonstrate the shifting ambiguity of bodies characteristic of many of these segments, a case where the addresser is torn apart and eaten by the addressee who is a shark (pp.64-65). The reader is initially in a position of uncertainty with regard to the bodily nature of the addressee, receiving a description of a body in partial allusions, but never sure whether to take the allusions metaphorically. The word 'shark' is presented only three-quarters of the

way through the segment. The segment begins thus with customarily no contextualizing references:

Fatal the day when *I* go to seek you in the sweet-smelling sea your gaze sliding over
 m/y shoulders and along m/y flanks. *I* approach you quite suddenly, m/y hand
 touches your blue glossy skin, a shudder seizes you from head to tail the water
 agitated furiously all round. (p.64)

Indeed, 'blue glossy skin' and 'head to tail' imply an unusual body, but, in Wittig's fantastic world, it is feasible for the reader to assume this may still be a description of a human with exceptional attributes, as Wittig deconstructs boundaries between human and animal. Upon further reading, Wittig's monstrous lesbian here conjures images of bestiality and sadomasochism, since the addresser seeks out the shark and seems to relish being consumed by it: 'Already m/y blood flows in long red streaks visible in the water, it makes you all the more bent on m/y massacre m/y beautiful accursed shark' (p.64). The closing lines of the segment read:

You lash m/e with your tail in your comings and goings, m/y face is struck on either
 side, m/y hands no longer able to raise themselves to protect m/y cheeks, all m/y
 scattered torn fragments are gathered by you and frenziedly devoured, *I* see you
 silently relish some flakes of m/y flesh in your teeth, *I*'ve done with watching you
 m/y eater of ordure m/y most nefarious one m/y so disquieting one, happy if *I* can
 remain a reflection that disturbs your gliding through the water. (pp.64-65)

These examples help to give a taste of the violence enacted upon bodies in this text and the fluid boundaries that are portrayed. The prose segments are mini-narratives that often possess thematic repetitions of dissolution, joinings or metamorphoses. Wittig's deconstruction of bodily boundaries literalizes the threat to societal and cultural stability that permeable bodily boundaries portray. The redrawing of bodily boundaries aids in breaking down the categories upon which cultural norms rest.

Lesbian Relationships

From the first prose segment, a complex dynamic of possession and adoration is set up between addresser and addressee, a dynamic that persists in many of the segments. The language of this first segment indicates possessiveness in the form of the repeated first person singular pronouns:

M/y very beautiful one m/y very strong one m/y very indomitable one m/y very learned one m/y very ferocious one m/y very gentle one m/y best beloved. (p.15)

The incantatory repetition of the attributes of the beloved suggests a desire to reaffirm or even reconstitute the addressee through language. However, rather than reconstituting the ideal objectified persona of the opening sentence, the segment moves on to describe an abject body that 'not one [of the women] will be able to bear seeing'. Yet the reader is forced to see, smell, and hear it in an uncompromising description:

With eyes turned up lids cut off your yellow smoking intestines spread in the hollow of your hands your tongue spat from your mouth long green strings of your bile flowing over your breasts, not one will be able to bear your low frenetic insistent laughter. The gleam of your teeth your joy your sorrow the hidden life of your viscera your blood your arteries your veins your hollow habitations your organs your nerves their rupture their spurting forth death slow decomposition stench being devoured by worms your open skull, all will be equally unbearable to her. (p.15)

A rapid perturbing defamiliarization occurs within this opening segment, then, wherein external parts of the body become mingled with internal, and we are unsure whether this body is alive or dead as it laughs and holds its own intestines while it has its open skull devoured by worms. The language of this latter quotation is brimming with a movement that contrasts sharply with the stasis of the 'beautiful', 'strong', 'indomitable' persona first

introduced: 'smoking', 'spat', 'flowing', 'frenetic', 'rupture', 'spurting forth'. The addresser also focuses more on the latter liminally alive and/or dead body in terms of the length of the description devoted to it. It enlivens this body and ascribes it an unsettling voice in the form of macabre laughter. In Kym Martindale's comparison of *The Lesbian Body* with a foundational anatomy text, Vesalius's *De Humanis Corporis Fabrica* (1543), she points out, following Jonathan Sawday, that the figures of the sixteenth-century text straddle the boundaries between the living and the dead:

They stride about the countryside, lean against trees, they (almost comically) ape soldiers, standing boldly with parts of their cranium held lightly, like a helmet, against a thigh [...]. They seem far from corpse-like, but neither do they 'live'. Their bodies are flayed, muscles are draped and suspended from limbs, organs displayed as their host rolls back his skin.⁸⁸

This description might, indeed, be just as relevant to the protagonists of *The Lesbian Body* at times. In their self-display, the subjects in Vesalius's text practise 'collusion in their own disintegration, thereby absolving the anatomist from accusations of physical violation' (Martindale, p.350, following Sawday). Whilst Martindale's focus is on Wittig's display of these bodies, there are also some illuminating points to be made about the dynamic between the protagonists that Wittig presents. The author's choice of the addresser-to-addressee form throughout the prose segments ensures that the protagonists are not equal. Not only is the addresser in control of the means of representation, even if they are passive within the semantics of the segment, but, most importantly, the '*I*' is the signifier of 'excess', not the 'you'.⁸⁹ The second person pronouns are not highlighted in any way. Placing the '*I*' in such

⁸⁸ Kym Martindale, 'Author(iz)ing the Body: Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body* and the Anatomy Texts of Andreas Vesalius', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 8.3 (2001), 343-356, pp.349-350. Martindale refers the reader to Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.114-116. Subsequent references to Martindale and Sawday are to these works.

⁸⁹ Grammatically '*I*' and 'you' relate to one another in a power-charged dynamic. Shaktini's data on the language of the text suggests that the protagonists rarely act together or share experiences, confounding interpretations or expectations of the text as depicting a harmonious community. She

a powerful position is suggestive of authorial control and this is effected much more openly and directly through the linguistic choices than through drawings in an anatomy text.

Thus, acts of creation and authoring are interrogated by the form of the prose segments. To clarify this using the example of the opening segment, the dying or dead body, a body that ought conventionally to be inanimate, is brought to life through a description that is akin to prosopopoeia (or personification). We can detect the parallel between the technique at work in Wittig's text, and the quotation from the opening segment cited above, with J. Hillis Miller's discussion of this trope, which 'ascribes a face, a name, or a voice to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead'.⁹⁰ Even more specifically, the segment demonstrates Miller's suggestion that prosopopoeia can 'repersonify the dead' (p.6) and 'is the trope of mourning' (p.4). Indeed, the decaying body of the opening segment is in 'gehenna'.⁹¹ The trope is particularly pertinent to writing that attempts to depict bodies because bodies arguably possess a physicality that is beyond language. But Wittig attempts to bring this physicality into language in the ways I hope are becoming apparent. In more general terms, prosopopoeia might also be seen as a trope of the writing process. For both prosopopoeia and writing in general can create something out of nothing or bridge a gap between something perceived and the subjectivity perceiving it. Wittig's belief that language can create a reality is demonstrated through the construction of the body through language in *The Lesbian Body*.⁹² The relationship between the protagonists in the prose segments is not unlike that of the attempted concretizing of the body in the capitalized lists. The author explicitly states in her note prefacing the English translation:

identifies the use of 3,284 first-person singular forms and 2,712 second-person singular forms, in contrast to 180 first-person and second-person plural forms, 'The Problem of Subjectivity', Appendix B (B-1 - B-4), no page number.

⁹⁰ J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p.4. Further references to Miller are to this text.

⁹¹ In the New Testament, this is the place where the wicked were punished after death; in the Old Testament, it is the valley where children were sacrificed and offal and refuse were burned.

⁹² The power with which Wittig invests language is seen in Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's *Lesbian Peoples: Materials for a Dictionary*, trans. by Wittig and Zeig (London: Virago, 1980); trans. of *Brouillon Pour Un Dictionnaire Des Amantes* (Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1976). This 'dictionary'-like text lists words and names in alphabetical order, with definitions and short narratives that build up a depiction of an alternative society.

The body of the text subsumes all the words of the female body. *Le Corps Lesbien* attempts to achieve the affirmation of its reality. The lists of names contribute to this activity. To recite one's own body, to recite the body of the other, is to recite the words of which the book is made up. The fascination for writing the never previously written and the fascination for the unattained body proceed from the same desire. The desire to bring the real body violently to life in the words of the book (everything that is written exists), the desire to do violence by writing to the language which *I [j/e]* can enter only by force.

(p.10, Wittig's parentheses and square brackets)

This operates diegetically, too, for the desire for absent, or 'unattained', bodies certainly constitutes many of the motivations of the segments since the protagonists are often distanced from one another. For example, the addresser paradoxically describes what she states she cannot remember because she and the addressee are separated:

The gradually assembled features of your face do not take shape in m/y memory. *I* do not see the curve of your breast. *I* have no recollection of your arms your shoulders your back your belly. *I* am unaware that your hair when licked has a delectable taste. Your pubic hairs are not visible in their quadrangular fleece, your slender clitoris and hood prolonged by the winged labia are not to be seen. *I* no longer see your lungs your stomach your bones your blood-vessels. (p.63)

Logically, facial features cannot be 'gradually assembled' and yet not 'take shape' in the addresser's memory, since assembling would seem to indicate formation. Further, the addresser's claim to be unable to recollect parts of the addressee's body or be aware of its taste is contradicted by her vivid and sensuous description of them. The sentence beginning 'I am unaware that', followed by a statement of fact where the taste is referred to, is an example of the rhetorical device, *recusatio*. It also functions as prosopopoeia by bringing into being that which is absent. As the protagonist creates the body of the other whilst

denying it, the pain of separation is invoked. The memories are too hurtful to be admitted yet form a bridge between the absent object of desire and the addresser. The intimacy of the description is taken to its typical Wittigian extremes, with the mention of the internal body parts. Wittig's use of the present tense, employed throughout this text, aids in emphasizing the active creativity of prosopopoeia – the bringing into being that which is absent or dead – but the negatives here suggest a perceived inability to recreate the intimacy of the memory. As well as reinforcing ongoing activity, a lesbianization in process, the choice of tense possesses further defamiliarizing properties because of its rare employment in fiction.⁹³ There is always more, always an 'excess' that cannot quite be represented even by Wittig's innovative techniques.

Lesbian Agents

I have suggested above that the society of *The Lesbian Body* is far from an egalitarian utopia. Rather, the text is power-laden in terms of the violence the protagonists enact upon one another physically and mentally and this is reflected in the linguistic relationship between the 'I' and the 'you' of the segments. Although dominance and submission infuses the relationships, there is 'collusion' in this, to recall Martindale's term. More than this, the violence is eroticized and in some respects (sado)masochistically willed. With Wittig's writing, we receive no ironic detachment from the scenes but, instead, a poeticization of violence alongside the erotic. The conflation of the erotic with violence is of course not a problematic that Wittig creates but one that she replicates. What differs between Wittig's depiction and more traditional depictions is the fact that in *The Lesbian Body* power hierarchies are constantly shifting. At times, the addresser is in control, at times the addressee, at other times an external agent. Wittig's segmentation of her text, like that of

⁹³ However, apart from *Lesbian Peoples*, Wittig's other 'novels' are also written in the present tense. This substantiates Wittig's emphasis on continuity of action. See *The Opoponax*, trans. by Helen Weaver (Plainfield, VT: Daughters Inc., 1976), trans. of *L'Opoponax* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964); *The Guérillères*, trans. by David Le Vay (London: Picador, 1972, first published in translation by Peter Owen, 1971), trans. of *Les Guérillères* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969); *Across the Acheron*, trans. by David Le Vay in collaboration with Margaret Crosland (London: Peter Owen, 1987), trans. of *Virgile, Non* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1985).

the subjects and bodies in her text, permits a succession of short-lived, shifting, relations. In my analysis of two segments below, this decentralized distribution of power can be seen at work both in their content and their linguistic choices.

In the segment that I quote below in full, the addresser describes her bodily reactions, both internal and external, in detail as being manipulated into spasms and throbbings under the influence of the addressee:

I start to tremble without being able to stop, you m/y iniquitous one m/y inquisitress you do not release m/e, you insist that I talk, fear grips m/e m/y hair is shaken, the soft hemispheres of m/y brain the dura mater the cerebellum move within m/y cranium, m/y tongue uvula jaws quiver, I cannot keep m/y lips closed, m/y teeth chatter, m/y arteries throb in furious jerks in m/y neck groins heart, m/y eyes are compressed by their orbits, m/y intestines lurch, m/y stomach turns over, the movement spreads to all m/y muscles, the trapezii deltoids pectorals adductors sartorii the internals the externals are all shaken by spasms, the bones of m/y legs knock against each other when you do not steady them you wrench, there is a prodigious acceleration of movement to the point where freed from gravity I rise up, I maintain m/yself at your eye-level, then you m/y most infamous one you chase m/e brutally while I fall speechless, you hunt m/e down m/y most fierce one, you constrain m/e to cry out, you put words in m/y mouth, you whisper them in m/y ear and I say, no mistress, no for pity's sake, do not sell m/e, do not put m/e in irons, do not make m/y eyeballs burst, deign to call off your dogs, I beg you, spare m/e for just a moment longer. (p.27)

An analysis of the syntax of the segment shows that the transitivity choices parallel the sense of the addresser being subject to the control of the addressee.⁹⁴ Seven of the verb phrases have the first person '*I*' as the subject, and seven have the addressee '*you*' as the

⁹⁴ In the analyses that follow, I am indebted to Sara Mills's *Feminist Stylistics* (pp. 143-158), both for terminology and the fruitfulness of transitivity analysis from a feminist perspective.

subject. Of those which take the first person singular as the subject, four of them have material consequences and are intended by the subject. These are known as material action intention processes, which in this case are '*I rise up*', '*I maintain m/yself*', '*I say*', and '*I beg*'. Three of those which take the first person singular as subject have an external cause and are known as material action supervision processes: '*I start to tremble*', '*I cannot keep m/y lips closed*', and '*I fall speechless*'. Each of the seven verb phrases which takes the addressee as subject is material action intention, for example '*you insist*' and '*you chase*'. In this respect, it can be seen that the addressee is in a stronger position of control than the addresser, as all of her actions are reported as intentional. The perspective is that of the addresser and, therefore, it is her perception that the addressee is in control and this perspective is transferred to the reader. The reader is dependent on the addresser being a reliable source and the character of the addresser is obviously not impartial. The addressee is in control of her own actions and those of the addresser, since the agent of supervision in the addresser's actions seems to be the addressee. The types of verbs used are indicative of power, as are their positions in the segment. For example, the slavery imagery becomes more explicit toward the end of the segment, with the addresser calling the addressee '*mistress*', and begging not to be sold or put in irons. Concomitantly there is an increase in the second person singular pronoun as subject, '*you chase m/e*', '*you hunt m/e*', '*you constrain m/e*', '*you put words in m/y mouth*' and '*you whisper them*'. The first three of these verb phrases portray particularly forceful actions in contrast to the weaker '*I maintain*', '*I say*' and '*I beg*' of the addresser in the same final third of the segment.

The addressee has succeeded in forcing the addresser to speak, yet the speaker is merely beseeching the addressee to have mercy. To speak here is to be enslaved, to become subject to the control of the other. Having previously fallen '*speechless*', the addresser has words put in her mouth by the addressee: '*[Y]ou put words in m/y mouth, you whisper them in m/y ear and I say, no mistress, no for pity's sake, do not sell m/e, do not put m/e in irons, do not make m/y eyeballs burst, deign to call off your dogs, I beg you, spare m/e for just a moment longer*'. Although the words spoken are in supplication, the act of speaking

signifies a victory for the addressee, and the addresser remains powerless. The significance of this act is multilayered. The addresser, of course, is the one who is speaking to the addressee, the one who is speaking the whole of this segment to her. Even when she falls 'speechless', the addresser is telling the addressee she is doing so. This is due to the text being recounted in the present tense and taking the form of an address throughout the book. If the act of speech indicates enslavement, as this instance suggests, are we to assume the whole segment is spoken by one who is enslaved? This imagery of enslavement through language which is not one's own ('you put words in m/y mouth') is a fitting depiction of lesbians or women being forced to speak in the language of mainstream patriarchy, and Wittig has made the connection between women and slaves elsewhere: 'The perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men' (*The Straight Mind*, p.2). The addresser's aim to remain silent suggests that she will not be forced into using a language which is not her own. The 'community of equals' which Evans identifies is clearly not evident in this extract (p.206). Instead, the protagonists are in conflict with one another in an unequal relationship.

Whereas this example has the power in the hands of the addressee, just as frequently it is in the hands of the addresser, for example, one segment where the addresser lovingly pieces together the body of the other (pp.112-3). The segment which I cite in full below, however, has both protagonists apparently under the influence of some power greater than themselves. The image depicted is that of the addresser and addressee being drawn down together into sand. As their immersion is almost complete, their bodies split and start to become fused with one another as they are about to die:

We descend directly legs together thighs together arms entwined m/y hands touching your shoulders your shoulders held by m/y hands breast against breast open mouth against open mouth, we descend slowly. The sand swirls round our ankles, suddenly it surrounds our calves. It's from then on that the descent is

slowed down. At the moment your knees are reached you throw back your head, *I* see your teeth, you smile, later you look at *m/e* you speak to *m/e* without interruption. Now the sand presses on the thighs. *I* shiver with gooseflesh, *I* feel your skin stirring, your nails dig into *m/y* shoulders, you look at *m/e*, the shape of your cheeks is changed by the greatest concern. The engulfment continues steadily, the touch of the sand is soft against *m/y* legs. You begin to sigh. When *I* am sucked down to *m/y* thighs *I* start to cry out, in a few moments *I* shall be unable to touch you, *m/y* hands on your shoulders your neck will be unable to reach your vulva, anguish grips *m/e*, the tiniest grain of sand between your belly and mine can separate us once for all. But you fierce joyful eyes shining hold *m/e* against you, you press *m/y* back with your large hands, *I* begin to throb in *m/y* eyelids *I* throb in *m/y* brain, *I* throb in *m/y* thorax, *I* throb in *m/y* belly, *I* throb in *m/y* clitoris while you speak faster and faster clasping *m/e* *I* clasping you clasping each other with a marvellous strength, the sand is round our waists, at a given moment your skin splits from throat to pubis, *m/ine* in turn from below upwards, *I* spill *m/yself* into you, you mingle with *m/e* *m/y* mouth fastened on your mouth your neck squeezed by *m/y* arms, *I* feel our intestines uncoiling gliding among themselves, the sky darkens suddenly, it contains orange gleams, the outflow of the mingled blood is not perceptible, the most severe shuddering affects you affects *m/e* both together, collapsing you cry out, *I* love you *m/y* dying one, your emergent head is for *m/e* most adorable and most fatal, the sand touches your cheeks, *m/y* mouth is filled.

(pp.51-52)

In this climactic scene, the protagonists seem equal yet powerless together. The agent attributed most power in this segment is that of the sand which is engulfing the couple as they are dragged down into it. The segment begins with a balanced sentence in terms of semantics and linguistics in which the closeness of the couple foreshadows the literal fusing of their bodies toward the end of the segment. The syntactic parallelism of the beginning

and end of the opening sentence, 'we descend directly' and 'we descend slowly', emphasizes the enclosure of the couple. At this stage it might seem that the couple are intending to descend, as no external agent is introduced to suggest otherwise. It is only on reading the next two sentences that the reader realizes that it is as a result of the sand engulfing them that their descent is slowed down, and that semantically the couple are being enclosed by the sand as linguistically the syntax of the first sentence suggested enclosure: 'The sand swirls round our ankles, suddenly it surrounds our calves. It's from then on that the descent is slowed down'. Any illusion of power which the couple has in the first sentence is thus quashed.

Transitivity choices throughout the segment illuminate where the power lies linguistically. Sixteen of the verb phrases take a subject other than the protagonists or their body parts, and seven of these are directly attributed to the sand. 'You' is the subject of twelve verb phrases, all of which are material action intention processes. The body parts of the addressee are the subject of six verb phrases, all of which are material action supervention. 'I' is the subject of fourteen verb phrases, four of which are superventional, one intentional and nine mental. Six take the body parts of the speaker as subject, all superventional. Three take 'we' as their subject, two superventional and one intentional. There are far more verb phrases which take inanimate subjects in this section than in the previous one analysed. The addressee would still appear to be in control of her actions with all of her material actions being intentional. However, exactly half of these 'actions' are those of looking at or speaking to the addresser. The physical actions she performs are of small movements often to comfort the addresser, for example, 'you [...] hold m/e', 'you press m/y back', 'you [...] clasping m/e' and 'you mingle with m/e'. Only one of the verb phrases with the first person singular as the subject is a material action intention: 'I clasping you'. The addresser is in a weaker position linguistically than the addressee here as before, but both protagonists remain subject to external forces. This is further indicated by the use of the words and phrases 'suddenly' and 'at a given moment', where some force or fate has predetermined when events occur.

Although the first person pronouns represent a powerful 'excess' then, they are sometimes subject to fate and to control by the addressee. This redeems the 'I' from becoming an unwavering totalizing force. The lesbian subject Wittig presents us with cannot only morph its body shape but also can be transformed by other forces yet not be destroyed, for the 'I' remains the subject throughout the text. Appropriately, the italicized 'I' is a 'bent' or 'queered' phallogocentric 'I', or, as Shaktini puts it in the title of one of her articles: 'A Revolutionary Signifier'. It is not monocentric but an amorphous subject 'whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere', as Wittig states (*The Straight Mind*, p.62). Martindale criticizes Wittig for being 'instructional' in the preface to *The Lesbian Body* and suggests that,

The universality of the lesbian subject is compromised [...], if this author, in 'heading' the text, also 'heads' the lesbian body. This is, perhaps, inevitable: both Wittig and Vesalius, in their urgency to undo old orders, cannot afford query without an assured answer, and must replace the certainties they sweep away with new certainties. They are almost forced to stamp these new certainties with their author-ity, but it means that the lesbian which Wittig proposes, is finally, Wittigian rather than universal. (p.353)

Like Crosland's 'implausibility', this 'inevitable' consequence can be questioned. The decentralization of control exhibited in my analyses above shows that there are no 'certainties', but that within the society depicted change can occur, though often accompanied by violence. Wittig, indeed, employs combatants more overtly in *The Guérillères*, and uses literature as a 'Trojan horse' or 'war machine'.⁹⁵ When Martindale concludes that 'the text and "author" remain the point at which meaning is to be found, rather than the beginning of the reader's own narrative' (p.354), she fails to take into

⁹⁵ 'The Trojan Horse' is the title of an essay in *The Straight Mind*, pp. 68-75, in which Wittig writes: 'Any important literary work is like the Trojan Horse at the time it is produced. Any work with a new form operates as a war machine, because its design and its goal is to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions', pp. 68-69.

account the fact that readers may have to be resistant and enter into conflict with the text. Wittig's trajectory invites and provokes an active reading that does not depend upon mimetically adhering to her concept of 'lesbian' but having the strength to disagree with it. Her lesbianization can be challenged. Martindale's disappointment in what she sees as the didacticism of the author underlines a problematic for writers who exhibit a politics in their writing in a postmodern climate that, in its readiness to equate all voices and relativize positionality, can stifle the uptake of any definite position. This is a dangerous situation with which minority writers have historically been all too familiar. The social and political tributaries of the 1973 *Le corps lesbien* comprise of the direct action and emerging diversity of voices found in Wittig's countercultural background in late 1960s' France and the women's movement in particular.⁹⁶ Remembering this context helps to explain the text's stridency but the text's structure, its juxtaposition of short segments whereby the power dynamics alter from one to another and even within segments, exemplifies the transitory nature of power in the text. It is essential for Wittig's project that power relations are not finite and that there is no ossification of hierarchies. The society Wittig depicts, and the means of depicting it, celebrate flux, shifting perspectives, bodies and language to produce a radical challenge to the hierarchies in mainstream society.

