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SUBJECT TO DELUSIONS: NARCISSISM IN SIGMUND FREUD,  
HENRIETTE HARDENBERG, DJUNA BARNES AND UNICA ZÜRN

by

CAROLINE RUPPRECHT

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in  
Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The  
City University of New York

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## INTRODUCTION

Iste ego sum! Sensi; nec me mea fallit imago: uror amore mei, flammam moveoque feroque! Quid faciam? Rogem, anne rogem? Quid deinde rogabo? Quod cupio, mecum est: inopem me copia fecit. O utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!

Oh, I am he! I have felt it, I know now my own image. I burn with love of my own self; I both kindle the flames and suffer them. What shall I do? Shall I be wooed or woo? Why woo at all? What I desire, I have; the very abundance of my riches beggars me. Oh, that I might be parted from my own body!

(Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. F.J. Miller)

Who is this "I" that sees itself? What does its "image" look like? And where should we locate the "body" it refers to? - Those are the kinds of questions emerging from texts designed to represent "subjectivity." Although this concept was not part of antiquity, the myth of Narcissus seems related to twentieth century writing, whose emphasis on language and perception raises the question of the difference between representation and reality. In an age of virtual realities, how real are representations?

Reflection differs from representation: unlike the subject in a photograph, the subject of reflection is immersed in the scene, which also lacks an objectifying frame. The image lives and dies with its beholder. Still, in its effect upon the subject, the reflective image can be related to representation: insofar as Narcissus perceives

it to be "real," his gaze endows it with enough power to, eventually, destroy him. To him, the surface reflection is an actual object. This is his dilemma: unable to reach into the pool and embrace the vision without destroying it, yet also unable to walk away from the supreme object of his desire, Narcissus is fooled by the surface, the mere "shadow of a reflected form" (9). However, he not only suffers from an inability to distinguish between himself and his reflection, he also knows that he is deluded, a fact which seems to make the "object" even more desirable: while the myth acknowledges that Narcissus suffers from a delusion, it also implies that his "madness" is a specific form of knowledge, namely self-knowledge: "When asked whether this child would live to reach well-ripened age, the seer replied: 'If he never knows himself'" (Vinge 8). Seeing is equated with knowing and Narcissus appears to be the one who can actually "see." The reader, on the other hand, is confronted with a text that claims to objectify Narcissus' subjective vision into language. Language, in the reader's mind, becomes equivalent to what Narcissus sees, providing the reader with access to what would otherwise be inaccessible, yet it also suggests the impossibility of seeing what he sees. Thus texts about narcissism provide the illusion that subjectivity can be

represented and, at the same time, raise the question whether subjectivity is not, in fact, a textual construct. This, in turn, may lead to larger questions: to what extent are fictions capable of affecting the reality of matter they purport to reflect? Or, in terms of identity, are the stories and images through which we define ourselves mere reflections of who we truly are or is "who we truly are" a result of how we desire to see ourselves? Can we, in fact, "construct" our own identities?

As debates over, for example, advertising, or pornography, have shown, a great deal of power may be attributed to images. Although it is important to keep in mind that there is a difference between reality (i.e. the body) and representations (i.e. reflection), the relationship between them can be conceptualized in various ways. Over the course of this dissertation, I will ask such questions as to what extent the body may appear to be a kind of "medium" and to what extent language, i.e. representation, may appear to be "real" in physical terms. Because I am interested in texts which claim to represent subjectivity, I have selected texts which depict the relationship between a subject and its "body" and are, primarily, focused on "expressing," describing, or somehow conveying the impression of representing "feelings," such

as love or rage, either abstractly or in relation to an authorial subject (i.e. with an autobiographical dimension). In the works I will be discussing, language appears to provide insight into something other than what can be said to exist in objective terms (i.e. is not visible in nature). And, as I will show, there is a kind of text which makes "art" appear to be identical with "life."

So what if it is true that representation is, somehow, "real" in its own way? Does art have the power to change society? The fact that the "reflective image" has the capacity to delude the subject raises the question of the power of the text. The myth itself exemplifies the problem of how to approach fiction: on the one hand, Narcissus is aware of the difference between himself and the image, and maintains the proper distance in spite of his desire to merge with it; on the other hand, he is in agony, enamored by the vision to the point of abandoning his own physical and mental integrity (not incidentally, the word "narcotics" derives from this myth).

In the desire to "part from his body" in order to become another and be able to embrace himself, he is enslaved by the image to the point when he, literally, departs from his body through death. Thus his mind seems more connected to the image than to his own physical self.

Through this detour, in turn, his mental state comes to dominate his physical being: unable to avert his gaze and walk away, he is destined to die from exhaustion and starvation.<sup>1</sup>

As Narcissus himself recognizes, to some extent, his "love" exists only at the expense of his very being and still, the desire which destroys him is also what animates him. Locked into the tension of his own gaze, Narcissus experiences a condition of stasis, where time itself comes to a halt. Enticed by an infinite series of reflections, he must "split" himself in order to sustain his desire for another (this is his curse, decreed by an avenging goddess, for having been too vain to accept any of his real suitors). At each moment, he must actively watch and contain himself, i.e. resist his desire to "merge" so as not to fall into the pool. Each moment, therefore, becomes the same. The only mark for the passing of time is the gradual deterioration of his physical condition, which he does not truly notice, because there is no external vantage point from which to judge his own condition, except,

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<sup>1</sup> There are two competing versions: in Ovid, he "drooped his weary head on the green grass and death sealed the eyes that marvelled at their master's beauty" (11); in other versions, he succumbs to his desire to embrace the image and falls into the pool. My point is that in either version, he ends up losing control over his physical self.

perhaps, his own speech. Thus, while his biological life is in jeopardy, he also sustains himself by virtue of the illusion (and we do not know exactly for how long). Still, the actual fulfillment of desire, the merging with the image, only comes with death.<sup>2</sup>

All of this leads me to assume that, when it comes to self-reflection as well as self-representation, fictions seem essential. I wonder whether narcissism could be read as a figure of differentiation and, therefore, visualization, which is, in turn, conveyed by the medium of language. For example, through language, Ovid's narrator offers the reader a detailed description of what Narcissus sees. In fact, the switch between subjective and objective points of view in the telling of the myth reenacts the split to which its protagonist is subjected. The reader is affected by the narrator's claim toward the existence of an "image" which can be neither object nor fantasy because it appears as both. Thus it appears as if the figure of self-reflection lends itself to representations of subjectivity because, paradoxically, it implies an external vantage point from which the story can be told.

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<sup>2</sup> Ironically, Narcissus' death also brings about a merging with nature: "in place of his body they find a flower" (11).

Representing narcissism, as I would like to suggest, allows the writer to investigate the nature of textuality, i.e. the relationship between text and context. It produces a seemingly subjective vantage point which, in turn, seems to reflect reality as an "other." Through the use of narcissism, for example, "nature" can be represented in non-mimetic terms whereas "art" appears to be essential in a way that reveals the constructedness of human thought and, therefore, its ability to change and affect "reality." At least this is how I would characterize the texts I will be looking at, as they all exhibit a certain faith in writing as a way of effecting some kind of change: the three writers I have chosen for this project - Henriette Hardenberg (1894-1993) , Djuna Barnes (1892-1982) and Unica Zürn (1916-70) - are each related to one of the major artistic "groups" in this century - German Expressionism, Anglo-American Modernism and French Surrealism - and I would argue that they are all engaged in articulating emotions, desires and states of mind which are commonly perceived as, somehow, beyond representation. In this, they show how language constructs the body as "other," like Narcissus who wishes to die in order to embrace his image, but also how this image entices him to speak and, thereby, sustain his animation.