Lesbian Discourse

Wittig's fiction and criticism foreshadows Judith Butler's theory that individuals and their sexed bodies are shaped discursively. For example, in *The Straight Mind*, Wittig refers to 'the material oppression of individuals by discourses' (p.25), and states: 'Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it' (p.43-44). As I mentioned in my Introduction to the thesis, in her discussion of Wittig's work, Butler stretches the idea further to query whether the physical features that make up the body exist

⁹⁶ Elaine Marks writes that Monique Wittig was initially 'deeply involved in the early years of the French women's movement as a radical feminist lesbian separatist', active in the *Gouines rouges* (the Red Dykes) and the *Féministes révolutionnaires*, in 'Women and Literature in France', *Signs*, 3.4 (1978), 832-842, p.837.

at all without the shaping effects of discourse that Wittig identifies: 'Is there a "physical" body prior to the perceptually perceived body? An impossible question to decide' (*Gender Trouble*, p.114). Both Wittig's and Butler's work points to the centrality of the discursive as the level that needs to be challenged in order for material change to take place. Both theorists recognize that discourses are more than linguistic systems but encompass other reiterative signifying practices. For instance, Wittig writes,

The entire world is only a great register where the most diverse languages come to have themselves recorded, such as the language of the Unconscious, the language of fashion, the language of the exchange of women where human beings are literally the signs which are used to communicate. These languages, or rather these discourses, fit into one another, interpenetrate one another, support one another, reinforce one another, auto-engender, and engender one another.

(*The Straight Mind*, p.22)

Butler accords succinctly: 'Discourse is not restricted to writing or speaking, but is also social action' (*Gender Trouble*, p.166, n.26). Butler devotes much attention to the 'impossible question' of the materialization of bodies in both *Gender Trouble* and her later *Bodies That Matter*. That repetition and reiteration is necessary,

Is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled [...]. But how, then, does the notion of gender performativity relate to this conception of materialization? In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names [...]. The regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative.

(*Bodies That Matter*, p.2)

Thus, the operational mode of discourse is that of self-fulfilling prophecy ('produces the effect that it names'). Once this is exposed, the 'self' around which this prophecy is centred can be interrogated, destabilized and perhaps toppled. The body's failure to materialize fully in *The Lesbian Body* is exposed and accentuated by the need to reiterate. Butler's words, cited above, seem so pertinent to *The Lesbian Body* here: that reiteration is 'a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled'. We may infer from Butler here, then, that there is an 'excess' outwith the influence of discursive practices.

Wittig, in *The Lesbian Body*, attempts to create a new discourse centred around a self-defined, though 'not self-centered', lesbian subject (*The Straight Mind*, p.61). Wittig's discourse is not only a result of linguistic and textual innovation but also social, in terms of the reiterative practices that the series of segments portrays. Considering the text as a discourse takes us back to Martindale's criticism of Wittig, however, in which the former implies that the text operates only to fulfil its own prophecy: 'The Wittigian lesbian self speaks to be heard and understood as it intends; likewise, the Wittigian text seeks to be read and understood as it intends' (p.354). A discourse only really becomes problematic when it seeks to define or to control others who are excluded from the norm-setting of the discourse, as may be inferred by the second half of Martindale's sentence here. But the 'I' of *The Lesbian Body* does not totally control its other and the text does not totally control its readership because there is no fixity: every aspect of the fluid order is subject to challenge. One of the most overt characteristics of the text's refusal to fix identities is the absence of names for the protagonists. In all of the prosopopoic 'lists of names' in *The Lesbian Body* (Author's Note prefacing *The Lesbian Body*, p.10), the other, the 'you', is never given a name in the form of a proper noun. This itself is a fact that is reiterated throughout several of the segments.⁹⁷ For example, the addressee is addressed as 'm/y unnameable one' (p.69) and 'you unnameable unnamed' (p.46). At other times, the protagonists seem to have

⁹⁷ Shaktini notes that the word 'name' occurs twenty-seven times in the text, in 'Displacing the Phallic Subject', p.38.

names known to one another that are withheld from the reader. For example, 'you turn towards m/e crying m/y name' (p.55) and 'I baptise you' (p.29), the latter of which seems to imply naming. This refusal to name either the 'j/e' or the 'you' enhances the protagonists' indefiniteness.⁹⁸ They cannot be reduced to one noun. There is an implication that, for Wittig, to name would be to define and restrict, so she creates a discourse where the only names are those attached to mythical figures and revises them. Likewise, readers are not named, defined or enclosed but are lesbianized temporarily.

The following examination of Wittig's manipulation of two particular discourses, that of medicine and religion, demonstrates these discourses being opened to transformation by a resisting writer, a confrontational strategy that readers of *The Lesbian Body* might adopt.⁹⁹ It will have become apparent from my quotations from the text thus far that medical terminology infuses the prose segments. Medical terminology is juxtaposed with more everyday terms in the lists of body parts and excretions, in which parts of a body are laid open before the reader as in a blazon. The first list begins, 'THE LESBIAN BODY THE JUICE THE SPITTLE THE SALIVA THE SNOT', and similar repeated use of the definite article, 'the', is made in each of the lists, giving them an incongruous poeticism through the resultant rhythm (p.28). The use of 'the' also makes the body parts both specific and general, for 'the' can refer to one specific body or can be a collective determiner for any number of bodies. It can therefore be the body of both the 'I', and/or the 'you', or any bodies, including those of the readers. It contrasts acutely with the high number of first person possessive pronouns in the segments and gives the illusion of objectivity and impersonality. Surprisingly, though significantly, the sex of the bodies both in the segments and the lists is often not highlighted. True, the sex is never male but it is

⁹⁸ Names that do occur in *The Lesbian Body* are those of goddesses and feminized gods, sometimes as the addressee (Ishtar, p.93, Osiris, p.80) and Sappho is invoked in several segments. In the segment on page 69-70, several goddesses are named in contrast to the 'unnameable' addressee. In contrast, *The Guérillères* has bold capitalized lists of women's names interspersed throughout its segments. The lists of names in *The Guérillères*, however, also resonate with an inability to name every woman.

⁹⁹ The myths that Wittig manipulates are, of course, another example of a type of discourse reshaped in *The Lesbian Body*.

understatedly female.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Wittig's lesbian subject is more ready to insinuate itself because the category of sex, a social construction, is subjugated to the experience of embodiment, itself a construction that she challenges.

A close examination of one of the lists shows it apparently to be ordered according to a rigid logic of categorization and separation. It can be divided into five sections, pertaining initially to areas of the body. The list begins 'THE BRACHIALS THE CIRCUMFLEXES THE MEDIANS THE ULNARS' (p.62).¹⁰¹ These relate to the arteries, veins, nerves, muscles and bones of the arms.¹⁰² The next area which can be discerned explores the region from the lower back down the legs to the feet: 'THE SACRALS THE LUMBARS THE SCIATICS THE FEMORALS, THE SAPHENOUSES THE TIBIALS THE PLANTARS'. The following denote nerves and arteries communicating throughout the body: 'THE PATHETICS THE RECURRENTS THE SYMPATHETICS THE CARDIAC THE DIAPHRAGMATIC PLEXUS THE BULB THE SPINAL'. The description then moves to the face to denote the location of four senses of taste, sight, hearing and smell, followed by the more disparately located sense of touch: 'THE FACIALS THE GLOSSOPHARYNGEAL THE OPTICS THE ACOUSTICS THE OLFACTORIES THE NERVE-CELLS'. The final section is a breakdown of the blood: 'THE GLOBULES THE RED CORPUSCLES THE LEUCOCYTES THE HAEMOGLOBIN THE PLASMA THE SERUM THE VENOUS BLOOD'. What might appear a random list of body parts is seen to be constructed as an opening up of categories within categories. This list is a depiction of a contained body that can nevertheless be dissected in a measured, controlled fashion. It is in contrast to the unstable, unpredictable boundary-breaking of the decaying, metamorphosing, penetrating and perforated bodies which pervade the text both in the prose segments and in other lists. Medical discourse in

¹⁰⁰ See the concordance to Shaktini's doctoral dissertation 'The Problem of Gender' for information on word frequencies in *The Lesbian Body*. Shaktini writes: 'Where the phallic subject tends to genitally centralize our sexual perception of the human body, the lesbian subject of Wittig tends to decentralize it' ('Problem', p.33).

¹⁰¹ Each of the subsequent quotations from this list is from p.62.

¹⁰² My reference guide for the medical terminology is *Stedman's Medical Dictionary*, 20th edn., ed. by Isaac Asimov et al. (London: Baillière, Tindall & Cox, 1961).

the lists appears to be set apart as the objective 'true', emotionally detached approach to the body, typographically, grammatically and semantically segregated from the prose segments. At first, in Bakhtinian terms, the lists would appear to represent the ideal authoritative language which sets itself apart and does not enter into dialogue with other types of discourse:

The authoritative discourse itself does not merge [...] it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert: it demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance.

(The Dialogic Imagination, p.343)

But this unmerging, demarcated, compact, inert discourse blurs with some of the terminology used in the prose segments and has some everyday vocabulary penetrate it. The 'SNOT' of the opening list is exemplary of the latter and one of many segments that incorporates detailed anatomic vocabulary is on pages 60-61 which opens: 'The water makes the network of m/y nerves crackle the brachial plexuses the lumbar the sacral plexuses' (p.60). Although Wittig appears initially to literalize typographically what Bakhtin refers to here in his conceptualization of authoritative discourse, the interpenetration of registers debunks the authority of the lists and the speaker(s) of the segments (and Wittig) demonstrate an assured 'mastery' of anatomical terminology. Specialist vocabulary is made familiar to non-specialist readers.¹⁰³ But in this familiarization process, the signifiers become detached from their official significations because non-specialist readers cannot and are not expected to understand the terms as defined in medical dictionaries. Instead, the words may take on a very different, somewhat renegade physicality through the poeticism of their sounds, and be given a radically different semantic twist.

¹⁰³ The text, however, required a specialist translator. David Le Vay is described in Margaret Crosland's introduction as 'an eminent practising anatomist and surgeon, [who] has abandoned any male chauvinism long enough to translate this book' (p.7).

In the list I have been examining above, for example, the ossified hierarchies and categories of the official terms are humorously and subtly diverted by the suggestion of love problems in vocabulary such as ‘THE PATHETICS THE RECURRENTS THE SYMPATHETICS THE CARDIAC’. This string of juxtaposed words in a piece of literature might imply a repeated troubling of the heart’s emotions in the form of love problems. In fact, the suspicion might arise as to whether this is official medical terminology. These words are, however, according to the ‘legitimizing’ medical dictionary, specific components of the body: the fourth cranial nerve, a type of artery, the autonomous nervous system and pertaining to the heart, respectively. The duplicity of these words is highlighted by their juxtaposition and blurs the boundaries between medical, literary and vernacular discourses. Medical discourse is shown to be subject to de-hierarchization and infiltration by other discourses just as the classic contained body is subject to infiltration, decomposition and metamorphosis. To return to Bakhtin’s ideas, Wittig therefore demonstrates that this authoritative discourse can be dialogic and is therefore not as closed and authoritative as it would appear.

To dissect this list still further, the concrete authority of the medical terms is undermined etymologically by the use of the word, ‘SACRALS’. *Stedman’s Medical Dictionary* defines this as pertaining to the *os sacrum* or sacred bone, which closes in the pelvic girdle and is ‘so called because it was believed to escape disintegration and to serve as the basis for the resurrected body’. The use of this one word beautifully and humorously debunks the scientific objectivity of medical discourse by illustrating how the etymology of the vocabulary parallels to some extent that of the etymology of the discipline of medicine, exposing its origins in ‘unscientific’ belief. The list is a fitting example of a lesbian body ‘beyond the categories’ (*The Straight Mind*, p.47), not only of sex but also of medicine’s discourse.

The second discourse that I want to examine here is that of religion, specifically Christianity. Religious discourse is paramount in the very structure of *The Lesbian Body*. The Beacon edition has the text described on its cover as ‘an erotic female “Song of

Songs”’, the Old Testament Book depicting love poems addressed by a man to a woman and vice-versa. One far from sympathetic review parodies Wittig’s redeployment of language in terming the book a ‘sort of extended, and extremely repetitive, Song of Solomena’, The Song of Solomon being the Book’s name in some translations of the Bible.¹⁰⁴ The Biblical Songs have been interpreted by Jews as representing the relationship between God and his people and by Christians as the relationship between Christ and the Church.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the protagonists of the Song of Songs have been taken both as individuals and representatives is also echoed in Wittig’s text where the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ seem to be simultaneously individuals and more than individuals. However, Jean Duffy indicates that in more recent analyses:

The Song of Songs is no longer seen as an obscure allegory on the relationship between man and the church, but as a candid affirmation of human love and sexuality in which the female speaker is quite capable of taking sexual initiative. Wittig’s variation on the sacred poem flouts the church’s taboos on homosexuality, but it shows a grasp of the source’s structure and spirit. (p.225)

Wittig’s blasphemous reworking indeed echoes the Biblical Songs to some extent in form, sensuousness and pastoral imagery. The Song of Songs also provides an early example of the blazon motif, reworked by Wittig in the lists and fragmentations in the prose segments, in its use of similes in relation to lists of body parts of the beloved. This concerns both the male addressing the female, for example, ‘Your breasts are like twin deer, like two gazelles. Your neck is like a tower of ivory’ (Song of Songs 7. 3-4), and the female describing her beloved to other women: ‘His cheeks are as lovely as a garden that is full of herbs and spices. His lips are like lilies, wet with liquid myrrh’ (Song of Songs 5.13). The structural framework and poeticism of the Song of Songs, then, is manipulated by Wittig and infused with other registers, but whereas similes predominate in the descriptions in the Songs,

¹⁰⁴ ‘Butch Telegraph’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 Jan. 1974: 5. No author given.

¹⁰⁵ Song of Songs introduction, *Good News Bible* (Glasgow: The Bible Societies, Collins/Fontana, 1986) p.659.

Wittig literalizes similes so that rather than being like animals or inanimate objects, her protagonists actually are them.

A more specific instance of Wittig's manipulation of Christian discourse is seen in the segment which describes a scene akin to that of Christ's carrying his cross. In this segment, a weary protagonist walks along a road, falls down, loses consciousness, and is supported by women: 'When *I* fall for the first time the women support m/e under the arms, with their aid *I* walk. Loss of consciousness flings m/e to the ground again' (p.63). The words 'fall for the first time' echo those attributed to a scene represented in the Stations of the Cross: 'Jesus falls for the first time'.¹⁰⁶ The Stations are further evoked when the protagonist falls for a second time ('flings m/e to the ground again') and the fact that she is aided by women also finds its correlative in the Stations. Religious discourse and ritualized worship is thus brought into contact with literary and vernacular discourse, as was the medical discourse in the list. As the list questioned medical discourse in exposing its origins to be in unscientific belief in resurrection, the choice of echoing these Stations of the Cross exhibits a similar questioning of the authoritative authenticity of religious discourse.¹⁰⁷ The Stations comprise nine gospel scenes and five from popular tradition.¹⁰⁸ The three suggested here, two of them depicting falls and one where women help the protagonist (Jesus fell three times, and Veronica wiped his face), are extra-Biblical in source. The symbiosis of gospel scenes from the authoritative Christian text, the Bible, with scenes from popular sources, has formed a concretized fourteen-stage representation around which a form of worship has developed. This exposes the origins of religious discourse to be a fusion of discourses. The Christian claim to the truth of the gospels is made vulnerable in showing forms of worship not only to be originating from this pure 'truth' but from multiple, extra-Biblical sources, thereby querying whether this 'truth' is merely one form of

¹⁰⁶ These Stations comprise fourteen scenes depicting the crucifixion, are found on walls of Catholic churches and support a series of devotions.

¹⁰⁷ Fittingly, resurrection surfaces in my discussions of both the religious and medical discourses. Resurrection itself is like prosopopoeia in bringing close that which is absent or dead. Each segment and list of *The Lesbian Body* is rather like an attempt to resurrect a body.

¹⁰⁸ These details are described in *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. by J.G. Davies (London: SCM Press, 1986), p.498.

vernacular discourse.¹⁰⁹ By implication, extra-Biblical texts assume equal credibility or incredibility, as does *The Lesbian Body* in its own analogous patchwork composition. This segment illustrates how the text's defamiliarizing techniques produce insecurities and ambiguities inconsistent with the claim to 'truth' exhibited by an authoritative discourse. The text does not therefore set itself up as a 'truth' to replace that which it is debunking, but instead fosters an arena for engagement and exchange precisely because so much remains open to interpretation.

To summarize this section, therefore, the macro-discourses which Wittig displaces are not replaced by the discourse of *The Lesbian Body* finitely. The discourse of *The Lesbian Body* is itself a participant in exchange, for to be otherwise would be to take on the domineering characteristics of mainstream discourse which Wittig so despises. Her manipulation of these discourses illustrates the conflict between them, as does her representation of the language and bodies of the individual protagonists. Her lesbianized discourse is comprised simultaneously of incorporation and defilement of other discourses in a move which parallels and is interlaced with her representation of the body of the lesbian subject. The defilement transgresses boundaries and opens up channels for exchange. The bodily and linguistic dialogues which result are not harmonious but conflict-bound negotiations of position.

Lesbian Conclusions

The author side-steps any accusation of sex-specific essentialism to a parodically exaggerated degree. Her trope of the lesbian is inclusive of all that is outside of the heterosexual system, all that is threatening to it, incorporating shifting power relations, unstable bodies and discourses. However, if her definition of lesbian depends upon being outside the mainstream, how, as Butler has observed, would such an identity persist should the objectives of the marginal be attained (*Gender Trouble*, p.128)? Marginal identities

¹⁰⁹ Of course, the Gospels of the Bible themselves are four versions of the same story.

based solely on a relation to the mainstream are vacuous once the mainstream has been dissolved. For Wittig, what is outside of the heterosexual system is a self-defined point-of-view not related to the mainstream, a point-of-view which, although currently a minority, does not need to remain so. Wittig explains this point: 'The minority subject is not self-centered as is the straight subject' (*The Straight Mind*, p.61). Instead it is a subject 'whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere' (*The Straight Mind*, p.62). Wittig requires a reevaluation of the terms 'central' and 'marginal', for nothing can be marginal to a centre which is everywhere and has no bounds. In this respect, *The Lesbian Body* to an extent succeeds in lesbianizing the men and the women, gods and goddesses, as Wittig intended, and succeeds in lesbianizing the straight minded reader for the duration of the text. But readers have the option to resist by adopting the strategies that Wittig does. What once was marginal, defined negatively in relation to the mainstream, not women, nonhuman, unnatural is also self-defined as having its centre everywhere and margins nowhere. Lesbian as trope is employed as a textual device to destabilize and lesbianize the reader. The reproduction of lesbians beyond even the bounds of the text is the result of Wittig's use of lesbian as trope for a point-of-view. But, does this lesbianized world view bear any relation to the identity the non-Wittigian lesbian subject has struggled to maintain a specificity for? Does this subject become dangerously engulfed by Wittig's monstrous lesbian or endlessly dispersed and diluted?

All that remains specific about this lesbian identity is its openness. In corporeal terms, Wittig's 'lesbian body' has a 'circumference' that is 'nowhere'. There are no hierarchies of body parts in her text. Instead, the whole of the body is open, not just the conventional orifices that Bakhtin, Kristeva and Douglas focus upon. The ideas of surface and boundedness are made meaningless. Wittig asks us to rethink identity in these radical terms. Wittig's lesbian is in some respects 'generic' in that it shares with the generic 'he' of the English language the ability simultaneously to incorporate and alienate its others. Just as the generic 'he' may be viewed as a powerful tool of subordination and erasure under the guise of inclusion, Wittig's lesbian embraces others in order to attain and perpetuate its own

power. But, significantly, the lesbian identity is altered by that which it incorporates, unlike the generic masculine subject. Like the 'lesbianization' of Cindy Crawford, the transformative power of Wittig's text is ephemeral, yet no less significant for this. Her 'Trojan horse' attacks the boundaries and substances of corporeality and textuality precisely in order 'to tear open the closely woven material of the commonplaces, and to continually prevent their organization into a system of compulsory meaning' (*The Straight Mind*, p.100).

CHAPTER FOUR

Reading the Ambiguously-Gendered Body as Jeanette Winterson Writes It¹¹⁰

Written on the Body provoked a wealth of criticism upon its publication and the novel continues to be viewed as the watershed text of Winterson's career, from which point she has failed to deliver what her disparate audiences have anticipated. For instance, Winterson has been described as writing the novel for an audience not of 'feminists, lesbians or even the general public: it is the (male) mainstream literati', thereby fixing herself 'most firmly within the mainstream literary community and its preoccupation with postmodernism'.¹¹¹ Such accusatory tones are examined by Lynne Pearce who suggests that, after her debut novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, 'a "classifiable" lesbian *Bildungsroman*', Winterson's experimentation with gender representation in subsequent work has meant that feminist readers and '[l]esbian readers, in particular, have experienced this "sliding" of gendered and sexual identity - this refusal to "name" - as a serious political betrayal'.¹¹² *Written on the Body* has as its premise this "'sliding"' and 'refusal to "name"' and therefore epitomizes that which is most treacherous. It is as though, with this novel, Winterson has come out of the closet to reveal herself as a postmodernist and must subsequently be rejected by the lesbian and feminist communities for no longer being or, even worse, of having only masqueraded as, a member of these communities.

¹¹⁰ My title is a reworking of Bordo's 'Reading the Slender Body'.

¹¹¹ Rachel Wingfield, 'Jeanette Winterson is Not the Only Lesbian', *Trouble & Strife*, 38, Winter 1998-99, 37-45, p.40, parentheses in original. Subsequent references to Wingfield are to this article.

¹¹² Lynne Pearce, *Reading Dialogics* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), pp.173-174. Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (London: Vintage, 1991; Pandora, 1985). Winterson's gender experimentation took the form of cross-dressing, bisexuality and a form of fantastic androgyny in *The Passion* (London: Vintage, 1996; Bloomsbury, 1987) and flexible and ambiguous genders in *Sexing the Cherry* (London: Vintage, 1990; Bloomsbury, 1989). The personal being political, Pearce elsewhere analyses her own strategies to defend *Written on the Body* at the time of its publication, suggesting she had 'succumbed to a very literary specific form of fandom' with regard to Winterson which masked her 'disappointment', thus providing herself an example of the emotional investment in the author, Lynne Pearce, 'The Emotional Politics of Reading Winterson', in *'I'm Telling You Stories': Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading*, *Postmodern Studies*, 25, ed. by Helena Grice and Tim Woods (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp.29-39, p.30 and p.36. Subsequent references to Grice and Woods are to this collection.

However, Winterson's betrayal is as slippery as the term 'postmodernism' itself. For example, Grice and Woods's collection of (predominantly feminist) essays on Winterson's fiction under the umbrella of a series entitled 'Postmodern Studies', incorporates a convincing reading of *Written on the Body* as a lesbian text.¹¹³ Winterson's strategy of employing an ambiguously-gendered first-person narrator might be regarded as postmodern in that it disrupts the mainstream discourse and its metalinguistic or metafictional nature promotes uncertainty, plurality and non-fixity. However, these are strategies familiar to feminists attempting to subvert patriarchal discourses. Because it is loaded with gender significations, Winterson's use of the ambiguously-gendered narrator moves beyond a textual game to draw attention to the materialities of subject positions and language's part in forming them. As Susan Lanser observes of *Written on the Body*:

Narratological attention to sex, gender, and sexuality [...] makes a strong case for a *contextual* poetics: for the impossibility of reading any narrative without considering the cultural conventions in which the narrative operates.¹¹⁴

The cultural conventions which Winterson foregrounds are further highlighted in discussions about the narrator where the commentator is made self-conscious about the third-person pronoun to be used in reference to her/him, a point which is compounded by the fact that the narrator is unnamed. Interestingly, several critics justify making a gender-specific choice, re-establishing the binaries that Winterson has attempted to undo.¹¹⁵ It is notable, however, that no one, to my knowledge, has opted openly to declare the narrator 'he' even though much antagonism has been voiced about the masculinist characteristics of her/him, more detailed discussion of which will follow. This lack itself indicates a tendency

¹¹³ The article is Cath Stowers's 'The Erupting Lesbian Body: Reading *Written on the Body* as a Lesbian Text', in Grice and Woods, pp.89-101. Further references to Stowers are to this article. Laura Doan discusses *Oranges*'s relationship to the postmodern in 'Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Postmodern', in Doan, *The Lesbian Postmodern*, pp.137-155.

¹¹⁴ Susan S. Lanser, 'Queering Narratology' in Mezei, pp. 250-261, Lanser's emphasis.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Heather Nunn, '*Written on the Body*: An Anatomy of Horror, Melancholy and Love', in *Women: A Cultural Review*, 7.1 (1996), 16-27, and Ute Kauer, 'Narration and Gender: The Role of the First-Person Narrator in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*', in Grice and Woods, pp.41-51. Further references to Nunn and Kauer are to these articles.

to read the gender-ambiguous 'I' as masculine, for 'he', it seems, does not require an essay-length argument in order to be reclaimed. This aligns the avowed gender encompassment of the first-person singular pronoun with other avowed gender-encompassing terms, 'man' for 'humanity', 'he' for the non-specific third person, for example.¹¹⁶ In this manner, readings which employ the feminine third-person in referring to the narrator tacitly assume the masculinity of the 'I' as a given whilst *re*-locating in the gaps and silences the feminine speaking subject as they paradoxically attempt to reclaim a voice for her. They reproduce the equation of non-marked language with the masculine and marked language with the feminine, whereas Winterson's 'given' is that feminine and masculine subjects co-exist in her deployment of the 'I', which then becomes a device to take her readers beyond those binaries. The novel suggests that it is the deadening cliché of patriarchy that causes 'the trouble' and this cliché's pervasiveness is evidenced in responses to the novel.¹¹⁷

The accusations against *Written on the Body* for its betrayal of feminism, and particularly lesbianism, into the postmodern are intriguing for it is precisely the characteristics of slippage and sliding in the text which have led to reclamatory lesbian readings, for example by Nunn and Stowers. The text is certainly open to such readings but not without complicating them, as Stowers's suggestion that the bisexuality in the novel is being used 'with specifically lesbian aims' testifies (p.99). It has been pointed out that, whilst a tenet of feminism is to illuminate that patriarchy is the common ideological position behind the "universal truths - Humanism, History, Religion, Progress, etc." which postmodernism probes, the latter does not recognize a single common factor behind this as to do so would plunge it into a totalizing discourse which it critiques in other ideologies.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ See Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) for detailed discussion of this myth of inclusion.

¹¹⁷ 'It's the clichés that cause the trouble' is a refrain of the novel, introduced shortly after its opening (p.10), and we discover near the end that the original words were those of Louise (p.189). Winterson's attempt to step beyond the clichés is thus clear, although she has, somewhat unfairly, been criticized for her failure and subsequent 'reprise of the NW3 adultery novel', Nicolette Jones's review, 'Secondhand Emotion', *Sunday Times*, 13 September, 1992, 4:11. Further references to Jones are to this review.

¹¹⁸ Barbara Creed, 'From Here to Modernity', p.52, quoted in Linda Hutcheon, 'Incredulity Toward Metanarrative', p.264.

A paradox is that feminisms point up the fictionality of patriarchal discourse whilst laying claim to a position which is somehow closer to the truth (Creed, p.67, cited by Hutcheon, p.264). It is the overt politicism of feminisms, which ‘usually want to go beyond [exposition] to work to *change* those systems, not just to “de-doxify” them’, that gives them this ‘strength and, in some people’s eyes, their necessary limitation’ (Hutcheon, p.264).¹¹⁹

By reading the silences of *Written on the Body* as lesbian one continues in the tradition of searching for the lesbian relationship amongst hidden codes enforced by centuries of censorship, but this denies the bisexuality of the narrator who informs us of sexual relationships with both female and male partners. A fixed lesbian identity is therefore disrupted as well as the heterosexual order. Bisexuality is also questioned by the force of the narrator’s desire for Louise, as we have no indication whether the narrator continues to desire males. The ambiguously-gendered narrator, and the red herrings which populate the novel with regard to its sexuality and gender, lead the reader through a maze of sexual identities, not in order to make us choose but in order rather to prevent us from choosing a gender for the narrator. This, in itself, may be viewed as a feminist strategy since it ‘is, after all, only those who have been oppressed by history and society who want to shatter the paradigms of dominance and submission enforced by hierarchies of gender, and restore a primordial, gender-free chaos’.¹²⁰ I would, however, argue that *Written on the Body* is not gender-free *per se*, but rather a hyperbolic parody of gender significations. What makes it feminist is its critique of these positions as central to our negotiation with the world and its attempt to alter those perceptions to a state free from these restrictions. The liberating potential of the strategy of the ambiguously-gendered ‘I’, is not, however, carried over to the representation of bodies in this text, as shall become apparent throughout the course of this chapter.

¹¹⁹ See Doan’s *The Lesbian Postmodern* for specific debates on the relationship between lesbianism and postmodernism.

¹²⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), II: *Sexchanges*, p.364, quoted by Ute Kauer, p.47. After citing this, Kauer somewhat paradoxically goes on to use the ‘feminine personal pronoun’ when referring to the narrator of *Written on the Body*, thereby undermining the ‘chaos’ and conflating the narrator with the implied author (p.47).

Written on the Body shares more than structural features with Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, both of which, for example, invest the signifier 'I' with a politics of gender, rework the 'Song of Songs' and make body parts into litanies. *Written on the Body*'s narrator shares attributes of Wittig's 'lesbian': 'a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society', 'located philosophically (politically) beyond the categories of sex' (*The Straight Mind*, p.13 and p.47, Wittig's parentheses). Whereas Wittig proposes that the lesbian's position as product of society yet on the edges of that society offers her/him/it (to embrace Wittig's trajectory) revolutionary potential, Winterson, in *Written on the Body*, deconstructs lesbianism and bisexuality along with heterosexuality to expose each as limited social constructions/constrictions. As a significant contrast to the reception of *Written on the Body*, *The Lesbian Body* has been described as having 'something of a cult status among lesbians'.¹²¹ In Chapter Three, I argued for a reading of *The Lesbian Body* which embraces its powerful 'lesbianization' of discourse in terms of Wittig's theorization of the 'lesbian' put forward in *The Straight Mind*, a concept which, for her, is plural, fluid and engulfing rather than a specific and enclosed category. If such a reading is uncomfortable with regard to the cult status, this is because *The Lesbian Body* prefigures Winterson's text because it throws open the categories of 'straight', 'lesbian', 'mind' and 'body'. But Winterson is dislodged from the category of lesbian writer because the promise of *Written on the Body*'s gender ambiguity is not fulfilled beyond its employment as a textual device.

Although a consistent feature of much of her fiction, Winterson's non-fiction writing does not have as its focus gender or sexuality, in marked contrast, say, to Wittig's non-fiction which is overtly feminist in its polemicism. Winterson's collection of essays, *Art Objects*, is polemical in relation to her views on art and literature, which is in keeping with her presentation of herself as a writer rather than a specifically female or lesbian writer.¹²² Lisa Moore summarizes Winterson's approach to sexuality in her fiction thus:

¹²¹ Patricia Duncker, 'Jeanette Winterson and the Aftermath of Feminism', in Grice and Woods, pp.77-88, p.84. Further references are to this article.

¹²² Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (London: Vintage, 1996; Jonathan Cape, 1995). In particular, see the chapter entitled 'The Semiotics of Sex' for the author's

Representation does not depend on the centrality of 'the heterosexual paradigm', nor on the inevitable 'duality' of femininity in relation to masculinity. Lesbian experience can be at the centre and not the margins [...]. For Winterson, the 'rules' don't work for anyone (even heterosexual men), and never have. She offers neither a critique of heterosexual culture nor a salvific account of lesbianism, largely because she refuses to accept the conventional distinction in the first place.¹²³

Winterson does refuse to accept the conventional distinction but she also disrupts the ideas of centre and margin. The ambiguously-gendered 'I' of *Written on the Body* functions like Wittig's lesbian with its centre everywhere and its margins nowhere, yet Winterson does not translate this motif onto the corporeality of the narrator. Moore's comments are certainly verified in *Written on the Body*'s disruption of conventional distinctions between sexualities and genders and its refusal to foreground any one identity. Indeed, Winterson's portrayal of lesbian relationships, even in *Oranges*, is hardly positive, as Wingfield points out.

Nevertheless, the annoyance of lesbian readers at Winterson's 'betrayal' in not providing them with consistently lesbian protagonists illuminates in part the readership's desire to categorize the author's work according to the author's sexuality, a correspondence which Winterson has eschewed consciously in her practice and her commentary upon her work:

There is such a thing as lesbian fiction. It's genre fiction like science-fiction, like crime writing, like thriller writing and its scope is necessarily narrow. It must be. Just as you have to have a body in a murder story, you will have to have obligatory sex scenes, love scenes, in your lesbian books and that's fine. They speak to a

views on the relationship between art and sexuality. Subsequent references to *Art Objects* are to the Vintage edition.

¹²³ Lisa Moore, 'Teledildonics: Virtual Lesbians in the Fiction of Jeanette Winterson', in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. by Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.104-127, p.107 (Moore's parenthesis). The words in quotation marks are those of Judith Roof in *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp.2-5.

particular audience and they are necessary but they are a kind of Mills and Boon, and I'm not interested in them, just as I wouldn't be interested in Mills and Boon or in that kind of very narrow writing. I don't want to say I'm only going to write about lesbians. I want the whole thing, the whole gamut, and I will have to draw it in disciplined only by a lasso of words.¹²⁴

Winterson's work has benefited from addressing this 'particular audience', however, as well as a wider audience. Winterson has elsewhere described herself as a feminist but not a feminist writer.¹²⁵ *Written on the Body's* refusal to fix itself therefore parallels the author's own resistance to categorization, and her not wishing to speak to any 'particular audience'. What the reception of *Oranges* shares with that of *Written on the Body* is the exhibition of the audience's hankering after the autobiographical. Angela Lambert, for instance, exhibits no caution in stating, '[s]ince it is soon obvious that the narrator has no penis there can be little doubt that "it" is a "she" if not necessarily her [Winterson], although the book was considered by the literary London to be a *roman à clef* based on Winterson's own colourful sex life'.¹²⁶ Lambert makes a series of leaps here which are plainly insubstantial: firstly, no sex characteristics of the narrator are alluded to and, if one were to follow Lambert's reductionist lead, it would be equally valid to say that it does not have a vagina and is therefore male; and, secondly, the leaps from not having a penis to being a woman and then Winterson are fanciful. Winterson herself views the conflation of her writing with autobiography with suspicion.¹²⁷ It is a significant paradox that critics who insist upon

¹²⁴ 'Face to Face', TV interview with Jeremy Isaacs (BBC, 1994). The publication of Maureen Duffy's *Love Child* (London: Virago, 1994; Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), as part of Virago's 'Lesbian Landmarks' series is an interesting case in point for the lesbianization of a novel which is narrated by a non gender specific character, presumably arising from the nature of the author's sexuality. From a different perspective, Wingfield's inclusion of Sara Maitland's work in her discussion of lesbians in mainstream publishing has, she states, been met with cries that Maitland is not a lesbian and is married to a vicar (p.37). Wingfield's arguments that Maitland represents lesbians more positively than Winterson, amongst others, support her inclusion.

¹²⁵ In interview with Alice Thomson, 'Passionate Apostle for the Lexicon of Love', *The Times*, August 26, 1992, *Life and Times*, p.5.

¹²⁶ Angela Lambert, 'Portrait: Jeanette Winterson', *Prospect*, 27 (1998), pp.46-51, p. 47.

Subsequent references to Lambert are to this article.

¹²⁷ Winterson discusses the conflation of women's writing with autobiography in her interview with Jeremy Isaacs where she states that *Oranges* is autobiographical only in a sense that all writing

resurrecting the author as a conduit into the text do so only in terms of her sexuality and gender, silencing her voice which at every opportunity argues that her work not be seen solely in these terms. The contradiction is a trope of many readings of *Written on the Body*, where determining the gender of the narrator is the elevated focus yet precisely what Winterson is attempting to subvert.

Apparent disparities between Winterson and the expectations stimulated by her sexuality and gender have received attention not only from lesbians and feminists. For example, there have been comments upon her stepping ‘confidently into the fictional maelstrom of testosterone’, challenging ‘the originality and charisma of male writers like Martin Amis and Ian McEwan’ (Lambert, p.46). Such self-confidence has been seen as conflicting with her gender, Harvey Porlock suggesting that ‘to announce on television that “my books are the best, I’m worth the money”, to dismiss the work of all other living writers and to reveal to journalists an affair with a woman who is still married’, is ‘unusual’ because ‘this impressive campaign was not mounted by some male in mid-life crisis, but by Jeanette Winterson, promoting her new novel *Written on the Body*’.¹²⁸ It is fitting that this and many of the criticisms of and observations on Winterson herself concern issues of categorization, particularly gender categories, since *Written on the Body* choreographs this debate.

As Ute Kauer has noted, *Written on the Body* forces gender into the field of narratology because it opens up for discussion the consequences of gender for the act of narration (p.41). Kauer notes that the narrator is barely physically present (p.44) and analyses the representation of other characters for clues to the narrator’s empathy with them to suggest that the narrator is female (p.47 ff.). Whilst my methodology shares some characteristics with that of Kauer, it is far from my aim to provide a gender for the narrator but rather to explore how Winterson creates a different means of representing gender and

comes from personal experience. Her introduction to the Vintage edition of *Oranges* touches upon this also: ‘Is *Oranges* an autobiographical novel? No not at all and yes of course’ (p.xiv) and in *Art Objects* she describes *Oranges* as ‘a fiction masquerading as a memoir’ (p.53).

¹²⁸ Harvey Porlock, ‘On the Critical List’, *Sunday Times*, 20 September, 1992, 6:2.

the body. In this chapter, I examine the means of representing the narrator's body which serves to foster a sense of spectrality, for far more than is necessary for the concealment of the narrator's gender is omitted from its descriptions.¹²⁹

'You can't see what I can see'

In the passage at the centre of the novel that gives it its title, the concealment of the narrator's body is explicitly foregrounded:

Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like braille. I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story. (p.89)

Winterson's narrator provides us with linguistic resonances of its body which deny specular objectification by the reader's gaze. The first-person narrator is the focalizer, literally the looker, and this grounds the character-narrator to a fixed position and implies a certain physicality. However, the information we have about her/his physical appearance is so vague that a picture cannot be built up as, diegetically, the narrator rarely records itself as the object of other characters' looks (exceptions will be discussed below). In a narrative ostensibly concerned with the body, the lack of bodily self-reference on the part of the narrator is marked and entices the reader both to look for the body and have their look deflected elsewhere, onto the more physically presented body of Louise, for example.

The narrator's presentation of itself as though it is not to be looked at by the reader characterizes Bakhtin's observation that, 'in life and dreams the main hero - I myself - is

¹²⁹ In the term 'spectrality' the three branches of the word's etymological root, the Latin *specere* meaning 'to look at', are appropriate: 'spectre' in the phantom-like presence of the narrator; 'spectacle' in the reader's insistent desire to see the narrator's body; 'spectrum' in the narrator's mobility on a scale of gendered identity.

never expressed outwardly and requires no outward image'.¹³⁰ This aspect of first-person narration is exaggerated playfully in *Written on the Body*. When the body parts of the narrator are alluded to, there are few adjectives which expand upon their physical nature, most of them prefixed merely with the possessive pronoun 'my'. Examples include a particular moment when Louise is touching the narrator, '[y]ou put your hand around my burning back' (p.11), 'held my hot hand in your cool fingers'(p.12). These adjectives, 'burning' and 'hot', however, are significant in that they do not permit the reader to visualize the narrator's body, but to engage with the physical sensations arising out of the touching bodies. A sense of corporeality is discovered by privileging touch rather than sight here, which develops the notion that the narrator is a tangible presence that the reader is not permitted to see.

The gaze, however, is both privileged and deflected in relation to the narrator's body. Frequently this is effected by the experiences being described focusing on body fragments. In the following instances, the sense of touch is again foregrounded through the choice of verbs - clasping, stroking, brushing, pulling - associated with the body parts: 'I [...] clasped her legs against my chest' (p.54); '[s]he stroked my hair'(p.54); 'her fingers brushing my skin, bringing up the nerve ends' (p.82); 'I pulled my knuckles along the rough brick' (p.87). The reader is invited to view the actions of the body but not the physicality of the body in performance. Other examples totally deny visualization and depend solely on empathy through sensation: 'My stomach contracted' (p.87). There is no suggestion of visual characteristics of the narrator's body except in the quasi-metaphorical description of her/his state in the present of the narrative when s/he is suffering without Louise: 'You'd see my hair, sparse and thinning, greying, gone' (p.107) and 'my skin was grey' (p.109). Employing the body as symbol of the emotional state of the narrator complements the pathetic fallacy afforded by the dilapidated and isolated cottage in Yorkshire to which s/he

¹³⁰ M.M. Bakhtin's essay 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' in *Art and Answerability*, ed. by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. by Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp.4-256, p.29. Subsequent references to this essay are to this edition.

has retreated from London after leaving Louise. Contrasted with Louise's vibrant red hair, discussed in more detail below, the narrator's hair thins and greys (and her skin also becomes the colour of phantoms) to the point of non-existence without Louise, the list of adjectives, 'sparse and thinning, greying, gone' emulating this process with its monosyllabic, past tense, end stop. That a lover is nothing without her/his other is a literalized cliché provoking complex implications for the relationship between the narrator and Louise. In one respect, the narrator may be seen as a stereotypical masculine-identified lover, pining for the feminine-identified beloved, bewitched by the power of her beauty. However, it is not Louise who has cast off her lover, as the traditional sonnet would have it, but vice-versa, albeit that the narrator acted on suspect selfless motives in believing that Louise's husband, the cancer specialist Elgin, could better care for his wife. The novel's concerns with the significance of gender to writing and the body, however, point up more important issues surrounding the narrator's spectrality, its representation in fragments and its lack of physical self-consciousness.

Since *Written on the Body*'s narrator is rarely the object of the gaze it exists primarily as a linguistic device, a speaking subject which is, nevertheless, seeking an other to make it whole. Far from embracing the world confidently as does Bakhtin's subject, 'because I experience myself essentially by encompassing any boundaries, any body - by extending myself beyond any bounds' ('Author and Hero', p.40), Iris Marion Young suggests that 'for feminine existence the body frequently is both subject and object at the same time and in reference to the same act'.¹³¹ Young states the reason for this thus: 'The basic fact of the woman's social existence as the object of the gaze of another [...] is the major source of her bodily self-reference' (p.150). According to Young's argument, the

¹³¹ Iris Marion Young, 'Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality' in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp.141-159, p.159. Subsequent references are to this essay in this collection. Young constructs her argument of feminine embodiment in response to what she views as the masculinist bias of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962). Her ideas seem to me to prove a useful feminist approach to Bakhtin although she does not deal with his theories.

lack of corporeal self-reference and self-objectification by the narrator is suggestive of masculine embodiment. In one of the few instances when the narrator explicitly becomes the subject of Louise's gaze, the reader's lack of privileged view is mocked:

I don't lack self-confidence but I'm not beautiful, that is a word reserved for very few people, people such as Louise herself. I told her this.

'You can't see what I can see.' She stroked my face. 'You are a pool of clear water where the light plays.' (p.85)

Denial of objectification can be seen as a liberating strategy yet the narrator's marked objectification of other characters, as I detail below, places the narrator in a hierarchical relationship with its co-characters. There is no shifting of power hierarchies that worked so productively in *The Lesbian Body*, for example.

Winterson's efforts to maintain the narrator's teasing corporeality foster a number of ways of deflecting attention from the narrator's body whilst seeming to describe it, such as the use of metaphorical descriptions to describe the narrator's emotions in bodily terms. For example the 'enlarged heart and no guts' (p.49) of the protagonist uncertain whether to embark on an affair, and, subsequent to the loss of Louise, the 'hole in [the] heart is the shape of [Louise]' (p.145), the 'heart has become a sterile zone [...], the pumped-out, dry bed' (p.183). Winterson extends this metaphorical deployment of the body, however, beyond use of the internal organ. For example, on an occasion when the narrator is in bed next to Jacqueline, her/his current partner, we are told, 'my lips were sealed and my cheeks must have been filling out like a gerbil's because my mouth was full of Louise' (p.41). This example illustrates a mechanism of disguise being performed linguistically in a centrifugal distancing from the object of description: the narrator's emotions for Louise are presented metaphorically as an effect on the body and this metaphor in turn becomes the object of the simile. The emotions seem to be located within the body which is being treated as a boundary between the self and the world while the mouth is depicted as an orifice which is difficult to control, liable to spill its linguistic contents. In one respect, using parts of the

body as metaphorical expressions of emotions corporealizes that which is not corporeal. Conversely, the use of metaphor, a linguistic construct, constitutes the body as signifier to the signified emotions, decentralizing the body's physicality to its function as conduit. The narrator's body performs this latter function and in a wider sense there cannot be a body present, merely an image suggested by the words on the page. The ambivalence between those words on the page and physicality is perfectly illustrated in that the 'Louise' in the mouth of the narrator appears to be both corporeal and linguistic, although in this example, Louise's body shares with that of the narrator the characteristic of not being *seen*.

The near-invisible aspect of Winterson's narrator may in part be attributable to the non-specified sex of the body and subsequent difficulties surrounding the perception or conception of this on the part of the reader. However, features which would not prevent the sex disguise are also omitted and there are references in the text which indicate the narrator does not view itself as corporeal at all. For instance, the narrator recalls the many times s/he has said the words 'I love you', 'hoping they would make me come true' (p.11). Further indicators represent the narrator as inanimate, her/his body being the 'property' of a former lover, Bathsheba (p.17), and as having 'all the sensitivity of a wet-suit' whilst sleeping with Gail Right (p.144). In a reflection on her non-commitment in past relationships the narrator describes her/himself: 'I've never been the slippers [...]. Plenty of times I've been the dancing shoes' (p.71). Such descriptions of the narrator serve once again to deflect from the human corporeality of the narrator and encourage the envisioning of a body which is morphed according to the specific spatial and temporal moments in the narrative. They also object-ify the body in terms of other objects whilst preventing us from seeing the body as object itself.