In contrast to a writing which performs and, thereby, investigates the relationship between "body" and "image," I will be reading Sigmund Freud's "Zur Einführung des Narzißmus" (1914); his essay, translated by James Strachey as "On Narcissism: An Introduction,"<sup>3</sup> establishes an opposition between language and a mute and passive "nature" whose reflected images are, in turn, produced by "culture" thus prohibiting our understanding of how "nature" is itself an imaginary and discursive construct.

Freud's essay begins with Paul Näcke's 1899 description of narcissism as "jenes Verhalten [...] bei welchem ein Individuum den eigenen Leib in ähnlicher Weise behandelt wie sonst den eines Sexualobjekts, ihn also mit sexuellem Wohlgefallen beschaut, streichelt, liebkost" (155) - "the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated - who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it" (17). To broaden the concept away from "perversion," Freud describes narcissism as "die libidinöse Ergänzung zum Egoismus des Selbsterhaltungstriebes, von dem jedem Lebewesen mit Recht ein Stück zugeschrieben wird" (156) - "the libidinal

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<sup>3</sup> Strachey's translation does not fully capture the way in which the German title is less on narcissism than it is the

complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature" (18). Through this, he glosses over the issue of "looking" which had been at the heart of the myth of Narcissus; Freud omits the humanist element of self-reflection to re-inscribe it later on, in his concept of a second kind of narcissism, which surfaces from "repression" and involves a culturally determined image, the "ego ideal."

As I will show, Freud renders representation secondary to a supposed state of "nature" which he portrays as inarticulate. Positing what he calls "primary narcissism" ("primärer" or "ursprünglicher Narzißmus") as an early genetic stage, he attributes large amounts of narcissism to women, "besonders im Falle der Entwicklung zur Schönheit" (172) - "especially if they grow up with good looks" (31), and "gewiss[e] Tiere, die sich um uns nicht zu kümmern scheinen, wie [...] Katzen und groß[e] Raubtiere" (172) - "certain animals which seem not to concern themselves about us, such as cats and the large beasts of prey" (32). Based

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official introduction of narcissism.

on the notion of "self-contentment" ("Selbstgenügsamkeit"),<sup>4</sup> his concept lumps together a variety of cultural "others," deflecting from the fact that his essay does not, in actuality, provide any evidence for the existence of primary narcissism. However, as I would like to argue, his essay can be read as a theory of representation insofar as it posits the ego ideal, a reflective image, as the only access to primary narcissism.

Thus, instead of simply reading the three writers through a Freudian lense, I would like to argue that their work makes apparent what his theory seems to repress, namely the possibility that subjectivity is constructed through language and images and that the body itself is part of this construction. What this may mean to readers of both literature and psychoanalysis will become apparent over the course of this dissertation, as I will read the writer's texts in relation to and as a revision of Freud's essay. As I show their works to correspond to particular aspects of Freud's conceptualization of narcissism, my

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<sup>4</sup> Freud's fascination with the narcissism of cats is confirmed by Lou Andreas-Salomé in The Freud-Journal (Quartet, 1987): "[Freud] told me of his life [...] Most personal of all perhaps was his charming account of the 'narcissistic cat' [...] The cat aroused mixed feelings in him [...] But [...] Freud's heart melted and he ordered milk for it [...] However, despite Freud's increasing affection

approach is based on the idea of a dialogue between literary and non-literary texts. Addressing the issue of narcissism as a function of a specific discourse, here psychoanalysis, enables me not only to demonstrate the extent to which literature may complicate theoretical concepts but also to show how such concepts are often themselves metaphorical, i.e. "literary." Reading Freud from a literary critical perspective highlights the imaginary quality of his seemingly scientific concepts, whereas reading literature in comparison to a theoretical concept, such as narcissism, draws attention to its implicit ability to engage with what we commonly refer to as "theory."

For example, Hardenberg's Expressionist poetry in Dichtungen (1923), dissolves subject-object boundaries as the body of the speaker becomes a kind of internal landscape in which the "I" must locate herself. A "natural" environment merges with the human body which then becomes the text itself, so that the medium of language appears to act as a kind of "body." Hardenberg's evocation of silence - which takes place, paradoxically, through language - suggests that there is something beyond language, a

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and admiration, the cat paid him not a bit of attention" (89).

seemingly pre-verbal state, in which the individual ("I"/ego) appears to be self-identical (not yet differentiated from an outside world). This relates directly to Freud's concept of primary narcissism: Hardenberg's work can be read as a "revision" of Freud's narcissistic woman insofar as her text shows that primary narcissism can be, in fact, represented.

However, as my chapter on Djuna Barnes' Nightwood (1936) will show, Freud's concept of the ego ideal is problematic because it is based on the same kind of biological determinism that takes on racist and sexist connotations in Barnes' parodic novel: whereas Freud's theory is founded on a genetic narrative, Barnes' narrative is often brought to a halt by scenes in which reflection plays a major role, so that "art" is shown to determine "nature" instead of vice versa, as in Freud. Whereas Freud focuses on the pathological implications of adult narcissism, showing its connection to art and culture (through the ego ideal) to be somewhat suspect, Barnes' universe is completely textual, turning "nature" into a function of narcissistic desire which here, in turn, represents "art." In this, Barnes' depiction of the relationship between the protagonist and her female lover complicates Freud's discussion of "narcissistic object

choice" which is based on his understanding of homosexuality and from which he derives, in turn, his view of object relations (including "love") in general.

From these discussions relating to "primary narcissism" in Hardenberg and the "ego ideal" in Barnes, my dissertation concludes with a chapter on Unica Zürn's surrealist text Der Mann im Jasmin [L'Homme Jasmin] (1970) which investigates the relationship between mental illness and artistic production. Freud, in his essay, hypothesizes the existence of primary narcissism based on schizophrenics' delusions of grandeur and withdrawal from the outside world. As he himself admits when referring to the "Seelenlebe[n] von Kindern und von primitiven Völkern" (157) - "mental life of children and primitive peoples" (19), his theory rests on an enigma: arguing that we are attracted to and envious of primary narcissism as something we ourselves were forced to give up in order to establish relationships with others, Freud represents mental illness as an impenetrable mystery which is, apparently, determined by forces of nature (whereas "normal" neurosis would be determined by culture).

Zürn's pseudo-autobiographical text, as I would like to demonstrate, questions both the romanticization of mental illness, i.e. its connection with "creativity," and,

at the same time, the pathologizing narrative of psychoanalytical case histories. Her artist-protagonist suffers from a madness whose cause is attributed to a figment of her own imagination, compelling her to write but also threatening to destroy her identity as a writer. As "she" (who has no name) is seduced by hallucinations, the reader realizes that the controlling Man of Jasmine can be interpreted as the outward projection of a kind of authorial "super-ego." However, whereas Freud locates the super-ego in the internal structure of the psyche, Zürn literalizes the metaphor by rendering it legible, i.e. "visible," thus providing evidence that "madness" may be produced as a culturally specific text.

CHAPTER ONE  
FREUD'S NARCISSISM

**Introduction: The Ego Ideal**

This chapter examines Sigmund Freud's essay, "Zur Einführung des Narzißmus" (1914), which pre-figures the turning point from his libido theory to his later structural theory of the id, ego and super-ego. Generally considered one of Freud's most complicated works, this essay contains many contradictions that caused Freud himself to rethink its content, but have also lead to contemporary psychoanalytic discourses on narcissism that continue to refer back to it as their foundation. My interest is to re-read Freud's essay, not just to highlight its inconsistencies (which are, however, what make such re-readings possible), but to show how it can be understood as a theory of representation (in spite of its claim to the contrary: Freud saw himself as a scientist). Since my inquiry about language and subjectivity involves linguistic representations of subjectivity, my aim is to test Freud's assumptions about narcissism against corresponding literary texts (which I discuss in the following chapters); I am placing literature and theory on the same level with the hope that they may enter into a dialogue. The following reading analyzes Freud's language because it is language that shapes the way in which psychoanalysis conceives of its object, the human psyche.

To begin with, Freud defines narcissism as two sides of the same coin: a "normal" (i.e. healthy) primary narcissism and a pathological narcissism which he calls "secondary" ("sekundär" 157). The division between these two narcissisms is reflected in what is known as the "Kernberg-Kohut debate" among psychoanalysts: whereas some analysts argue on behalf of a so-called "good" narcissism, following Heinz Kohut who advocates narcissism's "contribution [...] to health, adaptation and achievement" (Morrison 61), others emphasize the problems suffered by so-called "narcissistic personalities," described by Otto Kernberg as "grandiosity, extreme self-centeredness, and a remarkable absence of interest in and empathy for others in spite of the fact that they are so very eager to obtain admiration and approval from other people" (Morrison 214). Whereas Kohut's view is based on the supposition of primary narcissism, the symptoms observed by Kernberg are related to the ego ideal.

The emergence of the ego ideal is described by Freud, in the last third of his essay, within the context of the "Psychologie der Verdrängung"- "psychology of repression," according to which "libidinöse Triebregungen" - "libidinal instinctual impulses" are bound to come into conflict with the "kulturellen und ethischen Vorstellungen des Individuums"(177) - "the subject's cultural and ethical ideas" (35) in adulthood.

This represents an extension of Freud's so-called "libido theory," which he advanced in Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie (1905) [Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality] and as a continuation and defense of which his essay on narcissism is, ostensibly, written. Freud's colleague, C.G. Jung, had presumed a "single undifferentiated psychic energy" at the heart of everything but the libido theory holds that there is a specifically sexual energy (libido) which can be differentiated from other, non-sexual, instincts. Libido, in turn, is divided into "object-libido" (attached to objects, including other people) and "ego-libido" (attached to one's self), on which narcissism is based. Although different in kind, they originate from one place: as Freud explains in Three Essays, "narcissistic or ego-libido seems to be the great reservoir from which the object-cathexes are sent out [...] the narcissistic libidinal cathexis of the ego is the original state of things, realized in earliest childhood" (84).

The problem with the libido theory is the unclear nature of the ego. Laplanche and Pontalis have observed that the ego acts "exactly like an external object, the ego is a love object, charged with libido, 'cathected'" (73) but they also explain that the metaphor of a "reservoir" can be misleading because it renders the nature of the ego ambiguous:

[T]he ego, even though it is a reservoir of the libido cathecting it, can appear to be a source; it is not the subject of desire or wishes, nor even the site in which the drive originates (a site represented by the id), but it can pass itself off as such. A love object, the ego 'puts out' libido; it supplements and replaces love by positing itself as a loving subject. (74)

This description also highlights the question to what extent the physical body acts as a "container" for the ego. Compared to Freud's hypothesis of an even earlier developmental stage, so-called "autoerotism," in which the nursling (and/or fetus) is unable to perceive any boundaries between its body and the rest of the world, narcissism introduces a difference between "I" and "not-I" and, thereby presupposes the existence of an ego. Later, in Das Ich und das Es [The Ego and the Id] (1923), Freud describes the ego as "a body ego [...] the projection of a surface," leading Laplanche and Pontalis to adopt the definition of "a psychical unit paralleling the constitution of the bodily schema [...] this unification is precipitated by the subject's acquisition of an image of himself founded on the model furnished by the other person - this image being the ego itself" (LP 131). Thus, while the ego may seem unified in terms of a "reservoir," its function is to differentiate and, thereby represent itself in physical terms.

The issue of the ego is an issue of narcissism insofar as it involves the body and its image but Freud further

distinguishes between an "actual ego" and an "ideal ego," which becomes the ego ideal,<sup>1</sup> in the following passage from his essay on narcissism:

Wir können sagen, der [Mensch] habe ein Ideal in sich aufgerichtet, an welchem er sein aktuelles Ich mißt [...] Diesem Idealich gilt nun die Selbstliebe, welche in der Kindheit das wirkliche Ich genoß [...] Er will die narzißtische Vollkommenheit seiner Kindheit nicht entbehren, und wenn er diese nicht festhalten konnte, durch die Mahnungen während seiner Entwicklungszeit gestört und in seinem Urteil geweckt, sucht er sie in der neuen Form des Ichideals wieder zu gewinnen. Was er als Ideal vor sich hin projiziert, ist der Ersatz für den verlorenen Narzißmus seiner Kindheit, in der er sein eigenes Ideal war. (178)

We can say that [man] has set up an ideal in himself by which he measures his actual ego. [...] This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego.[...] He is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgment, so that he can no longer retain that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal. (36)

In this passage, the distinction between "actual" and "ideal" ego is drawn by way of positing an artificial construct in opposition to something that seems to be already there: on the one hand, the ideal ego is man-made,

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of Freud's shift from "Idealich" (ideal ego) to "Ichideal" (ego ideal), see Lacan's "Ego-ideal and ideal ego," Chapter 11 in The Seminar I.

"erected" ("aufgerichtet"), and detached from the subject in that it can be "projected" - a reflection which is also a representation; on the other, the ego ideal's "actual" counterpart escapes definition insofar as the reader is left to wonder what it may mean to be "one's own ideal." Based on this, Jaques Lacan, in "La Topique de L'Imaginaire," describes Freud's two narcissisms in the following way:

Il y a d'abord, en effet, un narcissisme qui se rapporte à l'image corporelle [...] en tant qu'il est homme et non pas cheval. Elle fait l'unité du sujet. [Puis, il y a] un second narcissisme. Son *pattern* fondamental est tout de suite la relation à l'autre [...] L'autre, l'alter ego, se confond plus ou moins, selon les étapes de la vie, avec l'*Ich-Ideal*. [...] Le sujet voit son être dans une réflexion par rapport à l'autre, c'est-à-dire par rapport à l'*Ich-Ideal*. (144-5).

First of all there is, in fact, a narcissism connected with the corporeal image [...] in as much as he is man and not horse. It makes up the unity of the subject. [Then there is] a second narcissism. Its fundamental pattern is immediately the relation to the other [...] the other, the alter ego, is more or less confused, according to the stage in life, with the *Ichideal* [...] The subject sees his being in a reflection in relation to the other, that is to say in relation to the *Ichideal*. (125-6)<sup>2</sup>

Based on this observation, Lacan reads Freud's essay as proof that "le moi humain se constitue sur le fondement de la relation imaginaire" (133) - "the human ego is founded on the basis of the imaginary relation" (115). Still, as I

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by John Forrester, The Seminar of Jaques Lacan, Book I, (New York: Norton, 1988). 107-117.

would like to add, the nostalgic narrative of a "lost narcissism of [...] childhood" refers to a stage beyond representation and images become suspect insofar as they are retroactively imposed by "culture." Freud glorifies "nature" as a state of "narzißtische Vollkommenheit" - "narcissistic perfection" which he then represents as irretrievably and tragically lost ("verloren"). The ego ideal, in turn, takes on negative connotations and the imaginary relation described by Lacan is not only set up but also devalorized in Freud's essay.