In order further to obfuscate her/his body and gender, clothing worn by the narrator is employed. Clothing is used metaphorically to suggest nonhuman qualities, as where the narrator suggests s/he has been the dancing shoes, or where the narrator's body has the sensitivity of a wet-suit, for example. It is the clothing that demarcates gender for some critics in the absence of body descriptions. For example, as Nicolette Jones suggests in her

review, the lime-green body stocking and crown of crocuses the narrator is required to wear during the spring festival for her/his job in Gail Right's bar (*Written on the Body*, p.141), is suggestive of femaleness, 'although perhaps not conclusively'. Other information with regard to the narrator's clothing might be used to support sex identification as female, for example the 'Mickey Mouse one-piece' underwear (p.75). There are, however, clothes which are more obviously non-gender specific, for example the 'pair of shorts with RECYCLE tattooed across one leg' (p.12). Suggestions regarding the lime-green body-stocking as 'evidence' that the narrator is female merely highlight cultural expectations of gendered dress codes. It is a noticeable cliché that in the absence of bodily description critics turn to clothing and behaviour as demarcators of gender, in themselves more demarcators of cultural expectations. Such critics ultimately succumb to the social constructionism into which Winterson entices them.

To contrast with these methods of concealment of the narrator's body, as focalizer the narrator's own gaze is necessarily privileged. Significantly, the only descriptive detail we receive about the narrator's body, apart from the greying skin and hair which, it is suggested, result from her/his pining for Louise, is the fact that s/he possesses brown eyes (p.117). This detail, which is presented late in the novel, draws the reader's attention to the fact which has been implicit throughout the novel that 'looking is a physical action, a function of those organs called eyes'.¹³² This physicality for the most part remains tacit and non-self-reflexive but Winterson does construct the narrator as self-conscious in respect of its role as the teller of tales: 'I can't be relied upon to describe Elgin properly' (p.92); and, in a direct address to the reader: 'I can tell by now that you are wondering whether I can be trusted as a narrator' (p.24). Such metafictional remarks are clichéd devices associated with

¹³² Warhol, p.23. Warhol's focus on the construction of the female body and gaze of the focalizer in interplay with other characters' bodies and gazes is similar to my methodology here, although she employs it to argue for a specifically feminized focalizer in *Persuasion*. As mentioned earlier, Kauer has gone so far as to suggest that the narrator's gender in *Written on the Body* can be ascertained from the degrees of empathy it demonstrates toward other characters in its descriptions of them (Kauer, p.47 ff).

postmodern querying of the 'truth' of any one story, and, on the level of the non-postmodern notion of character believability, the narrator would understandably be somewhat suspect in describing her/his lover's husband. Winterson creates a *mise en scene* of this narrative game when the narrator describes sitting in a park looking in the windows of the large houses which border it (p.58). S/he is reminded of a fairground viewing apparatus 'What the Butler Saw', which required the insertion of coins in order to continue viewing the stripping dancing girls represented in the machine (pp.58-9). The dancing girls are subjected to the objectifying gaze of the narrator's own 'prying eyes' as are the minor characters. The specifically gendered nature of this viewing apparatus takes us beyond the level of narrative game, however, as the reader is implicated in the voyeurism. Subsequent vocabulary puns on contrasting the reader's thwarted position in contrast to that of the privileged narrator, for 'What the Butler Saw' made the narrator 'a voyeur though of a modest kind' (p.59, my emphasis). While the feigned modesty of the narrator is protected from the reader's gaze by the various textual fig leaves, the narrator sees all: 'I like to pass by bare windows and get a sighting of the life within' (p.59, my emphasis). Her/his relative omniscience is furthered as s/he becomes 'the scriptwriter' who 'can put words in their mouths' (p.59). This, of course, is also a *mise en scene* of the reader's position in relation to the narrator although no amount of money will satiate our desire to see, so rather than positing the narrator as the object of the look, we become caught up in the narrator's voyeurism, a version of 'What the Narrator Saw'.

Specularization, Synecdoche and the Minor Characters

The concentric circles of implied authoring and narrating as empowerment are furthered in the narrator's telling us of a former girlfriend with whom s/he 'used to play that game, going round the posh houses when we were down at heel making up stories about the lamplit well-to-do' (p.59). This girlfriend, Catherine, we are informed wanted to be a writer but the narrator claims (and note the present tense here): 'I don't want to be a writer but I didn't mind carrying her pad' (p.59). This refutation or giving up of the power of authorship

arrives as a surprise considering the lead-up which has stressed the narrator's enjoyment of both the voyeurism and creativity associated with the process of looking and authoring. The narrator's function as amanuensis is furthered: 'I felt like we were Dr Watson and Sherlock Holmes. I knew my place' (p.60). The narrator places her/himself in a stereotypically feminine position in sacrificing to the other the creative position whilst s/he is content with the material copying, represented by the holding of the notepad. This whole incident, therefore, is a subtle example of the novel's oscillating gendering of the narrator: it masculinizes the narrator and then feminizes her/him. The narrator is made 'other' to a woman and both characters are feminized versions of male literary figures. The reader's fascination with discovering the narrator's gender is mocked here and this is more explicit at the very next point in the narrative when s/he tells us of breaking up with Catherine:

'Is there anything I can do for you before you go?' I asked.

'Yes,' she said. 'Do you know why Henry Miller said "I write with my prick"?"'

'Because he did. When he died they found nothing between his legs but a ball-point pen.'

'You're making it up,' she said.

Am I?

(p.60)

This may be read as yet another self-referential instance in that when the layers of the narrator are peeled away there is simply a textual strategy. Seeing genitalia, whether it be that of Henry Miller or Winterson's narrator, is mistakenly conflated with seeing the 'truth'. A similar story is used in conversation with another girlfriend, Inge. In response to Inge's recounting the rumour of Renoir's claim of painting with his penis, the narrator responds: "He did. When he died they found nothing between his balls but an old brush." "You're making it up." Am I?' (p.22). The correspondence in syntax foregrounds the repetitive and self-perpetuating nature of these myths and the final question, which is addressed to the reader rather than the diegetic interlocutor because of the lack of quotation marks, resonates

beyond these specific instances.¹³³ The overt phallogocentrism critiques not only the pen/penis conflation in relation to male writers but implicitly also questions any notion of a specifically female style of writing since the general principle of writing being associated with anatomical sex is ridiculed.

The positions of these references to phallogocentric authorship are themselves noteworthy. Both occur as reported conversations within micro-narratives of time spent with former girlfriends. Of the thirteen ex-lovers who can be identified (apart from Louise), nine of them are introduced with a construction approximating 'I had a girlfriend once', 'I had a lover once', 'I had a boyfriend once'. This effects a separation of these sections from the present narrative, not only in the sense of past indicated by the word 'once' but also in the sense that a new embedded story is about to begin, for the use of this word recalls the opening of fairy-tales and myths. The stories pertaining to Renoir and Miller therefore occur within embedded narratives themselves, the kernels of which are the substitute penis, the ridiculed Lacanian phallus in the form of a ball-point pen and a paintbrush. One of the many things which Winterson mocks here is the reader's desire to see the root of authorship, as if viewing the author's/narrator's sex would provide us with an answer. Significantly, the canonical 'masters' who are characterized by their anatomy, which transpires not to be their anatomy, are in the fields of painting and of writing, Winterson again drawing together the realms of the specular, language and the body.

These gender-loaded examples of reducing individuals to parts of their anatomy are analogous to the manners in which many of the minor characters are portrayed. Frequently they are represented by a part of their body or a characteristic which stands in for the whole and which lends an unrealistic quality to them. The ex-lovers are a case in point as many of them appear decidedly idiosyncratic in their physical features and behaviour, elements of

¹³³ A similar metafictional theme is present in Winterson's *The Passion*, in which the refrain, 'I'm telling you stories. Trust me', is placed in the mouths of several of the text's narrators, as Fleur Diamond details in 'The Mark of Desire: Rewriting the Romance and Lesbian-Feminist Textual Strategies', in *Crossing Boundaries: Thinking Through Literature*, ed. by Julie Scanlon and Amy Waste (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp.112-120, p.114, n.5. Subsequent references to Scanlon and Waste are to this collection.

which are hyperbolized so that they seem to be caricatures. Further, the neo-fairy-tale opening to many of the narratives concerning them, the 'once upon a time' echo, aids their enclosure in separate worlds where conventionally unusual occurrences are the norm. The ex-lovers are described, I will suggest below, primarily in synecdochic terms, that is a feature or two of them is taken and exaggerated to represent or become the whole. The more fantastic elements of *Written on the Body* are mostly limited to these sections of the hyperreal in relation to the bodies of ex-lovers, where bodily synecdoche is at its foremost.¹³⁴ Here Winterson's novel betrays a surprising alignment with Dickens's fiction in which,

'[P]eople are described ... by such an exaggeration of or emphasis on one part of their appearance that they seem to be reduced wholly to that part, with an effect of having become "thinged" into one of their own bodily members'.¹³⁵

The pertinence to *Written on the Body* is extended in Deborah Harter's reference to Dorothy Van Ghent, which, importantly, expands the discussion to include clothing and other objects, Dickens's characters being "'thinged" into one of their own bodily members or into an article of their clothing or into some inanimate object of which they have made a fetish'.¹³⁶

The similarities are less surprising considering Winterson's view of Dickens. She takes pains to extract him from the realist movement (*Art Objects*, p.149), a movement which she describes as 'essentially anti-art' (*Art Objects*, p.30), to bestow upon him the status of 'great writer' (*Art Objects*, p.177). He is praised for proceeding by 'leaps not lists', the meticulous attention to detail in realist fiction being overcome in this respect by Dickens (*Art Objects*, p.178). Furthermore, in *Written on the Body* a 'little twist to Dickens'

¹³⁴ Harter highlights the association between synecdochic fragments of the body with fantastic literature of the nineteenth century in *Bodies in Pieces*.

¹³⁵ Dorothy Van Ghent in *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Stephen Wall (London: Penguin, 1964), cited in Gomel, pp.48-49.

¹³⁶ Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), p.129; cited in Harter, p.147, n.16.

is confirmed by Louise's referring to her grandmother as 'The Aged Pea', whose nickname is abbreviated, somewhat synecdochically itself, to 'The Pea' (p.164-168).¹³⁷ Harter argues throughout *Bodies in Pieces* that the list-like descriptions in realist fiction are an attempt to capture the whole whereas fantastic fiction tends to celebrate the fragment. My examination explores the implications of this descent from the fantastic and its limitation to specific sections of *Written on the Body*, the descriptions of minor characters. The neo-fantastic attributes will later be contrasted with the rather different descriptions of Louise which pastiche the Romantic tradition.

For the most part, the minor characters in *Written on the Body* are described as if in shorthand by features of the body, of clothing or of behaviour which stretch in the direction of the bizarre. By contrast, the more comedic appearances of the narrator, in Mickey-Mouse one-piece underwear or a lime-green body stocking with a crocus on its head for example, are not used to define character as are the descriptions of other characters. Typically, each ex-lover is presented in an embedded narrative, ranging from a few lines to a couple of pages. Although we do not always learn the names of the ex-lovers, we always learn their sex: nine are female, four male. As I shall demonstrate, although each of the minor characters is represented synecdochically, there is a significant distinction made in terms of each sex's gender ambiguity. The male characters have their masculinity destabilized whereas the female characters retain their femininity.

It is through the customary casual introduction of 'a boyfriend' half way through the novel that we learn of the narrator's bisexuality. This first male, 'Crazy Frank' is described in the most detail, both in terms of his body and his behaviour. He worked at an exhibition in Paris, a six feet tall man brought up by foster parents who are midgets and whom he carried everywhere on his shoulders. This idiosyncratic behaviour is complemented by the memorable synecdoche of the chest chain which identifies him:

¹³⁷ The reference is to Dickens's 'Aged Parent', Wemmick's father, in *Great Expectations*, whose nickname is abbreviated to 'Aged P.' or simply 'the Aged'. Thanks to Louise Henson for identifying this character. See chapters 25 and 37 of *Great Expectations* for instances of his appearances. Interestingly, Winterson feminizes a male literary character as she did in her reappropriation of Holmes and Watson.

Frank had the body of a bull, an image he intensified by wearing great gold hoops through his nipples. Unfortunately he had joined the hoops with a chain of heavy gold links. The effect should have been deeply butch but in fact it looked rather like the handle of a Chanel shopping bag. (p.93)

Frank's emasculation and ridicule is completed by the simile here. He is remembered in terms of this signifier, the Chanel shopping bag handle, which belittles his masculinity, like the paintbrush and ballpoint pen of Renoir and Miller respectively. Frank, in a sense an artist (performance) like the two more renowned artists, is objectified and reduced, and, in Dorothy Van Ghent's term, 'thinged' into the handle of a Chanel shopping bag. The simile comes to function synecdochically, therefore. The description, then, strips Frank, both literally and metaphorically, of his masculinity at a point when it ought to be most apparent (when his naked torso is on display).

Gomel also observes of one of Dickens's characters, Mr Carker in *Dombey and Son*, that, through synecdoche, the character is 'feminized precisely at the moment when his masculine sexuality is at stake': he is represented by his teeth as he hopes to consummate sexually his relationship with another character (p.52). For Gomel, the very presence of synecdoche has the power to make gender ambiguous because the 'ideological baggage' of synecdoche is its association with detail, ornamentation and hence femininity (p.50). Frank epitomizes this ornamentation. Gomel traces several critics' ideas regarding the inventory of the female body in Victorian fiction as a reworking of the Renaissance blazon, whereby parts of the body come to stand for the whole and yet simultaneously leave an ostensible gap with regard to the sexual characteristics of the female body and that 'it is specifically the female body that is subjected to a rhetorical dismemberment through the substitution of a part for the whole' (p.51). However, 'gender ambiguity' seems only to work in one direction in both Gomel's argument and Winterson's novel. As my analyses that follow demonstrate, the masculine is feminized but the feminine remains undisturbed in the synecdochic representation of characters of both sexes. Thus, although the male characters

can represent gender ambiguity in that they seem to hover over an imagined binary line, the female characters remain on one side of the divide. It would appear that the masculine is what needs altering, for Winterson.

Synecdochic descriptions of two other ex-boyfriends, Carlo and Bruno, provide further examples of this feminization which occur at moments when masculinity should be at the fore. In order to increase sensation during sex, Carlo shaved off all his body hair, the synecdochic loss by which he is remembered (p.143). During a house clearance, Bruno is posited as the stereotypical heroine who needs to be rescued when he becomes trapped under a large Victorian wardrobe, having to be saved by the fire brigade (p.152). The fourth and unnamed boyfriend is literally 'thinged' into an article of clothing, an association provoked by Gail Right's 'vast bottom [which] reminded me of a pair of shorts a boyfriend of mine had once worn which said (GL)ASS. HANDLE WITH CARE' (p.143). By association with a woman's bottom, the boyfriend becomes less masculine. The reader is reminded of a point when the narrator's own shorts are described as they have 'RECYCLE' written on one leg but her/his shorts typically signify no specific gender identification (p.12).

Although he is not an ex-lover of the narrator, Elgin also fits into this feminized male category. We do receive more detail as to Elgin's character and he appears in more than one episodic description, but his character is never rounded and emotionally he is as cold as the marbles after which he is named. Elgin's name is a figure of displacement itself, for, like the famous marbles, the character is dislocated from his cultural roots, although he has elected to distance himself from his Jewish origins. Physically, Elgin is 'small, narrow-chested, short-sighted' (p.32-33) and his impact on entering a room is described thus: 'He came into the kitchen in his navy blue corduroys (size M) and his off-duty Viyella shirt (size S)' (p.35). Elgin's diminutive body is literally reduced into his clothing here as the narrator's questionable reliability is foregrounded - how would s/he know the size of his clothes and is her/his perspective simply one of a jealous and mocking lover of Elgin's wife? Elgin is more physically diminished by the narrator later in the novel when s/he

knocks him to the ground in a fight (p.172). Through the mention of his clothing size, he is implicitly and unfavourably contrasted with 'Mr Right' as prescribed in women's magazines who, if having an affair, will buy himself a 'new six-pack of boxer shorts (size L)' (p.74). Such images deflate Elgin's presence in the novel and this is epitomized by the ridiculing of his 'masochism': at the beginning of his relationship with Louise he 'begged her to scaffold his penis with bulldog clips. "I can take it," he said. "I'm going to be a doctor"' (p.34). Once again, in the description of male sexuality, we find belittling of the penis, the word 'scaffold' even suggesting a phallic monument under repair. During the time that the narrator had an affair with Louise, Elgin's 'present hobby was to fly up to Scotland and be sunk in a bath of porridge while a couple of Celtic geishas rubber-gloved his prick' (p.68).¹³⁸ He remains a figure of amusement and his body is recalled in synecdochic terms. In addition to these allusions to his penis, his mouth is also a figure of his ineptitude and lack of emotion: 'He had never been very good at smiling, mostly his mouth just moved around his face' (p.171). This reference to his mouth recalls a macabre suggestion of his Jewish background: 'His mouth opening like a gas chamber' (p.101). However, Elgin is a perpetrator here rather than a victim as what contextualizes the description is his position as informer of Louise's cancer and his words are described as 'poisoning' the narrator, being 'acrid, vile, in my throat and nostrils' (p.101). As the narrator has pointed out, s/he cannot be relied upon to describe Elgin properly but he does share with the other male characters descriptions which use parts of his body, clothing and behaviour to represent the whole and he also seems to be 'thinged' into his name in an exaggerated manner.

The female minor characters, who by far comprise the majority of the narrator's ex-lovers, are also subject to synecdochic and comedic representation. Many of these characters are ridiculed but for the most part they do retain their femininity unlike the gender-ambiguous implications when the males were described. Like the men, descriptions of parts of their bodies, clothing and behaviour characterize them rather than rounded

¹³⁸ Further signification of the name 'Elgin' comes into play here. The name is Scottish and Elgin realizes this sexual fantasy in the country of its origin, as he literally immerses himself in the caricatured national dish.

personalities. Inge, for example, is constituted by her 'anarcha-feminist' credentials, wearing a 'guerilla cap and boots' (p.21), and involving the narrator in the blowing up of public urinals. Inge is further characterized by her breasts in a paragraph devoted to their description and these breasts are the reason the narrator gives for not leaving her. Inge virtually becomes her breasts (p.24). This strong and unquestionably female image parodies the masculine objectification of women's body parts in a manner which parallels the depictions of male minor characters. However there is little gender ambiguity here, for although Inge's attire may be read as masculine (the novel pre-dating the late nineties' popularity of cross-gender combat clothing), her body retains the biological and cultural markers of femininity. As an image of radical feminism, Inge is subjected to a humorous and bizarre depiction which portrays her negatively (for instance, she also insists she and the narrator communicate by homing pigeons when she is in Amsterdam). Other hyperreal girlfriends include Amy, heavily into papier-maché, who set a papier-maché snake in the letter-box to frighten the postman; Judith, who could only achieve orgasm between the hours of two and five in the afternoon; an unnamed girlfriend who could only make love outdoors; Estelle, a scrap-metal merchant with a Rolls Royce; Catherine alias Sherlock Holmes; Bathsheba, the dentist who gave the narrator a sexually transmitted disease; and Jacqueline, the 'household pet' (p.25), the 'overcoat' (p.76) with whom the narrator was living when s/he met Louise. Although the female characters are ridiculed it is not their femininity which is at stake, only their credibility as characters. This bias may be read as suggesting all the relationships are heterosexual or homosexual, depending on the elusive gender of the narrator. The resulting impression is the questioning of bisexuality, heterosexuality and homosexuality and the very gender division upon which those categories are founded.

However, the minor characters are largely unrealistic hyperboles without content. The gender politics resulting from a feminization of male characters, suggestive that the masculine is what needs to be challenged, is virtually concealed by the characters' comic functions. The subtlety of the gender politics contrasts with the burlesque comedy

depictions and with the overt gender ambiguity of the narrator. Winterson has proven that she can successfully combine comedy with politics in *Oranges* but here the surface of the comedy takes over.¹³⁹ Further evidence of this can be seen in *Written on the Body*'s Gail Right, who is a cruelly comic stereotype despite the fact that she functions as a catalyst in the narrator's realization that her/his leaving Louise was erroneous. Gail is a transitional figure, bringing about change in the narrator's self-absorption. She convinces the narrator to seek out Louise. Gail's effecting of this change in the narrator's consciousness is striking when considered in relation to the portrayal of her body. She is depicted as grotesque in the sense in that she overflows her bodily boundaries, represented as excess rather than being reduced, though this in itself reduces her to a stereotype of a large woman. She is a clumsy woman with a 'plump ringed hand', who 'smelled of face powder and dry rot' (p.144). In the bath, she resembles a 'prime cut of streaky bacon' (p.147) and she is also likened to 'a left-over jelly at a children's party' (p.159), stereotypically food-orientated imagery, as well as being overbearing: 'a three-ton truck on a slope' (p.159). The moment when Gail forces the narrator to face the fact that s/he must look for Louise sees Gail's body at its most effusively grotesque. As the narrator drives her/himself and Gail home, the inebriated, parodically named Ms Right suggests that perhaps the narrator did not love Louise. This causes the narrator to lose control of the car and Gail to be sick down her blouse. Gail continues:

'You don't run out on the woman you love. Especially you don't when you think it's for her own good.' She hiccuped violently and covered her skirt with half-digested clams [...]. Finally she said, 'You'd better go and find her.' (p.160)

Despite the narrator's stating that Gail's 'only quality is to be larger than life' (p.147), an attribute of many of the minor characters, Gail plays a crucial role in the character development of the narrator. Gail alludes to her role as an angel: 'I may not look much

¹³⁹ For instance, in *Oranges*, the central protagonist's mother functions well as a comic figure yet also represents the narrow dogmatic vision from which the protagonist frees herself.

like a messenger from the gods but [...] I've got a pair of [wings] under here." (She patted her armpits)' (p.160). This allusion recalls not only angels but, along with the excessive make-up, false eyelashes and smells, it also evokes a closer fictional hyperreal antecedent: Fevvers in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. However, Fevvers is a far more positive representation of a large woman. Gail will not be controlled through synecdoche as were other minor characters but literally bursts into the narrator's physical and mental space.

A passage that epitomizes the conjoining of synecdoche, objectification and the gaze which runs throughout the descriptions of the minor characters is that describing the first proper 'date' of the narrator and Louise, when they attend the opera:

I realised how often other people looked at Louise. On every side we were battered by sequins, dazed with gold. The women wore their jewellery like medals. A husband here, a divorce there, they were a palimpsest of love-affairs. The chokers, the brooch, the rings, the tiara, the studded watch [...]. The bracelets, the ankle-chains, the veil hung with seed pearls and the earrings that far outnumbered the ears. All these jewels were escorted by amply cut grey suits and dashing spotted ties. The ties twitched when Louise walked by and the suits pulled themselves in a little. The jewels glinted their own warning at Louise's bare throat. (pp.31-32)

The women become their jewels as the description moves from the simile, 'like medals' to the jewels themselves being 'escorted'. These women become a 'palimpsest of love affairs', rather like the narrator's body that is a 'palimpsest [...] so heavily worked' with 'the accumulations of a lifetime', which seems also to be an accumulation of ex-lovers (p.89). Here the narrator looks at others (imagined to be) looking at Louise, which suggests Louise as object whilst the narrator is apparently free of the gaze of other characters. The men in this scene are also 'thinged' into their clothes as the suits and ties are personified and attributed agency, and, correspondingly, the persons are objectified, de-personified. Material objects and signifiers of wealth are substituted for the emotions of the imagined past loves represented by the women's jewellery. Each character in the scene is the object

of a gaze except for the narrator. It is almost as if the narrator is a third person, detached observer, were it not for the reminder of her/his participation in the pronoun 'we' in the second sentence of the quotation.