The ego ideal not only compensates the subject for the other, inaccessible ideal state of primary narcissism, it is also said to have arisen from it, i.e. it is its transformation (continuation) as well as its substitute. Primary narcissism is repressed when the adult develops object relations and Freud asks: "Was ist aus seiner Ichlibido geworden? Sollen wir annehmen, daß ihr ganzer Betrag in Objektbesetzungen aufgegangen ist?" (177) - "What has become of their ego-libido? Are we to suppose that the whole amount of it has passed into object-cathexes?" (35). As an explanation, Freud describes the ego ideal as an image based on the subject's "kulturellen und ethischen Vorstellungen" (177) - "cultural and ethical ideas" (35) (also see above: "Mahnungen" - "admonitions" and "Urteil" - "critical judgment"). Paradoxically, the ego ideal arises

from within (via repression), yet it is shaped by external forces: "Eltern [...] Erzieher, Lehrer [...] Mitmenschen, die öffentliche Meinung" (180) - "parents [...] those who trained and taught him [...] his fellow-men - and public opinion" (38). In other words, it is a social image which opposes itself to "nature." Or, as Freud himself concludes, "vom Ichideal führt ein bedeutsamer Weg zum Verständnis der Massenpsychologie. Dies Ideal hat außer seinem individuellen einen sozialen Anteil, es ist auch das gemeinsame Ideal einer Familie, eines Standes, einer Nation" (186) - "the ego ideal opens up an important avenue for the understanding of group psychology. In addition to its individual side, this ideal has a social side; it is also the common idea of a family, a class or a nation" (43). What does this mean with respect to the "actual ego"?

It should be noted that Freud uses two different terms, both of which Strachey translates as "actual": first, Freud speaks of the "aktuelle Ich" which implies a temporal dimension (the present ego, as opposed to the one of the past or future), then he introduces "das wirkliche Ich" (literally, "the real ego"). In this sense, the "actual ego" is a composite term which situates authenticity within the context of temporality. In contrast to this, the ego ideal has a static quality; it represents a fixed image which, as Freud suggests, represents an imaginary refuge from

mortality: "der heikelste Punkt des narzißtischen Systems [ist] die von der Realität hart bedrängte Unsterblichkeit des Ichs" (175) - "the most touchy point in the narcissistic system [is] the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality" (34). Thus, while the ego may be perceived as an image which exists for eternity, i.e. is not subject to historical changes, it is "actually" mortal, meaning that it is, in fact, connected to the body. This, in turn, suggests a conceptual difference between an ego based on the body (of organic matter) and an ego based on, perhaps, fantasy - a difference which I hope to explore in more detail throughout this dissertation. The problem with the "actual ego" is that we cannot picture it. Similar to "nature," it escapes definition as anything but the negative reflection of the ego ideal (which is also the only "proof" of its existence).

Still, Laplanche and Pontalis have observed, the term "primary narcissism" in this particular essay by Freud, posits "an originary cathexis not of the biological individual, but rather of a psychical formation, the ego" (72). Indeed, while Freud refers to the behavior of women and cats as something inborn, he also conjures up the reader's fantasies in relation to psychology, for example the "Seelenleben von Kindern und von primitiven Völkern" (156) - "the mental life of children and primitive peoples"

(19) whose primary narcissism he compares to the symptoms of mental patients. Having, initially, hypothesized the existence of primary narcissism based on his observation of schizophrenics, Freud argues that their "Größenwahn und die Abwendung ihres Interesses von der Außenwelt" (156) - "megalomania and diversion of their interest from the external world" (18) is equivalent to a primitive and childlike belief in magic, including "eine Überschätzung der Macht ihrer Wünsche und psychischen Akte" (157) - "an over-estimation of the power of their wishes and mental acts" (19). As if he himself were affected by his inference of what appears to be a kind of "spell" exerted by the narcissistic subject, Freud bases his argument on the attraction of narcissism: using the word "charm" ("Reiz"), preferably in relation to women and animals, he defines narcissism from the perspective of an outside observer (i.e. him) to whom he attributes "envy": "Es ist so, als beneideten wir sie um die Erhaltung eines seligen Zustandes, einer unangreifbaren Libidoposition, die wir selbst seither aufgegeben haben" (172) - "It is as if we envied them for maintaining a blissful state of mind - an unassailable libidinal position which we ourselves have since abandoned" (32). Thus Freud's conceptualization of narcissism in its "primary" form remains essentially nostalgic. Equating

mental illness with seduction, Freud's rhetoric seems anything but "scientific."

### Freud's "Method"

As I have begun to show, representation itself is at stake in Freud's essay concerning narcissism. Positing two egos and two narcissisms, his argument tautologically represents narcissism at the same time that it refers to it. Ironically, the essay not only contains a number of self-reflective comments, it also refers to rhetoric itself as a method of inquiry: "Bei dem völligen Mangel einer irgendwie orientierenden Triblehre ist es gestattet oder besser geboten, zunächst irgendeine Annahme in konsequenter Durchführung zu erproben, bis sie versagt oder sich bewährt" - "In the total absence of any theory of the instincts which would help us to find our bearings, we may be permitted, or rather, it is incumbent upon us to start off by working out some hypothesis to its logical conclusion, until it either breaks down or is confirmed" (21). This statement is part of a lengthy digression in which Freud explains why the essay on narcissism had to be written: he continually reminds the reader that, had it not been for Jung's serious charge "daß die Libidotheorie an der Bewältigung der Dementia praecox gescheitert und damit auch für die anderen Neurosen erledigt sei" (164) - "that the libido theory has come to grief in

the attempt to explain dementia praecox, and that it is therefore disposed of for the other neuroses as well" (24), "the essay would not, in fact, have been written. Freud's lengthy digression about his motive and approach ends with a disclaimer which gives the reader the impression that he did not, actually, want to write the essay, at least not in terms of defending a theory he represents as already in place: "C.G. Jung [...] hat mich [...] zu den letzten Ausführungen, die ich mir gern erspart hätte, genötigt" (162) - "I have been obliged [by C.G. Jung] to enter upon this last discussion, which I would gladly have been spared" (23). On the other hand, Freud's textual gesture of declaring himself what amounts to a "victim" of Jung's attack on him could be interpreted as a way of distracting the reader from the possibility that his theory is not, in fact, as sound as it may appear. Lacan, for example, suggests that

l'idée freudienne d'un auto-erotisme primordial [...] es presque équivalente dans sa structure à la théorie de Jung. Voilà pourquoi, dans l'article sur le narcissisme, Freud revient sur la nécessité de distinguer libido égoïste et libido sexuelle [...] Tout en maintenant la distinction des deux libidos, il tourne pendant tout l'article autour de la notion de leur équivalence. (132)

the Freudian idea of a primordial auto-erotism [...] is almost equivalent, in terms of its structure, to Jung's theory. That is why, in his article on narcissism, Freud harks back to the necessity of distinguishing egoistical libido and sexual libido. [...] All the while maintaining the

distinction between the two libidos, throughout the entire article he continually skirts around the notion of their equivalence. (114)

Whether or not this is the case, Freud's essay sounds extremely defensive. As if constantly second-guessing himself, he argues his point by anticipating a series of rhetorical questions which may have been asked by the reader (or Jung), such as: "Welches ist das Schicksal der den Objekten entzogenen Libido bei der Schizophrenie?" (157) - "What happens to the libido which has been withdrawn from external objects in schizophrenia?" (18). Presumably, the purpose of these questions is to convey the impression that Freud already knows the answer (i.e. that he has thought "further" than Jung and merely leads the reader through the argument as a courtesy). And yet, if one reads the essay carefully, some of the questions precipitated by Jung's attack are, in fact, legitimate, especially when it comes to differentiating instinct from libido and ego- from object-libido. For example, Freud asks:

Wenn wir dem Ich eine primäre Besetzung mit Libido zuerkennen, wozu ist es überhaupt noch nötig, eine sexuelle Libido von einer nicht sexuellen Energie der Ichtriebe zu trennen? Würde die Zugrundelegung einer einheitlichen psychischen Energie nicht alle Schwierigkeiten der Sonderung von Ichtriebenergie und Ichlibido, Ichlibido und Objektlibido ersparen? (158)

If we grant the ego a primary cathexis of libido, why is there any necessity for further distinguishing a sexual libido from a non-sexual energy of the ego-instincts? Would not the postulation of a single kind of psychical energy

save us all the difficulties of differentiating an energy of the ego-instincts from the ego-libido, and ego-libido from object-libido? (20)

Freud's answer deflects from the question in that he refers to "ein merkliches Unbehagen" (159) - "perceptible uneasiness" (21) at having to answer such questions in the first place. Referring to himself indirectly, as a "psychoanalyst," Freud uses the pronoun "man" ("one") to present the reader with a subjective perspective: "Man wehrt sich gegen das Gefühl, die Beobachtung für sterile theoretische Streitigkeiten zu verlassen, darf sich dem Versuch einer Klärung aber doch nicht entziehen" (159) - "One dislikes the thought of abandoning observation for barren theoretical controversy, but nevertheless one must not shirk an attempt at clarification" (21). Although such comments may seem evasive, they also reveal just to what extent Freud is prepared to "abandon observation" in favor of a theoretical perspective which he himself admits to be highly speculative. This is how he describes his method: "ein[e] auf Deutung der Empirie gebaute Wissenschaft [wird] sich mit nebelhaft verschwindenden, kaum vorstellbaren Grundgedanken gern begnügen, die sie im Laufe ihrer Entwicklung klarer zu erfassen hofft" (159) - "a science erected on empirical interpretation [will] gladly content itself with nebulous, scarcely imaginable basic concepts, which it hopes to apprehend more clearly in the course of

its development" (21). One such "nebulous, scarcely imaginable basic concept," as we have seen, is primary narcissism.

What I would call Freud's "poetic license" is at odds with the scientific model he constructs in order to prove his point. As he struggles to represent and explain primary narcissism, he continues to try and define his method in relation to science, resulting in contradictions, such as the hope that "all our provisional ideas in psychology will presumably some day be based on an organic substructure" which contradicts his express attempt "das biologische Denken [...] von der Psychologie ferne zu halten" (161) - "to keep psychology clear from [...] even biological lines of thought" (22). And, although he claims that "es liegt nicht in der Absicht einer rein psychologischen Untersuchung, die Grenze so weit ins Gebiet der physiologischen Forschung zu überschreiten" (167) - "it is not within the scope of a purely psychological inquiry to penetrate so far behind the borders of physiological research" (27), he continues to refer to biology, arguing, for example, that narcissism in women is based on their "Sexualorgane" (172) - "sexual organs" (31). However, in the next sentence, he argues that women's narcissism is also the result of "social restrictions," to that it is never quite clear to the reader whether his theory is, in fact, based on biology or not.

In any event, Freud makes an effort to channel biological ways of thinking into "culture" when it comes to his analogies between procreation and man-made laws. This passage, for example, consists of a juxtaposition of scientific and legal terminology:

Das Individuum [...] hält selbst die Sexualität für eine seiner Absichten, während eine andere Betrachtung zeigt, daß es nur Anhängsel an sein Keimplasma ist, dem es seine Kräfte gegen eine Lustprämie zur Verfügung stellt, der sterbliche Träger einer - vielleicht - unsterblichen Substanz, wie ein Majoratsherr nur der jeweilige Träger einer ihn überdauernden Institution. (160)

The individual himself regards sexuality as one of his own ends; whereas from another point of view he is an appendage to his germ-plasm, at whose disposal he puts his energies in return for a bonus of pleasure. He is the mortal vehicle of a (possibly) immortal substance - like the inheritor of an entailed property, who is only the temporary holder of an estate which survives him. (22)

The analogy is absurd: nothing could be further from "germ-plasm," which refers to organic growth, than "entailed property," which belongs to culturally determined laws of exchange. And yet, within the context of Freud's explanation of his "method," this passage illustrates the way in which his colorful metaphors deflect from the fact that many of Freud's ideas are not theoretically sound but rather, a kind of chain of associations. Or else how would one explain the fact that an almost identical analogy in the following paragraph presents the reader with an almost diametrically opposed point of view:

Es mag dann sein, daß die Sexualenergie, die Libido - im tiefsten Grund und in letzter Ferne - nur ein Differenzierungsprodukt der sonst in der Psyche wirkenden Energie ist. Aber eine solche Behauptung ist nicht belangreich [...] möglicherweise hat diese Uridentität mit unseren analytischen Interessen so wenig zu tun, wie die Urverwandtschaft aller Menschenrassen mit dem Nachweis der von der Erbschaftsbehörde geforderten Verwandtschaft mit dem Erblasser. (161)

It may turn out that, most basically and on the longest view, sexual energy - libido - is only the product of a differentiation in the energy at work generally in the mind. But such an assertion has no relevance [...] this primal identity may well have as little to do with our analytic interests as the primal kinship of all the races of mankind has to do with the proof of kinship required in order to establish a legal right of inheritance. (23)

Here, Freud dismisses any further discussion of the subject (differentiation of psychic energy) by ridiculing the relevance of his own (rhetorical) question. I would interpret this as an attempt to deflect the reader's attention from the "big picture" of biology which the above passage about "germ-plasm" so earnestly sets up. The fact that the analogies are related, as they both refer to legal rights of inheritance, makes it seem as if Freud's perspective were consistent; the repetition of the theme provides emphasis to an argument which remains, in essence, rhetorical.

Evidently, Freud does not have a real answer and, therefore, directs the reader away from the question. As he himself seems to admit in the above passage, his "analytic

interest" does not consist of a search for "truth" but rather of establishing "proof" in the form of documentation in a system which is subject to arbitration (law), a system which is based, in turn, on language. In this sense, the analogy does not merely illustrate a point, it also functions as an "introduction" to a way of thinking (psychoanalysis) which, as we know, Freud himself was in the process of defining. After all, this essay's conceptual difficulties were also productive insofar as they led to the shift away from the libido theory to Freud's later structural model of the psyche as a tripartite division into ego, id and super-ego (of which the ego-ideal has been described as a forerunner). In fact, Freud's "method" is productive because it allows him to pursue inconsistencies. If it were not for the ideological implications connected to the fact that he himself, as the author of a discourse with profound cultural repercussions, took his work seriously in scientific terms, one could almost interpret his theorizing as a kind of creative writing, including the assumption that the author's own repressed imagination is on display. As it is, however, the essay's insistence on discrediting Jung serves primarily as a way of deflecting potential doubts on the part of the reader about the validity of the concept "narcissism," a concept whose "introduction," as we know, continues to have wide-reaching consequences in regard to

how mental health professionals explain the nature of human relationships and, unfortunately, art.

### **Object Relations**

As I have tried to show, Freud's concept of primary narcissism escapes definition. Nevertheless, it functions as a basis for the ego ideal. In this section, I will look at the way in which Freud's essay performs the transition from primary narcissism to the ego ideal, namely through object relations. In an essay dealing with narcissism, the discussion of inter-personal relationships seems surprising, and yet this is where issues of vision, imagination and symbolism -which relate to my inquiry about representation, art and language - are negotiated.

I should begin by mentioning that, in the wake of Freud, psychoanalysis became focused on "object relations theory," which was, initially, concerned with the relationship between a subject's drives (primarily oral and anal) and the objects of their aim, which would provide or withhold satisfaction: according to Melanie Klein, "the development of the infant is governed by the mechanisms of introjection and projection. From the beginning the ego introjects objects 'good' and 'bad,' for both of which its mother's breast is the prototype - for good objects when the child obtains it and for bad when it fails him" (Buckley

40); W. R. D. Fairbairn, in turn, describes narcissism as "an attitude arising out of identification with the object. Indeed primary narcissism may be simply defined as just such a state of identification with the object, secondary narcissism being a state of identification with the object which is internalized" (Buckley 91).

Object relations theory has been criticized by Lacan for "confus[ing] the object of psychoanalysis with the object of biology and neglect[ing] the symbolic dimension of desire" (Evans 124) and there has been a controversy among psychoanalysts over whether object relations are indeed present from the beginning or whether narcissism is actually "primary," i.e. preceding object relations (Sandler 66). Klein's concept of biologically determined "partial objects," which are internalized and govern the relationship between the individual and the outside world, has been modified by D.W. Winnicott to include a cultural dimension: his "transitional objects," such as a teddy bear, take on a symbolic function, i.e. they may represent and thereby substitute for the breast (Playing and Reality, Chapter I). Winnicott revises Klein by focusing less on "internalized" objects than on the subject's relationship to "real" objects but the problem with any of these approaches for literary theory is that they are not directly applicable inasmuch as they, like Freud, refer to people rather than to texts.

Considering that people, including writers, have been affected by the "text" of psychoanalysis, I would like to look at them as texts whose referent (i.e. "people") is also textually constructed.

Freud begins the central part of "Zur Einführung des Narzißmus" with the admission that "ein direktes Studium" - "a direct study" of primary narcissism is not possible but that it could be studied indirectly, following the assumption that: "wir das anscheinend Einfache des Normalen aus den Verzerrungen und Vergrößerungen des Pathologischen erraten müssen" (165) - "in order to arrive at an understanding of what seems so simple in normal phenomena, we shall have to turn to the field of pathology with its distortions and exaggerations" (25). Freud maintains that narcissism can really be understood only with reference to dementia praecox and paranoia, but also suggests three other ways of approaching the study of narcissism: "Die Betrachtung der organischen Krankheit, der Hypochondrie und des Liebeslebens der Geschlechter" (165) - "the study of organic disease, of hypochondria and of the erotic life of the sexes" (25). Unlike schizophrenia, all of these areas deal specifically with the subject's relationship to his/her own and other people's bodies.

In what Freud calls a "redistribution" of libido, libido is withdrawn from others onto oneself in organic

disease. Quoting a line from the poet Wilhelm Busch about how one's "soul" seems to be confined to a tooth when one suffers from a toothache, Freud refers to the notion of sleep as a similar redistribution of libido, which happens, as he writes, "infolge von Ichveränderung" (166) - "consequent upon a change in the ego" (26). Hypochondria, as well, is based on a withdrawal of interest in external objects and a focus on particular organs but here, the issue is to explain how real symptoms develop from imaginary ones. Freud argues that the imaginary pain, focused on specific parts of the body, is analogous to the swelling and excitement that takes place in sexual organs and introduces the notion of "Erogenität als allgemeine Eigenschaft aller Organe" (167) - "erotogenicity as a general characteristic of all organs" (27). To what extent then, does the concept of narcissism presuppose the body as an "object"?

Initially, Freud makes a case for primary narcissism as a state preceding object relations. For example, his discussion of "introversion" in the beginning suggests that, in pathological narcissism, when the ego becomes the "object," even internal object relations disappear: "der Paraphreniker [...] scheint seine Libido von den Personen und Dingen der Außenwelt zurückgezogen zu haben, ohne diese durch andere in seiner Phantasie zu ersetzen" (156) - "the paraphrenic [...] seems really to have withdrawn his libido

from people and things in the external world, without replacing them by others in phantasy" (18).

When Freud refers back to autoerotism in his section on "the erotic life of human beings," he argues that the infant's sexual objects are connected to immediate physical satisfaction. In this "polymorphously perverse" state (Three Essays 57), a distinction between "sexual instincts" and "ego-instincts" does not yet exist: objects, such as the mother's breast, are identical with the experience of satisfaction they provide and this satisfaction is, in turn, identical with self-preservation. This first relationship to the world, which precedes narcissism, results in a type of object choice which Freud terms "anaclitic"

("Anlehnungstypus"<sup>3</sup>): the subject falls in love with someone who reminds him (in Freud, this type is masculine) of his mother because he associates the object with a satisfaction of his instinctual needs (i.e. to be nurtured). While this is consistent with Klein's version of object relations, it does not account for the second type of "object choice"

Freud introduces here, the "narcissistic type"

("narzißtischer Typus"). This second type of object choice is not based on the mother but on the self. How then does it relate to object relations?

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<sup>3</sup> Note that "Anlehnung" refers to the way in which drives "lean on" to objects, not to the way in which persons lean on to one another.

Freud introduces the "narcissistic type" in relation to "perverts and homosexuals" who are presumed to mirror themselves in others (in fact, Freud's "discovery" of narcissism as an intermediary stage between autoerotism and object relations is based on a case study of homosexuality, the Schreber-case of 1910). His way of thinking is clearly biased against homosexuals insofar as they are represented as a deviation from the norm, but his view of narcissism could also be read as a challenge to the assumption that all human relations are based on procreation. Leo Bersani, for example, challenges Freud's tendency to represent human sexuality primarily in terms of object relations by arguing that the concept of narcissism suggests a different view of sexuality in that "narcissism could be thought of as inherently subversive of our relations with the world [...] *the sexual always involves a turning away from the other*" (CR 40). While "successful" object relations, in psychoanalytical theory, tend to be presented as a kind of "cure" for excessive narcissism, Bersani proposes to interpret Freud's narcissism as "a definition of sexual excitement as both a turning away from others and a dying to the self. The appeal of that dying - the desire to be shattered out of coherence - is perhaps what psychoanalysis has sought most urgently to repress" (CR 45).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Narcissism has been validated in terms of its subversive

One might argue that Freud's "discovery" of narcissism, in spite of his own assumptions to the contrary, implies a departure from biological thinking when it comes to the ego ideal; he himself takes pains to explain that the "types" are based on an abstraction and that a certain amount of "choice" is involved. Although the division between the anaclitic and the narcissistic type is clearly gendered (with women and homosexuals on the side of the latter) Freud also writes:

Wir haben nun nicht geschlossen, daß die Menschen in zwei scharf geschiedene Gruppen zerfallen, je nachdem sie den Anlehnungs- oder den narzißtischen Typus der Objektwahl haben, sondern ziehen die Annahme vor, daß jedem Menschen beide Wege zur Objektwahl offen stehen, wobei der eine oder der andere bevorzugt werden kann. Wir sagen, der Mensch habe zwei ursprüngliche Sexualobjekte: sich selbst und das pflegende Weib, und setzen dabei den primären Narzißmus jedes Menschen voraus, der eventuell in seiner Objektwahl dominierend zum Ausdruck kommen kann. (171)

We have, however, not concluded that human beings are divided into two sharply differentiated groups, according as their object choice conforms to the anaclitic or to the narcissistic type; we assume rather that both kinds of object-choice are open to each individual, though he may show a preference for one or the other. We say that a human being has originally two sexual objects - himself and the woman who nurses him - and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself in a dominating fashion in his object choice. (31)

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potential by, among others, the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse who argues that it denotes "a non-repressive attitude to reality," including the utopian possibility to effect social change.