The description recalls a similar scene in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, in which Emma and Charles Bovary visit the opera and the third-person narrator has us watch Emma watching the male members of the audience:

There you saw the old men's faces, expressionless and peaceful, with their white hair and their pale skin, looking like so many silver medals tarnished in fumes of lead. Stylish young men were strutting around the stalls, displaying, in the opening of the waistcoat, a cravat in pink or apple-green; and Madame Bovary was admiring them from above, leaning upon their gold-topped walking canes with the smooth palms of yellow gloves.¹⁴⁰

Whilst the 'medals' here are 'like' the elderly men's faces rather than women's jewellery and the younger men's ties remain inanimate, the latter's hands are 'thinged' into their gloves. Once more, we are drawn toward a comparison of Winterson's style with that of a realist novel in terms of bodily depiction and its relationship to the gaze. In his discussion of *Madame Bovary* in *Body Work*, Peter Brooks argues that Emma Bovary is herself described in terms that, like Winterson's narrator, prevent a view of the body because Emma is represented by details that,

[O]ften seem to resist behaving as proper synecdoches. Particularly when they concern the body, they lead to no coherent construction of the whole; the eye and the mind are pulled back to the object-detail itself. (p.93)

This is in contrast to Dickens, for example, whose details are 'essentially synecdoches, parts that stand for a whole, indicial signs which, correctly deciphered, give access to meanings'

¹⁴⁰ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall (London: Penguin, 2001 (1857)), p.185.

(p.93). As I have suggested of the minor characters, their comic potential is fulfilled yet they fail to function in terms of any 'meaning'. There is no access to a 'truth', or even an exploration of postmodern relative 'truths', regarding either the minor characters or the narrator. Brooks suggests that, like *Written on the Body*'s narrator, Emma is constructed by descriptions of clothing but also, unlike Winterson's narrator, by the men who look at her. Brooks arrives at a fascinating conclusion with regard to Flaubert's 'feminist' trajectory:

Emma Bovary has no body – of her own. Her body is the social and phantasmatic construction of the men who look at her. If the narrator is included in these men, the result of Flaubert's practice is nonetheless a kind of feminist response (as in the celebrated phrase, 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi') [...], in that it denies authority to the observers' construction. If Flaubert is the realist par excellence, he also suggests the ultimate impossibility of realism insofar as it is subtended by the desire to know. There is something unsatisfactory about the field of vision: it can never quite see, in its entirety and its meaning, the body that is its central concern. To the extent that the body in realism is essentially gendered – because sexual difference is assumed to be definitional – the realist visual discourse is frustrated.

(pp.95-96, Brooks's parenthesis)

The fittingness of some of Brooks's observations to Winterson's *Written on the Body* are almost uncanny. Winterson indeed frustrates the visual discourse not only in terms of 'definitional' sex but also of seeing the body of the narrator at all and the narrator is not constructed by any gaze even within the diegesis. Brooks's playful suggestion of Flaubert's feminism is obviously problematic, however, if, like *Written on the Body*, it depends mainly on the body being hidden from the traditionally masculine gaze rather than the masculine gaze itself being challenged. Whilst a plethora of gazes constructing their own versions of Emma's body (or *Written on the Body*'s narrator) frees the body from a definitive objectification in a rather postmodern manoeuvre, the desire to objectify remains. As

contrast to this, in her analysis of the look and the body in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Warhol presents a way in which the conventionally masculine gaze is challenged by the female focalizer.¹⁴¹

The 'Mistress of Cliché'

Emma Bovary attempts to construct herself in accordance with romanticized female role models she has encountered in fiction and in this respect provides a role model herself for the construction of *Written on the Body*'s 'heroine', Louise. The depiction of Louise reproduces so many literary, and other, types that Duncker gives her the title of 'the mistress of cliché' (p.84), a label that would also fit Emma. Louise is both constructed by the narrator yet does collude in her own romanticization, as I shall discuss. One is reminded again of the novel's refrain, placed, significantly, in this heroine's mouth: 'It's the clichés that cause the trouble'. On the surface, Louise is a magnet for stereotypical, masculine-identified idealist images of women. Winterson embroiders these clichés onto her character, writes them onto her body, so that she becomes the epitome of the myth of 'Woman'. Louise is viewed through the lens of past images of women. The reader's initial introduction to Louise, before we even know her name, is as she bathes in a river and takes on the properties of the famous pre-Raphaelite painting, John Everett Millais's 'Ophelia' (1851-52):

Your body bright beneath the clear green water, its shape fitting your shape, holding you, faithful to you. You turned on your back and your nipples grazed the surface

¹⁴¹ Warhol begins from Suzanne Moore's suggestion that a 'distinctly "female gaze" might exist and that if it does, "it does not simply replicate a monolithic and masculinized stare, but instead involves a whole variety of looks and glances – an interplay of possibilities"' (Warhol, p.25, citing Suzanne Moore in *The Female Gaze*, ed. by Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1989), p.59). Warhol continues that 'Moore, very careful to avoid implying that gendered positions are "fixed outside social conditions," offers a liberation from what some see as an essentializing tendency in the more properly psychoanalytic theory of the gaze' (p.25). *Persuasion*, for Warhol, distinguishes 'among kinds of looking, juxtaposing the feminine focalization that relies on the heroine's viewpoint with the objectifying gaze – often associated in this novel with male characters – which others in the text direct at the heroine's body' (p.25).

of the river and the river decorated your hair with beads. You are creamy but for your red hair that flanks you on either side. (p.11)

The analogy with 'Ophelia' insinuates the reader into alignment with the focalizer's gaze, which at this point emanates masculine objectification of the female body. This very visual allusion to the dying, or dead, innocent Ophelia, with its green and red and cream echoing the tinctures of Millais's painting, prefigures Louise's role of sick heroine when it is revealed much later in the novel that she is suffering from leukaemia.

One myth is replaced by another as Ophelia is discarded immediately after her invocation, when Louise surfaces from the water newly baptised as the goddess of love Aphrodite, who in one version of the myth was born out of the foam created by Uranus's castrated penis falling into the sea. Winterson's description again is visual and romanticized: 'You stood up and the water fell from you in silver streams' (p.11). Ancient Greek myths are further evoked in the similes of Louise's shapeshifting into landscape, her arms holding the narrator 'like mountain sides' (p.19), and there is a reference to her as a tree that explicitly aligns her with myths:

There are plenty of legends about women turning into trees but are there any about trees turning into women? [...] It's the way her hair fills with wind and sweeps out around her head. Very often I expect her to rustle [...] her flesh has the moonlit shade of a silver birch. (p.29)

Louise's hair, its length and its red colour, is a recurring reference point throughout the novel which instils her with yet more characteristics of myths of women. She is termed a 'flame-haired temptress' from Elgin's parents' point-of-view (p.34), but the narrator mingles the association once more with painting and with that of Greek myths' metamorphoses again: 'If I were painting Louise I'd paint her hair as a swarm of butterflies. A million Red Admirals in a halo of movement and light' (pp.28-29). So many mythical images are evoked by the mane-like hair that this in itself would be enough to make Louise

the 'mistress of cliché' which Duncker identified. In her article 'The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination', Elisabeth G. Gitter indicates that:

The more abundant the hair, the more potent the sexual invitation implied by its display, for folk, literary, and psychoanalytic traditions agree that the luxuriance of the hair is an index of vigorous sexuality, even of wantonness.¹⁴²

Elgin's parents' flame-haired temptress can easily be identified according to these traditions and the enumerate references to Louise's hair also afford her the properties of a Victorian literary heroine for, according to Gitter:

No other writers have lavished so much attention on the physical properties of women's hair: its length, texture, color, style, curliness. There is scarcely a female character in Victorian fiction whose hair is not described at least perfunctorily, and often a woman's hair is described repeatedly and in considerable detail. (p.941)

Not only is Louise's hair described 'repeatedly and in considerable detail' but, as in the case with the evocation of Pre-Raphaelite and Greek mythology's images of women, the narrator alludes to her/his picturing of Louise in this manner with specific relation to her hair:

Her hair was down, warming her neck and shoulders, falling forward on to the table-cloth in wires of light[...]. She was more of a Victorian heroine than a modern woman. A heroine from a Gothic novel. (p.49)

The narrator's depiction of Louise on her/his very first encounter with her is in terms of yet another character from the literary canon, although this time a faery-like male which belies the (literal) transparency of the feminine body described here:

¹⁴² Elisabeth G. Gitter, 'The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination', *PMLA*, 99.5 (1984), 936-954, p.938. Subsequent references are to this article.

She looked like Puck sprung from the mist. Her hair was shining with bright drops of rain, the rain ran down her breasts, their outline clear through her wet muslin dress. (p.85)

The critics who condemn this novel for its perpetuation of clichés, Nicolette Jones, for example, fail to appreciate the deliberate artifice which Winterson uses to construct these clichés and which she at every point tries to make clear. Winterson points up the constructedness as the artifice of this situation is explained by Louise (p.85). Louise had staged this first meeting, having seen the narrator eighteen months beforehand in the British Library, the location itself imbued with a fittingly bookish signification. Louise explains she had discovered the narrator's name and address and positioned herself outside the narrator's house in the rain with a fabricated story about having had her bag stolen and needing to phone her husband. Further, she had plagiarized the alluring potential of the rain-soaked dress from Lady Hamilton who, Louise tells the narrator, used to wet her dress before she went out. This is another instance of narratorial *mise en scène*, along with the narrator and Catherine's making up stories of lives beyond windows, which I discussed earlier. This instance draws our attention to the fact that Louise is not as passive as has been implied. She has literally authored the circumstances of the initial meeting and is seen to have constructed herself through the lens of the past image of Lady Hamilton. This reaffirms Louise's role of 'temptress', in that she actively choreographed the scene.

For Winterson, the term 'cliché' seems to envelope everything from its conventional meaning of overused unimaginative language to overused unimaginative paradigms and archetypes, notably patriarchal images of the female body as well as narrative form. The author states that in *Written on the Body* she has 'said [...] it is possible to have done with the bricks and mortar of conventional narrative [...] by building a structure that is bonded by language' (*Art Objects*, p.189-190). However, the over-arching structure of *Written on the Body* has caused difficulties for feminist readings because of its masculinist colonialist paradigm. Stowers has summarized this problem as a failure 'to escape the dynamics of

possession and conquest, presenting little more than a tale of unpleasant obsession and exploration of the other, inextricably implicated in the discourse of both colonialism and heterosexuality' (p.90). Louise's body is there to be explored, discovered, plundered and displayed. The narrator does express a desire to 'explore' and 'mine' Louise yet at the same time Louise possesses some agency. For example, the narrator's addressing Louise, 'You will redraw me according to your will' (p.20), suggests the narrator and Louise enter into a reciprocal relationship and by the end the narrator is the land to be enjoyed: 'We shall cross one another's boundaries and make ourselves one nation. Scoop me in your hands for I am good soil. Eat of me and let me be sweet' (p.20). The desire to take up the passive position, to be the one enjoyed, is in itself, perhaps a forceful desire manifesting itself as the wish to be subservient, for the final two sentences quoted are imperatives and, as such, do not invite but order Louise to enjoy the narrator's body. The narrator does take up an archetypal feminine position, for 'soil' is invariably part of Mother Earth just as nations are invariably referred to by the use of feminine pronouns, and the trope resonates with masculine appropriation of the position ascribed traditionally to the feminine. Winterson's overt revealing of the clichéd link between the female body and land highlights that the means by which this connection is facilitated is through the type of language used. As with the other ways that Louise is mythologized, her positioning as colonized body is made explicit and is exaggerated through repetition of the motif. For example, as the narrator encounters Louise's nakedness: 'How could I cover this land? Did Columbus feel like this on sighting the Americas?' (p.52), and Louise's body also has 'all the treasures of Egypt' (p.146). The notion of a journey of discovery appears again as an exhausted metaphor, or cliché, of female genitalia as a 'damp valley' is extended to make Louise's body the topography of a village:

I began a voyage down her spine, the cobbled road of hers that brought me to a cleft and a damp valley then a deep pit to drown in. What other places are there in the world than those discovered on a lover's body? (p.82)

Thus, an architecture of clichéd images ‘scaffolds’ Louise to the extent that she is as immaterial without them as the minor characters represented by synecdoche. The sheer number of clichéd images reverberates with a sense of purpose, rather like the apparent chance meeting between Louise and the narrator that was part of a larger scheme on the part of its author. However, this scheme is never made explicit and Louise remains simply a pastiche of images of women.

The Sick Body

Winterson’s debunking of the male characters primarily takes the form of emasculation through comic dismemberment but what might be considered the more tragic counterpart – the dismemberment of Louise’s leukaemic body by the narrator in the listing of her anatomy – is itself later invested with images of resurrection. In Bakhtin’s motif of the decrowning of the carnival king, the act ‘is consistently portrayed as a *tearing to pieces*, as a typical carnivalistic “sacrificial” dismemberment into parts’.¹⁴³ Humour is an integral component in Bakhtin’s theorization of carnival but in Dostoevsky, he argues, the comic device is often paired with a more tragic dismemberment such as an actual death. The two scenes together ‘create an ambivalent whole’, which is essential for the carnival sense of the world (p.162). Winterson thus seems to provide a gendered reworking of this aspect of Bakhtinian carnival for the power of the sick female body is contrasted with ineffectual castrated (either in reality or metaphorically) male bodies. Winterson ultimately refuses to make a victim of Louise although the formative depictions by the narrator stress her victim-like status. Louise’s body is exploited in some respects: she is depicted as the prize throughout the novel and, in a typical quest-like trajectory, her leukaemia and her husband are obstacles to be negotiated. The final appearance of Louise’s body at the end of the novel is in itself a literalization of the ambivalent relationship between reality and fantasy, life and death.

¹⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.161-162, emphasis in original. Subsequent references are to this edition.

The idealistic and clichéd depictions of Louise's body are a contrast to the realities of her leukaemia which one would expect to make undeniable her physicality as they present a constant reminder that she 'is' a body. However, the type of cancer Louise is suffering from significantly blurs this idea to substantiate further a romanticized picture of her. In Duncker's discussion of *Written on the Body*, she points out that leukaemia is viewed as an 'interesting, delicate, wasting cancer' in contrast to the more common and less 'sufficiently genteel' breast cancers and bowel cancers which often require some sort of surgery which may disfigure the body (Duncker, p.85). Susan Sontag makes a similar point in 'Illness as Metaphor':

One non-tumor form of cancer now turns up in commercial fiction in the role once monopolized by TB, as the romantic disease which cuts off a young life. (The heroine of Erich Segal's *Love Story* dies of leukemia – the "white" or TB-like form of the disease, for which no mutilating surgery can be proposed – not of stomach or breast cancer).¹⁴⁴

Indeed, in her review of *Written on the Body*, Anna Vaux queries whether Winterson might be making some 'ironic reference' to Segal's *Love Story*.¹⁴⁵

Louise is also reminiscent of what Robyn Warhol terms 'the tradition of heroines who fade out or die in sentimental novels' of the eighteenth century (p.26). Warhol draws on Claudia Johnson's identification of the tradition in terms of gender relations:

Such novels emphasize the emotions inspired in men [...], by the spectacle of the heroine's suffering body. 'What is emphasized in this literature', according to Johnson, 'is the feeling of the onlooker, not the feeling of the sufferer' [...]. [T]he tradition 'locks women within an objective status, as things wept over'.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 18, Sontag's parentheses. Further references to Sontag are to this edition of the essays.

¹⁴⁵ Anna Vaux, 'Body Language', *TLS*, 4 September, 1992, p.20.

¹⁴⁶ Warhol, p.26, citing Claudia Johnson, 'A "Sweet Face as White as Death": Jane Austen and the Politics of Female Sensibility', *Novel*, 22.2 (1989), 159-74, p.169. For a discussion of the dead

Although Winterson's Louise does not exhibit the more histrionic characteristics customarily attributed to the 'sensible' heroine, with Marianne Dashwood as the eponymous co-heroine of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* being the prime example discussed by Johnson, Louise's figuring as the weak and fragile female body echoes some aspects of the role. Further pertinence of the image, which contributes to Louise's positioning as the myth of Woman, is illuminated by Alan Richardson's work on the appropriation of the sensible heroine by male writers of the Romantic period. Richardson suggests that whereas women were devalued in the Augustan period, "considered sensible but not reasonable, were all but denied status as human, that is, rational beings", the Romantic movement of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries appropriated the characteristics of feminine sensibility for males.¹⁴⁷ Rather than equalizing relationships between male and female characters, however, this portrayal obliterated the women's position further: "when androgyny functions as another manifestation of the male poet's urge to absorb feminine characteristics, his (or his protagonist's) female counterpart stands to risk obliteration" (Richardson, p.19, cited in Day, p.59; Richardson's parentheses). The proclivity was to portray 'women as subject in order to appropriate the feminine for male subjectivity' (Richardson, p.22, cited in Day, p.59). Similar to Claudia Johnson's suggestions, therefore, the focus is turned to the male although Richardson's remarks on the Romantic hero remove him from the position of spectator to that of parasite turned colonizer of the feminine sensibilities which he observes. Focus is indeed turned to the 'androgynous' figure in *Written on the Body*, at the expense of the suffering female body. How the narrator feels about the possible loss of Louise is foregrounded rather than any empathy with Louise's suffering. The narrator in many respects is indeed the sensitive, passionate 'fellow', sick from love or lack of it, a descendant of the sixteenth-century sonneteer, and her/his

female body in literature and art, as opposed to the suffering one, see Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body*.

¹⁴⁷ Alan Richardson, 'Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine', in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Anne Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp.13-25, p.14, cited in Aidan Day, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.59. Further references to Richardson and Day are to these works.

ambiguously-gendered body is so insubstantial it is virtually absent from the text. Since this novel is narrated in retrospect, one finds here a reason for the clichéd idealistic representation of Louise for much of the novel's duration: the novel is a melancholic reverie on the perceived perfections of the lost love.

There is also a discrepancy between Louise's bodily health and her appearance for outwardly she displays no signs of the illness, a fact which allows her to conceal the information from the narrator. The illness is as unseen as the narrator's sex for the reader. This effects a distancing between the ideal image of Louise's body, which is generally presented as a visual feast (and the resonances of famous paintings collude in this), and the physical body that suffers. Away from the narrator's 'prying eyes', Louise's body is being destroyed from the inside, something over which neither the narrator nor Louise have any control. Further, this cancer of the blood courses through the whole body, not a synecdochic part which might be excised.

Initially the narrator does attempt to bring Louise's illness under her/his control, firstly through denial, then through the image of the sick heroine and by obsessively educating her/himself about leukaemia in order to know Louise's body. When the narrator is first told that Louise has leukaemia by Elgin, the layout of the text becomes visually as stark as the facts which the narrator demands of Elgin. The exchange is represented in a list-like manner, with short lines of dialogue, and the absence of quotation marks aids in the urgency as it gives the appearance of being unmediated:

The facts Elgin. The facts.

Leukaemia.

Since when?

About two years.

She's not ill.

Not yet.

(p.101)

The narrator's desire to know replaces her/his idealistic picture of Louise yet s/he also attempts to deny these facts: 'She's not ill'. The exchange continues for the duration of a page of text in this staccato manner as Louise's body is opened up to investigation, a prefiguring both of the narrator's dissection of Louise's body via the anatomy books which s/he later pores over as well as the invasive medical procedures that Louise may face. Elgin's responses become more objective and medical, referring to Louise at one point as 'the patient', as the narrator's questions become more specific and personal as s/he tries to deny what he is telling her/him:

What kind of leukaemia?

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

She looks well.

The patient may have no symptoms for some time.

She's well.

[...]

She's not ill.

Her lymph nodes are now enlarged.

Will she die?

They're rubbery but painless.

Will she die?

Her spleen isn't enlarged at all. That's good.

Will she die?

(p.101-2)

In partial answer to the narrator's insistent question s/he can help Louise by leaving her because as 'Elgin's wife' rather than simply 'a patient, no matter how rich' she will be able to gain access to the latest treatments (p.102). Our first encounter with Louise's sick body, therefore, portrays her as a prize to be fought over by Elgin and the narrator. Elgin's privileged position is presented as a form of ownership, possession being highlighted in referring to Louise as 'Elgin's wife', as well as his being a cancer specialist in possession of

medical knowledge. The characters' registers contrast markedly, with Elgin giving objective medical responses to the emotional questions of the narrator. The narrator's awareness of Louise as prize in this conflict is made explicit when s/he first sees Louise after being told this news: 'When I looked at her I saw Elgin's square spectacled face. Not Louise's curved lips but his *triumphant* mouth' (p.103, my italics). Louise, therefore, continues to be objectified when the circumstances might suggest a more compassionate approach.

This objectification continues as the narrator imagines the future for Louise. S/he considers the treatment which will be 'brutal' and 'toxic', involving perhaps a splenectomy (p.102). Louise is imagined as badly anaemic, suffering from bruising and bleeding, tired and in pain, constipated, vomiting and nauseous but, after this graphic list, she is then imagined as the archetypal fading heroine with no hope of recovery: 'She would be very thin, my beautiful girl, thin and weary and lost. There is no cure for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia' (p.102). The final image of the fading heroine erases any hint of understanding which may have surfaced in the narrator's imagining Louise's demise as the visual image which she will constitute takes precedence and makes the preceding details appear gratuitous and almost masochistic. The harsh realities of the treatment's effects belie the romantic picture which Duncker and Sontag discuss and which is juxtaposed here. The narrator's reversion to type in her/his depiction of Louise is disturbingly indicative of her/his failure to face the facts, and it places the narrator in the traditionally masculine position of watching the sick heroine literally fade away.

The narrator's desire to see what is wrong with Louise manifests itself in visualizing the internals of Louise's body. For instance, remembering sleeping with her, the narrator's description moves from detailing the stubble on Louise's legs to what is inside those legs: 'The long bones of her legs rich in marrow. Marrow where the blood cells are formed red and white. Red and white, the colours of Louise' (p.110). As Louise's body is opened up to

inspection this takes on the properties of a 're-memory',¹⁴⁸ and the medical vocabulary is overlain with visual images as the 'colour' is emphasized. Red and white are the colours of Louise both internally, in her blood cells, and externally, with her red hair and her white skin recalling Millais's 'Ophelia' again. Although Louise's leukaemia is obviously at the root of this image, it is the beauty of the colours of blood cells which is emphasized and there is no explicit reference to their diseased nature. The movement from viewing the externals of Louise's body to its internals is quite surrealist or dream-like and this sensation is furthered more overtly in the following description where the narrator imagines Louise, whom s/he has left in Elgin's care:

Louise wasn't dying, she was safe in Switzerland. She was standing in a long green skirt by the drop of a torrent. The waterfall ran down from her hair over her breasts, her skirt was transparent. I looked more closely. Her body was transparent. I saw the course of her blood, the ventricles of her heart, her legs' long bones like tusks. Her blood was clean and red like summer roses. She was fragrant and in bud [...].
No pain. If Louise is well then I am well. (p.154)

This fantasy combines the narrator's denial of Louise's illness with the idealistic image of her. Recalling medical diagrams of the body's internal mechanisms, being able to see inside the body as a whole here simultaneously mocks the literal surgical treatment of the body as 'as a series of bits', and leukaemia's subsequent 'upsetting' status as the body acts as a whole (p.175), or 'the body turning on itself' as Elgin puts it (p.105). It is appropriate that this image of Louise's transparency is couched in somewhat fantastic terms since it conjures up yet denies the realities of her illness.