While the passage remains ambiguous as to what extent object choice is limited to biological pre-determination, it also suggests the possibility of an infinite variety of combinations of the two types. This is enhanced by the fact that narcissism itself offers a variety of choices. Whereas the "anaclitic type" loves "a. die nährnde Frau, b. den schützenden Mann" (173) - "a. the woman who feeds him; b. the man who protects him" (33) the narcissistic type has twice as many choices, loving:

- a. was man selbst ist (sich selbst),
- b. was man selbst war,
- c. was man selbst sein möchte,
- d. die Person die Teil des eigenen Selbst war.

- a. what he himself is (i.e. himself),
- b. what he himself was,
- c. what he himself would like to be,
- d. someone who was once part of himself  
[mother/child C.R.].

In fact, as Laplanche and Pontalis have pointed out, "these positions are by no means stable but, on the contrary, are caught up in a seesawlike movement which, at the slightest shift of the mirror, can cause an exchange of positions" (75). Thus, whereas anaclitic object choice is based on the body in terms of its physical needs (with subject and object in direct relation to one another), narcissistic object choice is based on some kind of imaginary projection, i.e. mediated by a mental "image" of oneself - which is where the ego ideal appears.

Nevertheless, Freud's overarching concept of the ego ideal is not only related to narcissistic object choice but rather to "love" in general.

### **The Loving Gaze**

Freud describes "love" in relation to primary narcissism in two ways: first, in conjunction with the libido theory, as he asks "woher denn überhaupt die Nötigung für das Seelenleben rührt, über die Grenzen des Narzißmus hinauszugehen" (168) - "what makes it necessary at all for our mental life to pass beyond the limits of narcissism" (28). In answer to this question, the reference to hypochondria provides the reader with a model for what Freud calls a "Stauung der Ichlibido" - "damming up of ego-libido": arguing that hypochondria provides evidence for the way in which an organ can be invested with too much ego-libido, he suggests that there can be an excess of ego-libido, an "overflow," which leads to object cathexis; this not only provides a rationale for the transformation of ego- into object-libido which had been said to take place in a "reservoir" but also reverses the function of primary narcissism in favor of object relations: "ein starker Egoismus schützt vor Erkrankung, aber endlich muß man beginnen zu lieben, um nicht krank zu werden" (168) - "A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in

the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill" (28).

Paradoxically, Freud promotes object relations over self-love at the same time that he advocates primary narcissism as the basis of the love relationship, as he assumes that object love is successful only when it provides the illusion that primary narcissism is restored: "Wer liebt, hat sozusagen ein Stück seines Narzißmus eingebüßt und kann es erst durch das Geliebtwerden ersetzt erhalten" - "A person who loves has, so to speak, forfeited a part of his narcissism, and it can only be replaced by his being loved" (30). The choice of love object, in turn, is determined by the ego ideal which has to match with the love object in order to ensure narcissistic gratification (in both types of object choice): according to Freud, loving depends upon one's ability to either idealize an object which satisfies one's need (in the anaclitic type) or to find an object which corresponds with one's ideal (in the narcissistic type). In fact, Freud's essay concludes with the following statement:

Die Rückkehr der Objektlibido zum Ich, deren Verwandlung in Narzißmus, stellt gleichsam wieder eine glückliche Liebe dar, und andererseits entspricht auch eine reale glückliche Liebe dem Urzustand, in welchem Objekt- und Ichlibido nicht voneinander zu unterscheiden sind. (184)

The return of the object-libido to the ego and its transformation into narcissism represents, as it were, a happy love once more; and, on the other

hand, it is also true that a real happy love corresponds to the primal condition in which object-libido and ego-libido cannot be distinguished. (41)

According to this, love is either a complete fiction or the return to a state which precedes object relations. As Lacan observes: "La stricte equivalence de l'objet et de l'idéal du moi dans le rapport amoureux est une des notions les plus fondamentales dans l'oeuvre de Freud" (145)- "The exact equivalence of the object and the ego-ideal in the love relation is one of the most fundamental notions in Freud's work" (126). What does this mean for Freud's discussion of primary narcissism and object choice?

To begin with, narcissism presupposes the presence of a gaze. Narcissistic object choice is not, in fact, the same as being narcissistic: whereas the former clearly relates to an "other," the latter entails transforming the "self" into an object. For example, Freud attributes narcissism to a certain type of woman whom he sees as inhibited in her ability to love, due to her excessive narcissism:

Solche Frauen lieben, streng genommen, nur sich selbst mit ähnlicher Intensität, wie der Mann sie liebt. Ihr Bedürfnis geht auch nicht dahin, zu lieben, sondern geliebt zu werden, und sie lassen sich den Mann gefallen, welcher diese Bedingung erfüllt. (172)

It is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them. Nor does their need lie in the direction of loving, but of being loved; and the man who fulfills this condition is the one who finds favour with them. (31)

Insofar as this description locates narcissism within the subject, as an effort to turn one's own body into the supposed object of an external gaze, it differs from narcissistic object choice as it is ascribed to homosexuality, where one's own physical characteristics are, in fact, seen in another person. This, in turn, differs from a kind of relationship which appears to be object love but is, in fact, said to be primary narcissism, namely parental love: here, similar to the way in which men are attracted to narcissistic women because they "envy" them, parents are attracted to their child because they envy the child's narcissism which they recognize as a lost property of themselves. In fact, Freud's discussion of object choices ends with a discussion of parental love (his analogy of "His Majesty The Baby") which paves the way for his introduction of the ego ideal insofar as he suggests that what may look like object love is, actually, a form of narcissism, i.e. "der wiedergeborene Narzißmus [...] in seiner Umwandlung zur Objektliebe" (175) - "narcissism born again [...] transformed into object love" (34).

With the introduction of the ego ideal, the differences between narcissism as a form of projection of the self and object love as a form of relating to another person seem to collapse. And yet, the concept of primary narcissism remains essential to Freud's argument. As he suggests in his

concluding remarks, there are three elements which contribute to the way in which we see ourselves: "1. an actual "remnant" of primary narcissism; 2. the fulfillment of the ego ideal which provides the illusion of a return to this primary narcissism; 3. satisfaction of object libido." But whereas primary narcissism is described as a characteristic of children, women and animals, 2. and 3. are, presumably, related to adult males whose task consists in matching the ego ideal to the object from which they receive satisfaction.

In an interesting aside, Freud laments the fact that narcissistic women are most attractive to men and yet unable to fulfill their need to be "nurtured." When it comes to love relationships, the supposedly "natural" characteristic of primary narcissism appears to be more of a hindrance than a help, so that its illusion, in the form of the "cultural" ego ideal, functions as a stabilizing concept. While the subject of primary narcissism is represented as exerting an enormous amount of attraction to the observer (the heterosexual male), he is bound to experience it as a frustration on account of its passivity and impenetrability. Interestingly, Freud proposes, in the following paragraph, that motherhood may act as a "cure" for women's narcissism, as they may come to develop object love through experiences in which "ein Teil des eigenen Körpers [ist] wie ein fremdes

Objekt" (173) - "part of their own body confronts them as an extraneous object" (32). One may only wonder what this may mean for the male adult of the anaclitic type.