These depictions of Louise's leukaemic body are small-scale examples of the narrator's exploration of the disease when s/he studies anatomy books in order to 'go on knowing' Louise in her absence: 'I would drown myself in her. Within the clinical

¹⁴⁸ I borrow this term from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in which the character, Sethe, uses it (London: Picador, 1988; Chatto & Windus, 1987), p.36. The term suggests a revision of facts through the reinterpretation of memory.

language, through the dispassionate view of the sucking, sweating, greedy, defecating self, I found a love-poem to Louise' (p.111). The narrator's obsessive desire to know echoes the position set up for the reader in terms of the narrator's sex. This 'love-poem' takes the form of approximately thirty pages separated from the rest of the text in typography as well as content and directly recalls Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, as many commentators have noted.¹⁴⁹ In this section, the narrator uses medical terminology and categories but quickly moves into a reverie on the specifics of Louise's body in each section. The body being referred to in the medical discourse is not specifically leukaemic. There are four broad categories, the headings of which occupy a whole page each as though they are title pages. These headings are capitalized: 'THE CELLS, TISSUES, SYSTEMS AND CAVITIES OF THE BODY', 'THE SKIN', 'THE SKELETON' and 'THE SPECIAL SENSES'. Capitalization and the use of the definite article in these lists echoes the technique with that of Wittig's in her lists of parts of the body. But Winterson juxtaposes objective medical discourse with the narrator's personal reflections on Louise in a far more obvious manner than Wittig. Each section opens with two or three sentences ostensibly from an anatomy textbook and this authoritative language is capitalized. The first section on cells begins thus:

THE MULTIPLICATION OF CELLS BY MITOSIS OCCURS THROUGHOUT
THE LIFE OF THE INDIVIDUAL [...].

In the secret places of her thymus gland Louise is making too much of herself.¹⁵⁰

(p.115)

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Duncker's remarks that this 'wonderful echo of *The Lesbian Body* stands at the centre of the book, and glitters like an obalisque, a monument to what the text might have been' (p.85). One assumes Duncker's choice of a phallogocentric image is intentional as her point is that 'Winterson refuses to write an "out" lesbian novel' (p.85). Most commentators on the novel make reference to the relationship of this section to that of Wittig's text but for a fuller discussion see Leigh Gilmore's 'An Anatomy of Absence: *Written on the Body*, *The Lesbian Body*, and Autobiography without Names' in *The Gay '90s: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Formations in Queer Studies*, ed. by Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, Ellen E. Barry (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp.224-251. Nowhere have I come across any mention of Wittig by Winterson herself.

¹⁵⁰ Medically, this refers to the imbalanced cell production of leukaemia sufferers.

This opening description of Louise makes clear that it is her body that is suffering from the disease and the language used is telling because, as Susan Sontag has observed, the prevalence of ‘military metaphors’ with regard to cancer contributes to the stigma of the illness and those suffering from it (p.97). Here ‘the white T-cells have turned *bandit* [...], overturning the quiet order’, and the lymph nodes used to ‘keep her body safe from *enemies* on the outside [...]. Now they are the *enemies* on the inside. The *security forces* have *rebelled*. Louise is the victim of a *coup*’(p.115, my emphases). Juxtaposing Louise’s body in these terms with the authoritative medical discourse gives the appearance that the onus is on Louise for it is parts of her body that are rebelling. The narrator as colonizing gaze comes to the fore in these sections as s/he literally explores and mentally gains access to the body of the beloved. S/he is ‘the archeologist of tombs’, embalming Louise in her/his memory (p.119); s/he is in Louise’s skin and bones, ‘floating in the cavities that decorate every surgeon’s wall’ (p.120).

The anatomy book section of *Written on the Body* brings to mind the Biblical Song of Songs, as did *The Lesbian Body*, in many respects. Here the narrator’s invocation of her/his absent lover, the ‘doctor’s text-book fallen open on the floor [is] a book of spells’ (p.125), echoes the female partner in the Biblical Songs when her lover is absent yet she dreams of his being with her:

I opened the door for my lover,

But he had already gone.

How I wanted to hear his voice!

I looked for him; but couldn’t find him;

I called to him but heard no answer.

(Song of Songs, 5.6)

Not only is there a situational resemblance between the Songs and *Written on the Body* but Winterson’s use of pastoral imagery and the oscillation between first person and second person when referring to the beloved makes the intertextuality clearer, for both texts employ

these devices. For example, the use of 'my lover' echoes the term found throughout the Song of Songs and the male lover is '[l]ike an apple-tree among the trees of the forest [...] and its fruit is sweet to my taste' (Song of Songs, 2.3). Compare this with *Written on the Body*'s: '[m]y lover is an olive tree whose roots grow by the sea. Her fruit is pungent and green' (p.137) where even the rhythm seems resonant of the Biblical predecessor.

Many of these ways of describing Louise's body still do so somewhat circuitously, then, through the invocation of other discourses and forms of intertext as though the quantity of description will make up for the absence of Louise from the narrator. This sensual description of Louise as an olive tree comes under the heading of 'TASTE' as one of *Written on the Body*'s 'SPECIAL SENSES'. There are notably only four senses described, the absent one being, poignantly, that of touch.

Conclusion

Winterson's employment of (sex) masking, synecdoche and cliché distances us from sensing visceral, material bodies. Whereas Wittig struggles reiteratively to bring absent bodies into language, Winterson, whilst initially appearing to have similar aims, obfuscates. So much circumvention of the bodies, however, results in drawing our attention to the 'matter' that is not there. This approximates erasure of the 'illusion of presence' in fiction that Elizabeth Barry discusses.¹⁵¹ Barry examines the way that Samuel Beckett uses in his fiction,

'Disembodied' language – language in which the concrete image has been erased – to explore the idea of an eviscerated being that can never invest its language with any sense of self. (p.145)

Barry is concerned specifically with linguistic cliché as 'language that has lost its aura of spontaneity and its link with a human origin' (p.142). Cliché makes evident a 'fundamental

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Barry, 'Enervation in Language as Innovation in Literature: The Function of Cliché in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy', in Scanlon and Waste, pp.141-149, p.145. Subsequent references to Barry are to this article.

feature of language', that 'language can never be appropriated by the self; it is irremediably public, inauthentic' (p.145). The fact that cliché exaggerates this public aspect of all language, in the sense that it does not clearly belong to any single utterer,

Undermines the metaphysics of presence upon which the literary text rests – the impression that we can and do have contact with the individual who is 'speaking' through the text to us. (p.143)

Written on the Body fragments these features of cliché and language across several characters so that the speaker and that which it speaks about appear to be all surface. However, *Written on the Body* does not indicate a hopelessness about 'surfacing' but is a reproduction of writ[ing] *on* the body rather than writing the body in a new way. The images that are evoked about Louise, and the relationship between herself and the narrator, are themselves eviscerated, 'half dead', like cliché (Barry, p.143). They are images that are barely concrete because they evoke other images rather than an illusive materiality. The minor characters are reduced, pigeonholed and 'thinged' by the narratorial voice, dispatched in a manner that reflects back on the narrator to dehumanize her/him. As well as repeated use of synecdoche, the repetition of the means of introducing the exes in mini-narratives (I had a boyfriend/girlfriend once) acts 'as a kind of verbal automatism' that is akin to cliché (Barry, p.143). These features of the narrative voice help to keep it detached from that which it describes and thwart a concretization of the narrator. Although narrators obviously do not need to be physically embodied to function, this particular narrator's corporeality is the absent kernel illuminated by a 'palimpsest [...] so heavily worked' (*Written on the Body*, p.89). A material corporeality is hinted at but this novel is not concerned with its mediation or production. The language of the text is substituted for any attempt to connect with the suggested materiality or uphold the illusion of the metaphysics of presence.

CHAPTER FIVE

Being *Life-Size*: Jenefer Shute Diets with Words

I want to find a cave or burrow somewhere where the idea of food becomes an abstraction,
and this body, ever clearer and purer, evaporates finally into the dark, leaving only
consciousness behind. (p.13)

I: the slenderest word in the English language, the flimsiest. (p.205)

These epigraphs are taken from the fictional first-person narrative of an anorexic character, *Life-Size* by Jenefer Shute. The words of the central protagonist, twenty-five year old Josie, poignantly introduce her preoccupations with food, the body, the self and language, preoccupations which mould this text into a beautifully articulated, at times disturbing, moving, humorous and intelligent account of the disorder. Shute's novel has 'woven throughout' its story insights from first-person autobiographical accounts and theories about anorexia, which the author acknowledges in an afterword to the text. *Life-Size* is thus a fictional autobiography factually rooted in the experiences of anorectics and the theories of its causes.¹⁵² Since, as I shall argue, the protagonist, Josie, is represented as suffering from a disordered relationship to language as well as her body, it is highly significant that Shute has elected to represent her in the first person.

An important aspect in which the novel differs from many factual accounts is in the lack of an authoritative theorizing voice from a recovering anorectic, the kind of voice that we find in Marya Hornbacher's *Wasted* or Sheila Macleod's *The Art of Starvation* for example.¹⁵³ In *Life-Size*, the primary 'story' covers the duration of the protagonist's

¹⁵² I use the word 'anorectic' as noun and 'anorexic' as adjective as this is the way that most criticism employs the terms, although the *OED* states that the terms are interchangeable.

¹⁵³ Marya Hornbacher, *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (London: Flamingo, 1998); Sheila MacLeod, *The Art of Starvation* (London: Virago, 1981). As testament to the hybrid nature of these testimonies, both books contain notes and Hornbacher's text includes an extensive bibliography. I use the term 'recovering' because autobiographers tend to present their disorder in terms of an addiction and it is generally accepted that there is no 'cure' as such for the disorder.

hospitalization, terminating precisely as she is about to leave. The narrative is written in the present tense and even the external analepses that record the development and maintenance of her anorexia prior to hospitalization are devoid of reflection and are barely distinguishable from the hallucinations of this extremely subjective narrative voice. These aspects of the novel foster a narrative that attempts to show 'how anorexia looks from the inside'.¹⁵⁴ This is quite different to being structured as a relationship between an analyst and analysand, as Pascual observes of the autobiographies concerning anorexia ('Depathologizing', p.346), where the participants in the dialogue are the 'after' and 'before' of the autobiographical self.

Pascual goes on to upturn conventional readings of such narratives of anorexia as cathartic therapy that this structure implies, proposing instead that such 'writing recreates the repressed and breeds repression [...], both inaugurates and sustains desire, the hunger for need' ('Depathologizing', p.346). It does so because it places the analysand, or former self, within medical discursive practices, blanking out the 'singularity' of the sufferer's voice, encouraging them to employ a language that is not their own (p.346). This is indeed a challenge to the received ideas of contemporary culture where updates of the Freudian talking cure reign supreme not only in the popularity of confessional narrative texts but in their underpinning of the spectacles of television talk shows such as *Oprah*. For Pascual, then, the hindrance seems to arise from an excessive objectification and sealing off of the former self that actually rehearses the anorexic perspective rather than helps the speaker view the self as a continuum. This part of Pascual's argument is, for me, contradicted by the fact that sufferers of anorexia realize that they are never cured, as Pascual points out ('Depathologizing', p.347). This surely indicates that an awareness of susceptibility to the disorder within the analytic self persists, though perhaps a return to anorexia would be viewed as a return to the 'deceased' former self, as Pascual terms it ('Depathologizing',

Nieves Pascual notes the MacLeod's anorexia had begun to recur at the time of her writing *The Art*, 'Depathologizing Anorexia: The Risks of Life Narratives', *Style*, 35.2 (2001), 341-353, p.346.

¹⁵⁴ This is quoted on the cover of the Mandarin edition of the novel, originally from a review in *The Independent*.

p.347).¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the article does illuminate the complexities and dangers surrounding objectification of the self that can occur by speaking a language that is not one's own. In a different article, Pascual discusses *Life-Size* but fails to make a distinction between the lack of narratorial distancing in the novel compared to autobiographical first-person texts.¹⁵⁶

I have encountered little to date in the mass of cultural and psychoanalytic analyses of anorexia that directly addresses the specific nature of language employed by the sufferer, even though communication between the sufferer and other people transparently is impaired.¹⁵⁷ Shute's fictionalization of anorexic language is made all the more interesting for this. An exception to the general silence is Caroline Giles Banks's article, "'Culture" in Culture-Bound Syndromes: The Case of Anorexia Nervosa', in which the author argues for an awareness and deeper investigation of the 'language, symbols and belief systems' projected by anorectics.¹⁵⁸ However, whilst in this article Banks highlights the idioms and symbols that some anorectics use to encode their experiences, and the general non-assimilation of these into medical diagnoses and treatments, her central focus is on the religious symbolism employed rather than more specific linguistic features. Maud Ellmann also briefly notes that, 'it is striking how often anorectics appropriate the discourse of

¹⁵⁵ Pascual's ideas possess a remarkable similarity to Sue Vice's rather different approach to *Life-Size* in *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp.181-186. Vice discusses Shute's novel in relation to Bakhtin's essay, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', in which he details the problematics of the hierarchical relationship between an author and hero in novels. Where Pascual suggests that the autobiographical anorectics objectify their former selves and view them as 'deceased', Vice refers to Ann Jefferson in noting that the 'hero must be as if dead' (*Introducing Bakhtin*, p.186, quoting from Ann Jefferson, 'Bodymatters: Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre and Barthes' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.152-177, p.158. Josie makes herself into her own hero. Vice suggests that, 'representing the hero as subordinate, non-polyphonically in an undialogic setting, amounts to a dead image [...]; in Josie's case, the death which may be suffered for the sake of completion is a real one' (*Introducing Bakhtin*, p.186).

¹⁵⁶ Pascual summarizes a number of texts, including *Life-Size*, thus: 'These texts share a double chronology and a double discourse: the anorexic's and the narrator's', Nieves Pascual, 'Hunger and Melancholia: From Jenefer Shute to Rigoberta Menchú', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 21.3 (2000), 271-282, p.272.

¹⁵⁷ Canonical theoretical works on anorexia include Hilde Bruch's *Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa and the Person Within* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), Susie Orbach's, *Hunger Strike*, and Kim Chernin's, *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating and Identity* (London: Virago, 1986). These texts are among those cited by Shute as informing her work.

¹⁵⁸ Caroline Giles Banks, "'Culture" in Culture-Bound Syndromes: The Case of Anorexia Nervosa', *Social Science and Medicine* 34.8 (1992), 867-884, p.869.

religious abstinence to justify their own voluptuous austerities' (p.14).¹⁵⁹ Shute does not have her protagonist adopt the specifically Judaeo-Christian religious symbolism that Banks discusses but the echo of excessive ascetic denial and ritual is apparent, as my discussion will indicate.

The general lack of commentary by cultural theorists on the role of language in anorexia is surprising since research recognizes a disturbance in anorectics known as alexithymia. Janet de Groot summarizes this as,

A term derived from the Greek meaning absence of words for emotions. It refers to a difficulty in describing subjective feelings, an impoverished fantasy life, and a cognitive style that is literal, utilitarian, and externally oriented.¹⁶⁰

The absence of words is exaggerated in approaches that view the anorexic subject as employing her body as substitute for language.¹⁶¹ As Susie Orbach writes,

While she may not be able to talk directly about her cause, we can begin to decipher her language. The text we read is the transformation of her body and her action of food refusal [...]. She expresses with her body what she is unable to tell us with words. (p.83)

¹⁵⁹ See also Caroline Giles Banks's, 'The Imaginative use of Religious Symbols in Subjective Experiences of Anorexia Nervosa', *Psychoanalytic Review*, 84.2 (1997), 227-236. For a discussion of the anorexic-like behaviour of saints and highly religious women and men, see Rudolph M. Bell's *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). In fiction, links between anorexia and denial with religious connotations are suggested in Marina Warner's short story, 'The Food of Angels' in Marina Warner, *The Mermaids in the Basement* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.40-56. Catholicism features large in the anorexic narrator's story of Stephanie Grant's *The Passion of Alice* (London: Sceptre, 1996).

¹⁶⁰ Janet de Groot, 'Eating Disorders, Female Psychology, and Developmental Disturbances' in *The Good Body: Asceticism in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Mary G. Winkler and Letha B. Cole (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp.127-144, p.140.

¹⁶¹ Throughout this chapter, when referring to a generalized sufferer I do so using feminine pronouns because there is a significant disparity between the sexes of sufferers and all of the accounts to which I refer are written by females. In 1982, it was estimated that around ninety percent of sufferers were female (Paul Garfinkel and David Garner, *Anorexia Nervosa: A Multidimensional Perspective* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1982), pp.112-113, cited in Bordo in 1993, *Unbearable Weight* p.329, n.6). Chernin in 1985 and Naomi Wolf in 1990 also reproduce this figure, Chernin p.57; Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1990), p.181.

This is the approach that leads to a view of the sufferer as a kind of update of that other ever-popular figure of discussion, the hysteric, prevalent in the nineteenth century.¹⁶²

However, as far as writing, as opposed to voicing verbally, is concerned, Ellmann's *The Hunger Artists*, a study of the relationship between starving, writing and imprisonment, describes a proliferation of writing from hunger strikers making more clearly defined political protests than that which the anorectic might be said to represent. In their work on fictional and non-fictional anorectics, respectively, both Sue Vice's and Jennifer Maher's findings echo those of Ellmann and suggest that writing is substituted for the body and for food.¹⁶³ Pascual's work also indicates this trajectory. It seems, then, that there is a marked difference between views of the spoken and written language of anorectics.

Anorexia and Aphasia

Just as the anorectic can be seen to over-excel at producing the slender body required by contemporary western culture,¹⁶⁴ *Life-Size*'s Josie has difficulties in communicating that also exceed in pointing up the inherent slipperiness of the signifier to signified relationship. It is evident that a breakdown in communication occurs between the sufferer of anorexia and those around her as they fail to understand one another's value systems. Josie's failure to comprehend the full implication of words spoken to her is a disturbance partly based in the social functioning of language, which I term 'semantic aphasia'. This disturbance, I would suggest, stems from Josie's anorexia and is one of the means by which her sense of separation from others is perpetuated. Josie's misunderstandings go beyond the everyday discrepancies between language use by different groups, because Josie uses language, as

¹⁶² To note that comparisons between anorexia and hysteria are very common is to understate the issue. See, for example, Orbach, pp.5-7; Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, pp.49-51, 66-67, 157-159, 167-84; Ellmann, p.2; Wolf, p.198.

¹⁶³ Sue Vice, 'The Well-Rounded Anorexic Text', in *American Bodies: Cultural Histories of the Physique*, ed. by Tim Armstrong (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp.196-203. Jennifer Maher 'Everyone Needs the Words for Food', <http://www.uwm.edu/~jemaher/Kaplan.html>, consulted 28/08/02. Subsequent references to Maher are to this article.

¹⁶⁴ Bordo makes this point in *Unbearable Weight*, p.203.

well as her body, as a barrier between herself and the world.¹⁶⁵ Like Kafka's 'Hunger Artist', to whom Josie implicitly compares herself (p.50), once the culturally-sanctioned motivations for denial are absent – the Hunger Artist's professionalism and the 'normative' desire for the slender body, respectively – then understanding on the part of that culture diminishes.¹⁶⁶

Josie's relationship to the slippages in language is disorderly because it betrays her relentless obsession with her body and food. Words that relate to food in particular can become detached from their semantic collocations for Josie. For example, the phonetic parallel of the words 'chilly' and 'chilli', in the external analepsis quoted below, exaggerates Josie's denial of food. When in a grocery store Josie hears the conversation between the assistant and the customer in front of her, she fails to comprehend it completely and the reader is assimilated into her lack of understanding through the way the ambiguous word is spelt in her narrative. The 'phantoms' Josie refers to in this extract are the people around her:

I ignored them, these phantoms, finding it harder and harder to make sense of anything they said or did. In the grocery store one evening, for instance, I was waiting with a six-pack of Tab behind a woman buying what looked like a year's worth of food, when the bag boy, slinging the last few items, announced, 'Chilly.'

It wasn't at all - it was midsummer - and evidently she didn't think so either, for she didn't respond. But almost a minute later, counting out her cash, she replied, 'Enchiladas.'

'What?' he asked, startled (he'd been picking a scab on his hand).

'I thought you said "chilly,"' said the woman, over her shoulder. 'I said "enchiladas."'

'Oh!' he said, some kind of light dawning on his pimply face. (p.201)

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Deborah Tannen's *Gender and Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (New York: William Morrow, 1990) for discussions of the differences between conversational styles of men and women.

¹⁶⁶ Franz Kafka, 'A Hunger Artist', in *The Complete Stories*, ed. by Nahum N. Glatzer.

At least two levels of miscomprehension are at work here, that between the customer and the assistant and that of Josie's failure to register the food connection. Furthermore, the instance is indicative of the anorectic's obsession with food – for Josie takes special note of the 'year's worth of food' – yet her simultaneous denial of its proper function, that is to make a meal.

However, Josie can also literalize language in a manner that recalls de Groot's 'cognitive style that is literal, utilitarian'. On one occasion, for instance, she misinterprets the nurse, Suzanne's, words as the latter discovers her lying on the floor after an illicit period of exercise and is exasperated at Josie's behaviour: ' "You're not the only patient on this floor, you know." Momentarily confused, I look around, half expecting to see a fellow inmate, hitherto unnoticed, also flat on her back' (p.27). This instance is a further example of the duplicity of semantic implications already existing in Suzanne's utterance and that depends upon the ability of the hearer to interpret according to context. This occurrence appears to be a genuine misunderstanding on Josie's part but her adoption of the 'wrong' semantic path echoes a more intentional path of resistance in her behaviour (exercising, here), though intentionality is complicated because she is subject to the constraints of her anorexia. Exercise, for instance, is not a choice but a compulsion for this character. The use of the word 'inmate' here distances the character and her fellow patients from the authoritative definition of them as patients. It demonstrates a refusal to be defined by the authoritative discourse. Suzanne repeats these words on another occasion, provoking a different response from Josie: " "You're not the only patient on this floor, you know." "Who else? Who else is here?"" (p.83). In this instance, Josie's interest in discovering her co-'inmates' reflects a move to engage with others as her cognitive faculties improve. In the first instance it is Josie who is out of context by being on the floor and she brings the semantic implications of the utterance centripetally to her context, whereas in the second example, she contextualizes herself in relation to other people.

These brief examples raise larger unsettling questions about the act of reading *Life-Size*. The novel's readership is, I think, encouraged to identify with Josie's perspective not only through employment of the first-person focalizer but also through the black comedy and innovative language of the narrative and the alluring resilience of the character, more of which will become apparent in my discussion. The narrator's insular perspective strengthens the tendency that Pascual identifies in autobiographical accounts where the narrator theorizes the self, 'shortening the emotional distance between patient and reader' ('Depathologizing', p.348). This is indeed one of the titular 'risks' that Pascual identifies in this article: 'The reader comes to consider anorexia a means to empowerment and a vehicle to identity-acquisition [...], the illness becomes a signifier of identity' ('Depathologizing', p.348). Taken to extremes, this leads these texts to propagate anorexia and 'seduce readers into taking up the route of starvation by making them believe anorexia is the solution to gaining control' ('Depathologizing', p.349). Whilst there are resonances of Wittig's lesbianization project in this idea, readers are unlikely realistically to 'catch' anorexia through reading about it just as they are unlikely to 'catch' lesbianism after reading *The Lesbian Body*. But Shute does legitimate a voice that is often unheard except in translation by medical discourse or self-theorization. It is the voice of the compulsive disorder of anorexia, however, that Shute depicts most effectively as consuming the character of Josie. Shute does not contribute to the disturbing glamorization of anorexia discernible in media fascination with the disorder but performs an understated critique. Eventually, the author has Josie negotiate a path between the 'authorities' of her anorexia, medical, parental and societal control.

Authority figures feature largely in this novel in the form of Josie's parents and the hospital staff. Such figures are represented rather stereotypically and this aids in our identification with Josie's more rounded and interesting characterization. Josie is generally depicted as retracting into an isolated domain when these authoritative figures attempt to communicate with her in a language that does not seem to register. She appears to move into a separate space and time whilst the dialogue is occurring and only the reader has

privileged access to her thoughts. The result for the diegetic interlocutor is confusing as Josie sits in silence while they await her response. It is as though the narratorial Josie uses her narrative to fill in the gap which is evident between her and her diegetic interlocutors, substituting language for relationships with others, an internal monologue for dialogue. Josie sometimes mentally moves into the past, recalling memories, or into a parallel present time filled with imaginings or fantasies. This spatio-temporal movement replicates that of her narrative as a whole in the latter's blurring of the past, present and disparate locations and the indistinguishable difference between fantasy and reality. In the following extract, detailing an interview with her doctor, we are privy to Josie's thoughts and are unaware of the time lapse between the doctor's comment and her response until the doctor makes it clear, by his disorientation, both to Josie and the reader simultaneously. Finally, Josie summarizes the chasm between their worlds, illustrating her knowledge of the sense of futility at even attempting to communicate with the doctor:

He seems to be waiting for me to say something, so I inform him: 'I ate my breakfast. I ate fifty-one flakes.'

'Good, Josie,' he says, 'it's a start. But we still have a long way to go.'

I still have a long way to go - no excess baggage, no deposit, no return - but I'm not going to talk to him about that. He wants to drag me down, bury me in flesh, obscure the clear, sharp lines of my self. He wants to take me back to the days when, driven by a ravening restlessness, I would roam the streets looking for something to devour. The nightmarish days, before I learned control.

'Maybe,' I say.

'What?' he asks, confused. (How much time has passed?)

'Maybe we have a long way to go still.' Or maybe I'll just vanish before your eyes.

'I'm not sure what you mean by that, Josephine,' he responds carefully.

No, you wouldn't, would you. How could a person like you understand a person like me? (p.36)

Josie demonstrates a fuller understanding of the gap in communication here than the doctor is able to realize. Her final unspoken rhetorical question does not anticipate a response and emphasizes her isolation and sense of futility. The syntactic repetition and parallelism, 'a person like you', 'a person like me', draws attention to the perceived space between the spheres of the doctor and Josie, since the exact repetition ends precisely at the second and first-person pronouns. The doctor's words prompt her to appropriate the meaning of having 'a long way to go' for herself, in a manner similar to that seen in the exchange with Suzanne above. The paragraph detailing Josie's thoughts interrupts the dialogue, replicating in the body of the text the position of the 'gap' in the present dialogue. While the doctor might take her late response as indicative of a dysfunction on her part, Josie demonstrates on the level of her internal monologue that her mind is functioning sharply, spurred on by her anorexia, and that she is determined to maintain control of herself.

These gaps in linguistic communication and semantic aphasia are part of the anorexic perspective that sees the sufferer withdraw from social and physical contact with others. As Ellmann states, food itself is an essential component of the social contract since 'all feeders are enmeshed' in 'networks of exchange' (p.110). From a psychoanalytic perspective, food is also integral to the family unit with a particular emphasis on the mother's role in the unit.¹⁶⁷ Sarah Sceats suggests, however, that there have been 'profound changes in our eating habits over the last few years' and that this 'clearly poses problems for

¹⁶⁷ Food is associated with the mother figure both through breast-feeding and the tradition of the mother figure as primary preparer and server of food in the home. Most writing on anorexia discusses a problematic relationship between mother and daughter and Josie replicates this disturbed relationship. Orbach writes: 'A mother's presence is always implicit in food. It is almost as if food, in its many and varied forms, becomes a representation of the mother. From the child's point of view, the essence of its mother is distilled through food. The mother's personality comes to fruition in the meals she prepares. Food is a statement of her love, her power and her giving in the family. Food personifies the mother and she is rejected or accepted through it. In this way food, divorced from its biological meaning, takes on a prism of reified projections' (p.35).

the notion of food as a currency or language and eating as an exchange'.¹⁶⁸ However, in most of the novels that Sceats discusses, she sees food and eating represented in quite traditional terms as means of communication (p.184). Physical communication is also banished from Josie's world. She fears the touch of others, partly for what they might think of her imagined excess flesh (p.99, p.103) or partly out of her disgust at the other's flesh (p.31). Voluntarily touching Suzanne's face toward the end of the novel is one of the indicators of her improvement (p.228). This physical touch demonstrates a return of the emotional connection that Josie has lost during her anorexia. Not simply lacking in the words for emotions, as de Groot's observations indicate, emotional connections are also alien to Josie. When prompted by Suzanne to describe how she felt, she thinks: 'Felt? How can I make her understand that I haven't "felt" anything for years, numb and vacant behind my wall of glass?' (p.170). The hard, transparent barrier which Josie has put up emotionally is what she attempts to make of her body: 'One day I will be thin enough. Just the bones, no disfiguring flesh, just the pure, clear shape of me' (p.9). Josie's way of negotiating the world is to refuse to negotiate, to keep it out, just as she keeps out food: 'Some current has reversed in me, and I negotiate the world by keeping it out' (p.168). Eating is taboo not only because it threatens the ideal hard lines but also because it spoils the intactness of her body, reminding her of bodily orifices which have the potential to connect to other things: 'Because if you begin taking things in, how will you know when to stop?' (p.169). She is even affected by smells, a reminder of olfactory orifice, as she describes food she smells as 'entering' her with a foreign, sickening feeling: 'The smell is entering me as a hollow nausea' (p.2).

The distancing is extended to her parents and this is recreated in an analepsis detailing a conversation with them as they attempt to persuade her to enter hospital. The location of the meeting is,

¹⁶⁸ Sarah Sceats, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.185. Subsequent references to Sceats are to this work.

A typical transparent ploy, to meet in a pastry shop, hoping I'll be tempted by the warm, fragrant air, by the mounds of airy dough, snow-dusted, dark-hearted (but I don't even notice, note). (p.77)

In spite of her characteristic denial, Josie plainly does notice, just as she notices meticulously the details of her parents' appearance:

Mother's face was freshly painted on, her hair firmly glued; in a blue jersey suit with sensible pumps (like the Queen of England), she looked determined not to cry. Dad, redolent of shaving cream, with comb marks still in his hair, was ruining the effect with a haze of cigarette smoke. (p.77)

These evocative descriptive details contrast with the representation of her parents' words, the same conversation they have 'been having, on and off, for eight years' (p.76), which are snatches of placatory clichés merging with the narrative voice, unmarked by quotation marks:

There's this hospital, Josie - well, not really a hospital. More like a private rest home. Specialists. Rest up. Take care of you. Just a month. Gladly pay. Won't make you do anything you don't want to do. Break from the routine. What do you say, eh, love? (p.77)

Josie understands what is said but responds only in her thoughts, although this is not explicit initially:

I say, fuck off and leave me alone.

I say, what the hell difference would it make? I can starve anywhere.

I say, it's becoming too much work to decide what to do next. Just to move my hand through thick, resilient air to this glass of iced tea - the lemon slice has begun to melt, the rim is sweating, how can I put it in my mouth? - requires all the energy I have. To move my hand back again and decide where to put it, somewhere it will

look natural - so bony and blotchy, so cracked and fissured in the cruel morning light takes all my attention. I will rest it here, beside the blue napkin, parallel, and line up the knife so they're all parallel, equidistant: hand, napkin, knife. Knife, napkin, hand.

Why is everyone looking at me like that?

Are they still waiting for me to say something? (pp.77-78)

Like the doctor, the parents are left expecting a response that Josie has only given mentally. In fact, the reiteration of 'I say' gives Josie a voice that is present only on the level of the narrative and absent totally from the diegesis. The words used to describe those thoughts, 'thick, resilient air', a lemon slice beginning to 'molt' the rim 'sweating', are far more original and powerful than the clichés attributed to her parents. Readers see the thoughts, and actions, once more acting as a substitute for communication diegetically yet communicating with a reader most effectively.

Reclaiming Language

Language is also used as means of resistance by Josie, however, in her deliberate attempts to subvert authority. Official documents and names are reappropriated by the character. For example, reproduced in the text are forms that Josie has been asked to fill out. But she fills them out, in the text at least, in a manner that evokes sarcasm, humour and resistance as well as tragedy. In the form reproduced overleaf, we see Josie adopting a different semantic path in a way similar to that characteristic of her conversations. However, the movement from the deliberate humour of the 'late industrial capitalism' to the poignant and tragic 'wasting away' points up the irrelevance of the questions to Josie's state of mind. Reproducing such forms in the narrative might be seen as evidence of the latter's disorderly nature. Yet, the form is neatly sealed off in its rectangular box, separate from Josie's story. Rather than producing a collage effect with a blurring of lines, this actually reinforces the separation of

the form, and the authority that it represents, from all that is significant for Josie. She remains untouchable.

<p>DIAGNOSTIC PROFILE</p> <p>Thank You for Your Voluntary Cooperation</p> <p>DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION</p> <p>Age: Late industrial capitalism Sex: Rarely Race: Opted out Religious Affiliation: None Marital Status: None Current living situation: Barely Highest level of education: <i>The Pritikin Program for Diet and Exercise</i> Highest occupational level: 122 pounds Current occupation: Wasting away</p>
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(p.29)

However, in the most lengthy form, on pages 142-143, there is a blurring of identities between the official bold-typed questions and Josie's voice. For example, '**Gargoylism**' is among the list of family medical history ailments (p.142). Further, the patient is asked to describe how often they experience a list of symptoms, and '**Difficulty making it through the day**' is followed by,

Difficulty making it through the next day

Sense of floating through dark interstellar space

(p.143)

Here, then, the Bakhtinian 'special script' of the authoritative voice is openly appropriated. However, although this type of debunking is comic and demonstrates a certain independent resilience alongside the traumatic experiences of Josie, books such as *The Pritikin Programme of Diet and Exercise* also have their hold on her answers. Sentences and extracts from such diet books permeate Josie's narrative and are usually italicized throughout the text. The occasional presence of italics in responses to the bold typeface of

the medical form sets together the two types of authority, squeezing out Josie's voice totally:

How does a 3-pound weight loss affect your sense of well-being? *In reality, you are a different entity every time you lose a single pound.* (p.143)

Josie's successful (self-) programming enables her to reproduce responses in a mechanistic manner, developing linguistically the 'perfect, self-sufficient machine' that she desires to make of her body (p.230). Significantly, although she questions the medical authorities, she never questions the diet books.

Other means of upturning the authority of the hospital staff are seen in Josie's appropriation of their names. Suzanne is usually 'Miss Pert', because of her brisk manner, or 'Squeaky', because of the noise her shoes make. The doctor is 'Dr. Frog', and the therapist 'Miss Sparrow' because of their physical appearances and we never find out the actual names of these characters. Hyperalimentation, forced feeding by tube, is also comically appropriated by Josie. It is familiarly referred to by both staff and patients as 'hyperal'. Josie manipulates the term, personifying it as a rapist: 'Hyper AI? Who is Hyper AI? A manic patient who has escaped from the psycho ward, perhaps, and is roaming the corridors with rape on his mind?' (p.45). Whilst the transition of a medical procedure into a man threatening rape is only amusing on the level of linguistic play it is, of course, simultaneously poignant in that the forcing of a tube into a female by a, frequently male, doctor is often paralleled with rape. The use of hyperalimentation recalls the forerunner of the anorectic, the suffragette. Josie later makes this comparison herself: 'Like prisoners everywhere - like the suffragists even - all I have left is the power to refuse' (p.50). Josie's narrative is a major component of this power to refuse.

Sometimes, then, what I term Josie's semantic aphasia is a genuine lack of understanding and connection to words in their context. But, at other times, her lapses in conversations are not so much a failure to comprehend but demonstrate a sense of pointless futility and belief that her voice will not be heard. Further, she lacks the words to

communicate her closeted emotions to her family and her doctor yet the narrative voice is extremely communicative of the sensation of being locked within her body and thought processes. Pascual suggests that in autobiographies of anorectics their writing is 'reduced to aphasia, empty speech, dead language or useless words', because they employ a distancing, medicalized, theorized discourse ('Depathologizing, p.346). However, this is clearly not the case in Shute's novel where the semantic aphasia occurs in representations of attempting to communicate with authority figures diegetically. In the narrative itself, language can at times be strikingly 'full', 'alive' and 'useful'.

A Sense of Perspective

A sense of the distorted perspective of the anorectic is effectively reproduced in *Life-Size*. Josie objectifies her body, separating her self from her body in an extreme version of Cartesian dualism. But she paradoxically makes an object of her body from an incredibly subjective perspective, a perspective that is out of alignment with that of other observers. However, she perceives observers to be in alignment with her own image of her body, sometimes imagining them to be in awe over her achievement and at other times to be disgusted by her 'fat'. Although she strives to detach her sense of self from her body, seeing it only as a wayward signifier of her self, this detachment continually fails. Her actual state approximates an 'extravagant attention to flesh and decay [...] not "flight from" so much as "submersion in" the body.¹⁶⁹ These words of Carolyn Bynum refer to a medieval perspective of corporeality but they demonstrate a general problem with corporeal denial that produces a correlative in the form of an enclosure within an obsession. Mark Anderson notes this paradox in relation to the anorexic body specifically,¹⁷⁰ but the sentiment is more widely applicable, to dieters and their relationship with food for example. Instead of attaining detachment, Josie's distorted sense of her corporeality recalls a return to

¹⁶⁹ Caroline Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry*, 22.1 (1995), 1-33, pp.14-15. Subsequent references are to this article.

¹⁷⁰ Mark Anderson, 'Anorexia and Modernism, or How I Learned to Diet in All Directions', *Discourse*, 11.1 (1988-9), 28-39, pp. 36-37. Subsequent references are to this article.

a time before the idea of a visual 'objective' 'perspective' became consolidated. Josie attempts to make her body into a thing like any other, to separate herself from it totally and attain a subjectivity, a 'self', that is elsewhere. But she is always obsessively subjective. David Harvey demonstrates the evolution of an illusory objective perspective that has been made the norm in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, when he juxtaposes maps from the medieval period, with those from the Renaissance and eighteenth century (p. 243, p.246, p.256). Early maps were drawings that were far more sensual and three dimensional, yet appear out of what we call 'perspective' because,

The world was more like a garment men wore about them than a stage on which they moved [...]. It was as if the observers themselves were in the picture.¹⁷¹

Bordo notes that art from the medieval period,

Which seems so distorted and spatially incoherent to a modern viewer, does so precisely because it does not represent the point of view of a detached, discretely located observer confronting a visual field of separate objects.

('Cartesian', pp.446-447)

In narrative terms, these ideas on perspective might translate as points upon a scale from the illusion of omniscience, visually well-represented in Harvey's modern maps for example, to the subjectivity of an internal monologue or first-person homodiegetic narrator. This is not to say that readers necessarily empathize with Josie's narrative because it is in the first person. Although the narrative is predominantly an interior monologue, it strives for an omniscient, detached perspective. In her self-objectification, Josie is antithetical to *Written on the Body*'s narrator who concealed its body. Josie performs '[e]very morning the same ritual, the same inventory, the same naming of parts before rising, for fear of what I may have become overnight' (p.9). As well as the fear of her body getting out of control

¹⁷¹ Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965), pp.94-95, cited in Susan Bordo, 'The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought', *Signs*, 11.3 (1986), 439-456, p.447.

whilst she has lapsed in her vigilance in order to sleep, the inventory has discernible in it the relish of being looked at admiringly from outside of the body. Here is just the beginning of the description:

The first thing I do is feel my hipbones, piercingly concave, two naked arcs of bone around an emptiness. Next I feel the wrists, encircling each with the opposite hand, checking that they're still frail and pitiful, like the legs of little birds. There's a deep hollow on the inside of each wrist, suspending delicately striated hands, stringy with tendon and bone. On the outside of the wrist, I follow the bone all the way up to the elbow, where it joins another, winglike, in a sharp point. (pp.9-10)

The reader is taken through the inventory with Josie for the duration of a full page of narrative, as if the lingering description takes the place of the diminished body to which it pertains just as it simultaneously nevertheless confirms to Josie her body's presence. The 'legs of little birds' and 'delicately striated' hands give a visual impression as well as a tactile one as Josie 'feels' her way around her body. During the examination, she omits only her breasts as they disgust her as markers of her femininity and the 'emptiness' framed by her hipbones simultaneously indicates her womb as well as her emotional state. Over and over, we receive descriptions of Josie's body that take up the equivalent amount of time to read as they do Josie to perform. This accurately fits the text to Josie's obsessive checking of her body and the present tense aids in the sense that this is an enactment or performance in which we are engaged with the character simultaneously. The equation of narrative time with story time is known as 'scene' and is usually, though not always, reserved for important events in a narrative.¹⁷² This custom helps to convey what is important to Josie and further helps in the creation of narrative subjectivity here.

The style of detailed description that Shute uses evokes the detail characteristic of realist novels, in which lengthy descriptions are employed to build up a picture toward an

¹⁷² See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp.54-55.

omniscient whole. However, Shute's narrator manipulates the technique, for she turns the description to her own body; it is not used to describe landscape or to depict a character in any sense akin to that found in nineteenth-century realist novels. In the latter, narrators tend toward objectification of others, rather than the self even if they are homodiegetic narrators. Our familiarity with the procession of description in such an orderly manner from the realist tradition is persuasive in aligning us with the objectification procedure that Josie is attempting to perform from her subjective perspective.

Sue Vice has suggested that the 'life-size' drawing of herself that Josie is asked to produce to compare with that of external observers is the narrative that comprises the novel, it being too large for her body.¹⁷³ Detailed descriptions of the body and food replicate exactly Josie's experience of them and the repeated use of this character-led 'scene' is correlative to her perspective. The repetition of scene descriptions solidifies Vice's suggestion beyond a 'metafictional conceit' (*Introducing Bakhtin*, p.183), as the text can be seen to be exactly 'life-size' in terms of Josie's experience, rather than her minimally-sized body. However, size being relative and, appropriately, a matter of perspective, Sceats sees the novel as,

A slim text, witty elliptical and caustic but, like its lean and bony heroine, capable of binges; the first-person narrator occasionally breaks out bulimically into luxuriant eloquence or rant. (p.65)

But it is difficult to see the text as 'slim' – materially it is 230 pages in duration – and the descriptions are usually well-controlled replications of the character's distorted perspective.

Control of herself and her environment overwhelm Josie's world and her narrative. Her obsessive self-regulation is painstakingly depicted when hospitalization has disrupted her (non-)eating regime and she is required to adopt new systems in order to cope with the food that is placed in front of her. The description of a meal can be as lengthy as that of

¹⁷³ 'Well-Rounded', p.198, *Introducing Bakhtin*, p.183.

bodily surveillance. For example, having banished most of a meal as inedible, Josie makes a decision as to what she will eat, and how, in a way which exercises her self-discipline:

I decide I will drink two cups of tea and eat half the cantaloupe and one piece of toast [...]. Slowly, delicately, precisely, I cut the piece of toast into halves, then quarters, then eighths, then sixteenths, and daintily convey each piece to my mouth, allowing three minutes between bites. Then, in the same way, I eat exactly half the slice of cantaloupe. (p.18)

The measured manner in which the language progresses ‘slowly, delicately, precisely’, ‘halves, then quarters, then eighths, then sixteenths’, suggests the deferral of consumption which is being described. However, as detailed as this description is, it only approximates the length of the process for the three minutes between each bite are omitted from the narrative. Importantly, the focus here is on the process of controlling food itself and notably absent is the sensation of eating the food, as though the depiction of ingestion must be elided. Food remains separate from the body in this manner of description and the eating must be carried out in private in the narrative just as Josie draws the curtains around her hospital bed for this meal (p.18). The materiality of the food as well as the body is also cancelled out by this description, because its physical presence is made less threatening. When presented to her, this breakfast was overwhelming in terms of its size and disorderliness, including an,

Enormous load [...], a huge mound of dry flakes [...], heaping over the rim of the bowl [...], a vial of glutinous red stuff; a gigantic glass of orange juice. (p.17)

Josie thus enacts the same paring down and control with her food that she enacts upon her body.

The character’s excessive systematization complements her semantic aphasia as both are forms of attempting to distance, to disengage emotionally and to control associated

with her disorder. The detachment and rigour with which Josie approaches food and her body is displayed throughout other areas of her life, particularly in her academic work:

The way I did my homework was to write everything out three times and memorize it. Later I could summon up anything I needed - Latin, Chemistry, Poetry, Math - by reading it off my mindscreen, never betraying (I hoped) that it meant nothing to me: black traces over a void, a code to which, staring at the page from a distant star, I had somehow lost the key. (p.146)

Employing this method, Josie makes straight 'A' grades and moves on to study history, economics, cosmology and maths at university, the latter three of these at least fostering an illusion of control in that they are studies of macro-systems. The methodical approach to learning is recognized in other anorectics and forms part of the alexithymic outlook, lacking in emotional engagement with the subject matter. For example, Alice Kaplan in her memoir *French Lessons*, which implicitly refers to her excessive dieting or possible anorexia as a child and adolescent, speaks of learning French thus:

Memorization, copying, repeating, taking words down in dictation [...] are the practices I excelled in. Don't be original, learn from a ready-made reality ready-to-hand.¹⁷⁴

The detached, efficient, ascetic scholar is the epitome of traditional monastic life, exhibited by Kaplan's statement that she 'copied verbs like a monk' (p.52).¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.56. Subsequent references are to this book. Thank you to Jennifer Maher for directing me both to Kaplan's *French Lessons* and her own work on it.

¹⁷⁵ Jennifer Maher highlights this point in 'Everyone Needs the Words for Food' (no page numbers).

Words as Food

Writing and learning takes on for Kaplan what the trajectory of Ellmann's *The Hunger Artists* suggests, for the former makes explicit the substitution of words for food in her mode of learning:

We wrote down what we ate every day; I used the same notebook for food and conjugations [...]. I wrote 'Force de volonté' (force of will) across my notebook, the way other girls wrote 'Suzy loves Ralph.' There was chocolate in every store, on every corner, chocolate bars with colored wrappers showing roses, bottles of milk, nuts in rows of six, three rows deep. For each bar of chocolate I didn't eat I learned a verb.

I grew thinner and thinner. I ate French. (pp.52-53)

In Maher's discussion of this passage, she points out that in addition to the overt substitution of verbs for chocolate, there is also the 'talismanic function' which the words appear to possess as the retrospective Kaplan writes this narrative, the lingering descriptions of the coloured wrappers being 'themselves an instance of language [...] taking the place of sustenance'. Interestingly, like Josie, Kaplan's will to learn and diet becomes a substitute for more common social behaviour. The phrase across Kaplan's notebook replaces that common to other girls' notebooks and indicates that dieting rather than relationships with boys is her main interest.

Life-Size is also suggestive of this 'talismanic function', that words for food come to stand in for food itself. Vice cites the particularly useful example of Josie's thoughts regarding butter: 'For some reason, even to think the word *butter* seems obscene, lewd and oily on the tongue' (*Life-Size*, p.82, quoted in Vice, 'Well-Rounded', p.200, Shute's emphasis). Significantly, in Saussure's terms the signifier is the 'sound pattern' and the

signified the 'concept'.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, Saussure's definition of the sound pattern as the 'psychological impression of a sound' (p.10), in order not to limit it to the spoken medium, is evident in Josie's *thinking* of the sound pattern here leading to the 'oily' sensation which the 'concept' leaves on her tongue. Josie takes a typically deviant semantic path here, because the word 'lewd' is suggestive of sexual appetite rather than hunger for food. Although the signifier is conflated with its signified by Josie, the sign's relationship to other signs is foregrounded when 'butter' is collocated with 'lewd'. Josie's collocation is far from arbitrary, however, because for her food and sex are interlinked as demonstrable of the neediness and interdependence from which she is at pains to extract herself. This strain for independence recalls Ellmann regarding food as 'the prototype of all exchanges with the other, be they verbal, financial or erotic' (p.112). Words take on the properties of food and become as dangerous.

These characteristics of the sign surface time and again in Josie's narrative where the signifier becomes the signified. Her substitution of words for food leads her to have an analogous ambivalent relationship with language and food, incorporating both loathing and desire. For example, of a menu card given her in hospital from which she must make a selection, Josie claims of the names of the foods: 'Some disgust me, the very words filling my mouth with a viscid sickness: pork chops, hamburger, cheese omelet, clam chowder' (p.8). On the diegetic level Josie tells us these words make her nauseous, yet her narrative caresses the alliterative vocabulary - 'chops', 'cheese', 'chowder' - causing the speaker of the words almost to enact the mechanism of chewing. Indeed, the words are not only alliterative but also onomatopoeiac.

It is ambiguous, however, whether words for food ever really get out of narratorial control because they so accurately depict Josie's experience. For example, when she

¹⁷⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure, 'Nature of the Linguistic Sign', in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), 10-14, p.10. Subsequent page references are to this reproduction of the essay.

describes an episode of overeating in her past she lists the food she ate in a manner that is like the way she lists the parts of her body:

Three doughnuts, a glass of milk, a slice of pizza, most of a package of chocolate chip cookies, a bag of Doritos, a glass of orange juice, an English muffin with butter and jam, another, a large dish of coffee ice cream with chocolate chunks, more cookies, pretzels, a bowl of Raisin Bran.

[...]

This was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. (p.165)

The binge continues after she leaves the flat in which this occurred, there being nothing left in it to eat, but the narration of the episode ends with a virtual repetition of this list of food almost ten pages later, with only two items in the list, the milk and pizza, reversing their positions (p.174). The statement that this was the worst thing that ever happened to her is also directly repeated immediately after the second description. Josie flagellates herself with this memory in recording it twice but the idea of being trapped within a cycle becomes apparent. In fact, it was a handful of Raisin Bran that sparked off the binge and finishing with this, 'returned [her], as if in an infinite loop, to the episode's starting point', just as the repeated list takes us back to the beginning of this episode (p.174). The confessions encircle a rare moment of disorder since such confessions of overeating occur in the text infrequently. It becomes clear part way through the recounting of this episode that Josie is sharing the tale with Suzanne, so the lists introducing and concluding the binge enclose another rare event, that of genuine communication between Josie and the nurse. It is significantly through confessing a lapse in her order that Josie lapses into communication with Suzanne. What Josie observes of herself during the binge could readily be applied to this moment of communication of the confession to Suzanne:

This wasn't me. My identity had been temporarily suspended. Until I became myself again - empty and immaculate and controlled - nothing mattered, none of the usual rules applied. (p.169)

The binge that Josie relates is juxtaposed with the narration of her having unfulfilling sex with a fellow student, which has left her 'hollowed-out from his enthusiastic, nightlong assault' on her (p.165). Josie puts the cause of the binge down to the fact that she is alone in a strange flat at breakfast time, that her system has been disrupted: 'If only he'd had some Special K in the house' (p.165). But the embedding of these tales with one another plainly equates sexual 'excess' with food 'excess', both of which leave her emotionally empty.

The parallel of these two fleshly appetites is a common one and another quite different yet equally familiar equation is apparent on many occasions in the novel. This is when food is attributed its calorific content in parentheses beside its mention and its calorific value becomes the meaning of the food:

A peanut butter sandwich (300 calories), two oatmeal-raisin cookies (100 calories), an apple (65 calories), a bag of potato chips (150 calories), and a bottle of orange soda (125 calories). Grand total: 740 huge, enormous calories. (pp. 108-9)

This depicts Josie's lunch when a schoolgirl, a lunch prepared, significantly, by her mother that she throws away. In such calorie counting, 'normal' behaviour for dieters everywhere, we can see the beginnings of Josie's systematic approach to food and the listing of words in the narrative again can be seen as a substitute for the eating of it as well as an enjoyment at recording what she did not eat. Josie makes a direct correlation in terms of substitution later, which also demonstrates the influence that the diet books she has been reading have had on her:

From the books, I learned what to put into my mouth and what not to. I learned to substitute saccharin for sugar, skimmed milk for whole, cottage cheese for Cheddar,

yogurt for cream, diet soda for regular, carrot and celery sticks for sweets, lemon juice for salad dressing, rice cakes for cookies, frozen bananas for ice cream (special treat only), clear bouillon for dinner, black coffee for breakfast, shopping for lunch, exercise for tea, air and club soda (but watch that sodium!) for food of any kind. (p.115)

This cycle of substitution, which the anorectic takes too far yet again, moves from replacing heavy food with the lighter option to substituting non-food for food, thereby paving the way for words to take the place of food. Significantly, Josie has also incorporated the words of the diet books into her narrative, a literal indoctrination, here represented by the bracketed phrases and possibly the first half of the lengthy sentence beginning 'I learned to substitute'.

In contradiction to the ascetic denial of the body that Josie strives for, many of the lists of foods evoke the senses of the body. For example, in the following extract the 'fragrant' flavours of the foods, many of which are rather exotic, are recalled by Josie at the same time as she denies herself them:

I think of all the things I will never eat again. All the flavors so fragrant on the tongue: cinnamon and coffee and clove; apricot, raspberry, nectarine, and rye; ginger and chocolate, nutmeg and pear; almond, guava, sorrel, and plum; butternut, hazelnut, tangerine, thyme. (p.39)

This feast of signifiers not only evokes the senses of smell, taste, touch and sight (in the mix of colours) but also hearing, since the sounds of the words approach a rhythmic poeticism. Further, it recalls the kind of seduction banquet motif that one finds in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market',¹⁷⁷ or Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes'. In Keats's poem, for instance, the 'dainties' similarly evoke all five senses in their sounds, textures, colours, smells and tastes:

[A] heap

Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;

¹⁷⁷ In *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, ed. by R.W. Crump (London: Penguin, 2001).

With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
 And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
 Manna and dates, in argosy transferred
 From Fez; and spicèd dainties.¹⁷⁸

Keats's sensuous description reaches an excessiveness which borders on abjection, an abjection which is more explicit in Josie's intermingling of flavours which seem not to fit together, coffee and clove for example. The extract from *Life-Size* can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it is as though even an imagined feast must be tempered with the asceticism with which Josie protects herself from her desires. Alternatively, the list may be viewed as an imagined binge, wherein the foods are consumed arbitrarily simply because they are foods. The first interpretation is validated somewhat by the measured division of the list, however, with the use of semi-colons to separate the elements, beginning with 'apricot', into four groups consisting of four foods and four stressed syllables. The controlled delivery of these lines does not emulate a binge but suggests rather the considered aural parallelisms associated more with poetry. Again, then, we see the controlled delivery by the narrative voice tempering the suggestion of being out of control.

The substitution of words for food is made explicit in relation to poetry when Josie views a restaurant review from a newspaper as poetry. The review is set out typographically as a poem:

Translucent slivers of scallop have the texture
 of firm custard,
 with a frothy oceanic flavor.
 The veal chop is tempting, too,
 thick and tender.

(p.34)

¹⁷⁸ *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Miriam Allott (Harlow: Longman, 1970), ll.264-269.

The review continues for some duration and is interrupted by Josie's reaction which emphasizes its substitutional and sustaining properties: 'It's poetry; the only kind I read, tasting each word on my tongue' (p.34). Josie manipulates the implied seductiveness of this meal into emotionally-detached sex:

The saltiness from the ham plays
seductively
off the sweet cognac.

Don't miss the silken artichoke mousse,
boosted by a lusty black truffle sauce;

[...]

a rousing combination.

No, it's pornography.

(pp.34-5)

As a reader or viewer of this 'pornography', Josie experiences the meal or sex by proxy, substituting the distant representation for the embodied reality.

Food as Bodies, Bodies as Food

Josie thus experiences a crisis in signification. In particular, signifiers can become their own signifieds as we have seen (sound patterns for food). However, they can also become attached to signifieds that do not conventionally belong to them in a manner that both reflects and perpetuates Josie's preoccupations. Notably, bodies are frequently described as food, food as bodies and parts of the external world as food. For example, very often Josie speaks of her own body as though it were food, using highly disturbing yet effective adjectives to describe her features: her fingertips and nails are 'blueberry-hued' (p.14), her lips have 'mulberry scabs' (p.42), her skin is 'the wan blue of skimmed milk' (p.158) and her stomach after she has eaten food is 'an immense mound, soft and swollen as risen dough' (p.217). These examples are semantically loaded from Josie's perspective. The

bluish hues of her body lend her an air of the transparency for which she strives, whilst the deeper purple of the mulberry etches onto this spectre a reminder of its status as living flesh. The image of dough evokes not only the gestation of food in/as her stomach but the swelling and gestation associated with life-giving pregnancy, although this is depicted in a typically negative fashion. Josie highlights a slightly more conventional view of her body as a 'piece of meat' (p.6), exaggerating the implications of the cliché. The doctor,

Wants to see some more 'meat on my bones,' and soon. (Meat. Am I to resemble
a pork chop? A leg of lamb? A bloody, dripping steak tartare?) (p.22)

The parenthetical pondering objectifies Josie's flesh in relation to cooked animal meat and also evokes cannibalism. But there is a further implication of self-consumption because this could be another example of Josie's enjoyment of food by enjoying the words for it, in this case her own flesh transubstantiated. Ellmann suggests that the idea of self-consumption is actually 'medically precise, because the starving body eventually consumes itself in the absence of any other nourishment' (p.81). In other instances, Josie imagines others eating her heart, 'so red, so sweet, so meaty' (p.49), and hallucinates that she is the roast dinner burning at her mother's house (p.24), this latter description being interwoven with italicized extracts from a book detailing the behaviour of cannibals. The fear of incorporation is made explicit here and is part of the threat to the boundaries of the self with which Josie is preoccupied. Viewing her body as food aids in its objectification and separation from her self whilst also making the body as unstable and interchangeable as other objects around her, for it can be consumed by others as well as herself.

The cannibalistic relationship is reciprocal, however, as other people's bodies are also described as food: Suzanne's arm is 'meaty and tight, like a sausage' (p.31), a fellow patient has 'honey-coloured hair' and 'almond eyes' (p.48), her mother's caesarean scars become 'a double purple gash across the blancmange of her belly' (p.63). Whilst these 'foods' are not appetizing to Josie, there is one food-identified body for which she exhibits some desire. This is found in the hint of Josie's feelings toward her friend, Amanda Jane,

when they were teenagers. On being questioned by the doctor, Josie's thoughts betray this desire, whilst typically she chooses not to communicate them to the doctor:

‘Have there been no, uh, sexual experiences that you would describe as pleasurable?’

Her body: lean, golden, toasty.

‘No, not really’, I lie. (p.188)

Josie's memories are of the ‘lanky and lean’ body of Amanda Jane, with ‘its toasty-golden odor’ (p.58). Sexual appetite is once again combined with desire for food but, for the only time in the novel, is charged both positively and homosexual. The narrative does not dwell on this desire but instead deflects the reader into an unappealing image of heterosexual exchange (and food) with a quip which parodies the doctor's verbal probing, conflating it with a physical probing:

Perhaps I should invent a sexual fantasy, just for him. Oh, doctor, I'm so ashamed - before I go to sleep, I dream that you cram your doughy dick into my mouth. What on earth do you think this could mean? (p.188)

Mockingly alluding to clichéd rape fantasies and fantasies concerning women's relations to men in authority, the doctor is here reduced to ‘[t]he therapist and the rapist - a matter of spacing’, as Josie sees it (p.144). Thus, the sole positive representation of Josie's sexual desire, probably unfulfilled, is juxtaposed with an image of enforced sexual relations with the doctor that echoes the unappealing heterosexual encounters described in the narrative. The body as food is also explicitly gendered, since the un(der)cooked bread is the monocentric ‘doughy dick’, versus the more appealingly rendered polytheistic ‘golden, toasty’, perfectly cooked sustenance of the female body. The fantasy which Josie mimics here is the words which the doctor wants to ‘cram’ into her mouth, the anticipated response which he wishes to force-feed her, attempting to make her say the right words, eat the right foods and have the right fantasies and desires.

Food which is invested with the properties of bodies is largely personified in a manner which emphasises its abject threat. For example, a boiled egg is so threatening to Josie that she wishes to destroy it but she is 'afraid of the terrible smell this would release, the metallic stench, the viscous yellow blood' (p.17). The language prefigures that used to describe an instance of oral sex which 'filled [her] mouth with a viscous slime. The bitter, metallic taste made [her] heave' (p.32). The correlation of the egg's properties with those of oral sex draws together their resonances of fertility and yet betrays their actual sterility: the egg presented to Josie to eat is unfertilized and oral sex carries no risk of fertilization. In other instances, meat is described as 'corpses' of 'muscle and gristle and blood' (p.4) or fruit and vegetables as having 'flesh' (p.83, p.127), but there are innumerable descriptions which are more uniquely abject to Josie, for example where a hard-boiled egg possesses a 'bruise-colored line where the white pulls away from the yolk' (p.11), a salad dressing is 'some urine-colored oil labeled "Italian"' (p.11), a tomato has 'watery blood' (p.30), and a bowl of oatmeal is 'mucus [...], snot' (p.79). A segment of apple with cheese is 'one perfect white wedge of apple, edged with a nail paring of green and topped with its skin of cheese' (p.47), a potato is 'alive', possessing "'eyes'" which look back at Josie and 'skin', and is 'plump, complacent, daring [her] to eat it' (p.126). The lemon halves used by Josie as part of her beauty routine when younger are 'like small mouths, sucking on each elbow' (p.146), doughnuts are 'lewd-looking pastries, powdered like a plump woman's flesh' (p.171) which returns us to the 'lewdness' of the butter, one of the signifiers she dare hardly speak.

The rather dolorous, institutional green and cream colours of her hospital surroundings are enlivened by descriptions infusing them with the alluring yet threatening properties of food: 'that honeyed square of sunlight on an olive tile pierces my retina, furs the edge of my tongue' (p.25), and 'the ceiling, speckled like an eggshell, in other places - near the water pipes, I suppose - encrusted like Camembert' (p.26). Her labelling of the conventionally inedible as edible results in a confusion around the categories leading to her fear of eating the 'waffled bedspread and cream pillowcases [...], the dried flowers on the windowsill, the *Vogue* magazine, cramming it all insatiably into [her] mouth' (p.28). By

means of all of these references to food, the text becomes a feast of all that Josie denies herself.

Conclusion

Life-Size presents a first-person protagonist who is insistent on authoring and objectifying her body as well as her narrative. As the narrative relates what Josie sees as the whole world, as objective observers we, as readers, can ascertain how distressingly reduced the world she inhabits is. However, because Josie does not adopt the distancing medicalizing discourse that Pascual sees might perpetuate anorexia, the end of the novel is more optimistic than those autobiographical accounts. It is implied that what has most helped Josie to recover is her discovery of a connection with another character, Suzanne. The emotional connection has been made in spite of the official care she has received in hospital rather than because of it. Somewhere between the authoritative voices of her anorexia, diet books, the medical authorities and her parents, Josie begins to wonder what she might be once her 'whole mind' is no longer 'under occupation' by the drive to deny her body (p.230). Rather than viewing her body as a detached signifier of her self, Josie considers Suzanne's closing words to her in the exchange which ends the novel:

Don't say 'I have a body,' Suzanne tells me: say 'I am a body.' I can't do that yet.

But if it were true, if I were a body, what would I be? (p.230)

If Josie were able to accept that she is a body, she would, it is implied, no longer be anorexic but a different identity that is indefinable for her at this stage. Despite refuting food and bodies, Josie's narrative has actually exhibited what it is like to be an excessively embodied self.

CONCLUSION

A Feminist Narratology of the Body?

That my analyses do not *exclude* readings of the corporeal-textual relations as metaphorical is clear. For instance, there are many similarities between the texts and the bodies of Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* that help to illuminate one another, forming a metaphorical ground. In my discussions of these novels, I have referred to the tropic relationships between texts and bodies. Yet I have also demonstrated how the transformation of Eve(lyn)'s/Tiresias's body from its intertextual precedents actively constitutes the transformative textuality of *New Eve*. In *The Lesbian Body*, Wittig succeeds in presenting the illusion that the bodies transform their own representations because the concept of bodies develops through discursive reiteration in the text's segments. Every segment is a reiteration of corporeal fluidity that encourages us to read the bodies as spilling out of themselves. The disunified whole(s) of Wittig's bodies are both erotically and grotesquely charged. For Butler and for Wittig, if we alter the way that the body is spoken about, we can transform the concept of the body. Although we may not be able to reach a 'true' body, Wittig demonstrates that we can intervene in the body 'sedimented' through discourse, as Butler describes it. We can do this enough to reconceive the body so that this reconception affects or influences future discursive practices.

Life-Size and *Written on the Body* problematize analogous relationships between their bodies and their texts. In *Life-Size*, there is an antithetical correlative between an abundant text and a slight body, yet Shute succeeds in creating the impression that both the body of the narrator and the text have been fashioned from the same subjective perspective of the central protagonist. Regulatory pressure on the western female body in society possesses an antonymic relationship to fluid societal boundaries stemming from an ideology of fear. In producing a rather unwieldy text that stems from the same subjectivity that forms a pared down body,

Josie's body and narrative echo this trajectory of wider society and its relation to the body. But the dangers of narrative abundance in *Life-Size* are productive because presented in the first-person narrative voice of Josie. This is the way in which the character transgresses her bodily boundaries. Rather than being about the body, Winterson's *Written on the Body* fails to represent a body. The challenge of Winterson's text is in destabilizing the reader's knowledge and placing us in an unfamiliar position of not knowing the sex of the central character. In *Written on the Body*, where gender roles are unstable, the body's representation appears the most tightly controlled of the texts that I examine, in a manner that literalizes Bordo's observations in 'Reading the Slender Body', that at times of gender role instability, control of bodily boundaries is evident. Whilst Winterson's text is challenging on the level of destabilizing our reading of gender, it does not further this idea in relation to the body itself. In this text, there is a such an overpowering sense that the narrator is in control of the bodily representations that there appears to be no room for dialogue between those bodies and the text.

Revisiting 'textuality' as narratological and stylistic choices that formulate political statements has reopened a dialogue between form and content that is rarely engaged with in criticism on the body in fiction. Throughout my analyses, I have drawn on disciplines that are oftentimes perceived as uncomfortable partners. For example, the more rigorous stylistic analysis in my chapter on *The Lesbian Body* is coupled with a wider theoretical discussion of the concept of the lesbian. My methodology has fused elements of stylistics (linguistic choices), narratology (formal properties of narrative, for example time and spatial relations) and interpretative close reading with cultural and theoretical perspectives concerning identity, agency and feminism. Not only are these approaches rarely brought together but a certain antipathy to the cross-currents that might run between narratology and feminism and between narratology and interpretation has been expressed by Nilli Diengott and Daniel Punday.¹⁷⁹ But

¹⁷⁹ Nilli Diengott defends the purity of narratology in his vehement response to Lanser's 'Toward a Feminist Narratology', stating that Lanser is interested in interpretation, which does not belong in the

my belief is that whilst disciplinary categories are useful in terms of delineating fields of study and providing us with a descriptive vocabulary, the categories themselves ought not to determine our fields of investigation. As my analyses demonstrate, elements of style, narrative and content operate together to elucidate the politics of texts. And, as Lanser indicates, feminists are right to be suspicious of categories that might constrict our thought ('Toward', p.343).

The primary texts that I have discussed themselves flout generic categories to such an extent that the texts might be termed meta-theoretical fictions. However, in my analyses of these texts I have not simply rehearsed the theories that have overtly informed the fictions – psychoanalysis, femininity as construction or masquerade in *New Eve*; gender as construction or masquerade in *Written on the Body*; lesbian subjectivity in *The Lesbian Body*; autobiographical and theoretical accounts of anorexia in *Life-Size*. Instead, I have adopted more deviant routes in my close readings, which have resulted in an exposure of politics that are less explicit. This is demonstrated particularly well in my work on the synecdochic representation of minor characters in *Written on the Body*, where, as I have suggested, this reductiveness weakens Winterson's innovative employment of the ambiguously-gendered narrator. My focus on the metamorphic properties of *New Eve*'s protagonist has illuminated the transformative nature of this text in terms of literary intertextuality. My discussion of language in *Life-Size* points to the careful construction of this text as a fiction, which separates it from autobiographical accounts of anorexia. And my close stylistic analyses of *The Lesbian Body* illustrate that power dynamics are not utopian in this text and that resistance might need to be employed in reading it.

field of narratology. See Nilli Diengott, 'Narratology and Feminism', *Style*, 22.1 (1988), 42-51, p.49. Whilst there are problems with Lanser's article, such as the implication that there is a difference between men's and women's writing and her overgeneralizations with regard to the aims of feminists, her opening up of a dialogue between narratology and feminism is useful. Punday laments his own lapse into interpretation in 'A Corporeal Narratology?' (p.238).

The act of reading these texts deviantly itself incorporates a resistance to reading more directly the blatant concerns of the fictions. Two important points arise out of this method. Firstly, it is clear that any fiction might be approached employing close analysis in order to examine textual politics, not only fiction as heavily concerned with theory as are my chosen texts. Secondly, deviant readings demonstrate that readers need not be passive and accepting of any traceable instructional qualities of texts but can create their own pathways, as Carter hopes. That readers' responses are not solely produced by the discourses of the texts is evident here.

This methodology, coupled with my thematic focus on the degrees of freedom permitted the bodies in the texts, elevates agency. Further, my work suggests that agency is located precisely in that space which Butler intimates is outwith discourse (which she argues is barely perceptible because when we speak of that which is beyond we (re)formulate it): the body in the text or readers' innovations. These are decidedly un-postmodern statements. But, whereas in the early 1990s Judith Roof was able to remark that the link between feminism and postmodernism was 'in the air', it is apparent a decade later that postmodernism's demise is instead 'in the air' ('Lesbians and Lyotard', p.47). Feminists now have the opportunity to liberate ourselves from having to relate to postmodernity. It now seems possible to recognize the fragility of subjectivity yet at the same time say things about the world without making claims to omniscience. In this way, the body, inherently interwoven with subjectivity as it is, will continue as a productive site for these explorations. New ways of engaging with bodies can only be a positive step from feminist perspectives. My work's movement toward a feminist stylistics, or narratology, of the body makes some progress in liberating us from the essentializing or metaphorizing quotation marks that customarily frame the phrase, 'writing the body'.

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