While my focus in this dissertation is not on gender, it is important to note that Freud bases his concept of the ego ideal on an opposition which presents the adult heterosexual male as the norm. When it comes to women, in particular (and Freud does not, in this essay, discuss homosexuality in any detail), Freud consistently mixes up the categories he otherwise so painfully differentiates, leading this reader to wonder whether the inarticulate and ill-defined, yet also highly attractive "other" does not, in fact, represent the foil upon which to project the ego ideal. This would run counter to Freud's references to a concept of "repression," which, based on the developmental notion of childhood, holds that heterosexual males have also been, at one point in their lives, subject to primary narcissism. The problem with such a developmental metaphor is that its biological basis can be used in conjunction with sexual difference so as to imply that women are not as advanced in their development (supporting the cliché that they are more "childlike").

At the same time, as I have mentioned, the supposed primary narcissism of women and children is discussed in relation to mental illness. Thus, while most of Freud's

rhetoric about gender is based on biologism, i.e. behavior which he sees as "normal," he also refers to women in terms of an inability to see themselves as who they are. More prone to lacking the ability to establish a viable ego ideal, they are portrayed by Freud in terms of a confusion between their subjective (internal) self-image and their objective (external) appearance:

Hat man eben einer neurotischen Patientin den Glauben geschenkt, daß sie krank werden mußte, weil sie unschön, mißgebildet, reizlos sei, so daß niemand sie lieben könne, so wird man durch die nächste Neurotika eines Besseren belehrt, die in Neurose und Sexualablehnung verharret, obwohl sie über das Durchschnittsmaß begehrenswert erscheint und begehrt wird. (183-84)

We may be tempted to believe a neurotic woman patient when she tells us that it was inevitable she should fall ill, since she is ugly, deformed or lacking in charm, so that no one could love her; but the very next neurotic will teach us better - for she persists in her neurosis and in her aversion to sexuality, although she seems more desirable, and is more desired, than the average woman. (41)

Thus, although women are said to be more narcissistic by nature, their neuroses are said to consist in an inability to look at themselves in objective terms. It seems as if Freud's own gaze, which claims to be in a position of objectivity, is also "fooled" by appearances; in fact, his assessment of what constitutes "neurosis" is based on his "discovery" of an inconsistency between self-image and appearance - as if, for some reason, there should be a

continuity between people's looks and the way they feel about themselves. Implicit in this seems Freud's own bias against the attraction the object of his gaze exerts on him: while he is "tempted to believe" a statement suggesting consistency between unattractiveness and feelings of worthlessness, the desirable woman "teaches" (belehrt) him an unexpected lesson, as if his gaze had been corrupted in the process of looking at her and must now be corrected. In this example, "vision" provides the evidence for Freud's understanding, not what the women have to say. Vision, in turn, is also presented as superior to language when it comes to the ego ideal, where the subject of the gaze is not only in a position to size up the object but also to identify with it as a way of "ensuring narcissistic gratification." In this context, the issue of projection becomes an issue of power: in the absence of everything but looks, the cure of the neurotic woman consists of making her see herself as she is seen by Freud, physically desirable and, therefore, destined to find her own satisfaction in attracting men (such as him). In other words, Freud's women are essentially described as wanting to be seen as objects and in need of another's gaze, therefore ensure narcissistic satisfaction in the same way as heterosexual men, in the form of an ego ideal (whereas homosexual men, like women, are described as dependent on external appearances with the

exception that they are able to develop object love, provided the object has identical physical characteristics).

According to this model, Freud's heterosexual adult male, whose ego ideal is based on repression, must rely on his identificatory and objectifying gaze in order to relate to the love object. But what exactly is an "object"? Does it have a reality of its own or is it an imaginary construct? Is the "body" a container or merely a surface for its own "reflections"? - As I have tried to demonstrate, the relationship between "nature" and "culture" in Freud's essay can be mapped in different ways, depending on the significance the reader attributes to primary narcissism (while it is clearly represented as essential, the passages on women, for example, suggest that its repression in favor of the ego ideal is the norm).

What remains to be discussed now is the role of the "body." Given that Freud's thinking is based, to some extent, on genetic determinism, his references to the body must be taken literally, in terms of sexual and/or racial difference as a cause of human behavior. His concept of the ego ideal, on the other hand, allows for a less biologically determined view of human nature as shaped by culture and, therefore, subject to changes. Due to this possibility, as I would like to argue, Freud's "body" can be understood as a site of signification which has a mediating function. As I

would like to demonstrate, the opposition primary narcissism/ego ideal, which I have mapped along the lines of a nature/culture opposition, collapses when it comes to "Selbstbeobachtung" ("self-observation," also translated as "self-regard").

### **Knowledge and Self-Regard**

Freud's discussion of "Selbstbeobachtung" ("self-observation") enables him to conclude his essay with the concept of "Selbstgefühl," translated by Strachey as "self-regard" and commonly used synonymously with "self-esteem." Self-regard has "eine besonders innige Abhängigkeit von der narzißtischen Libido" (182) - "a specially intimate dependence on narcissistic libido" and "erscheint uns zunächst als Ausdruck der Ichgröße" - "appears to us to be an expression of the size of the ego" (40). In accordance with the libido theory, self-regard is presented as measurable in quantitative terms, with an increase in self-love appearing in direct proportion to a decrease of interest in others. But, as Sidney Pulver states in his critique of the use of the term "narcissism" as "a more technical term for self-esteem" in psychoanalytical discourse, this "does not fit the clinical facts. Individuals with high self-esteem are precisely those most able to be more interested in others, while those with low

self-esteem are most likely to concentrate upon themselves" (Morrison 105). In fact, looking at the way in which Freud's essay arrives at "self-regard," it is less related to the construction of a positive self-image than to the pathological condition called "paranoia" ("Beobachtungswahn").

Paranoia is said to arise when it becomes impossible for the individual to ensure narcissistic satisfaction by meeting the requirements of the ego ideal; here, Freud argues that what we commonly call "conscience" ("Gewissen") measures the "actual" against the ideal ego and can be projected outwards onto others as a self-critical gaze (he describes this pathology as a form of "rebellion" against the pressure exerted by the ego ideal, i.e. the opinion of parents, teachers, public opinion, etc.). Based on this, he identifies "eine besondere psychische Instanz [...] welche die Aufgabe erfüllt, über die Sicherung der narzißtischen Befriedigung aus dem Ichideal zu wachen, und in dieser Absicht das aktuelle Ich unausgesetzt beobachtet und am Ideal mißt (179)" - "a special psychical agency which performs the task of seeing that narcissistic satisfaction from the ego ideal is ensured and which, with this end in view, constantly watches the actual ego and measures it by this ideal" (37). Based on this "agency," which is essentially related to the ego ideal and has been described

as a forerunner to the "super-ego," Freud equates paranoia with intellectual activity: "Dieselbe psychische Tätigkeit, welche die Funktion des Gewissens übernommen hat, hat sich also auch in den Dienst der Innenforschung gestellt, welche der Philosophie das Material für ihre Gedankenoperationen liefert" (181) - "Thus the activity of the mind which has taken over the function of conscience has also placed itself at the service of internal research, which furnishes philosophy with the material for its intellectual operations" (38).

In this sense, it may be helpful to remember that Tiresias' prophecy in the Ovidian frame narrative also connects Narcissus' so-called delusion to self-knowledge: "When asked whether this child would live to reach well-ripened age, the seer replied: 'If he never knows himself" (Vinge 8). In the myth, seeing becomes synonymous with knowing (perhaps, the reflective image represents a kind of knowledge which is based less on the perception of an objective reality than on a hitherto inaccessible subjective truth rendered "visible"). The superficial "reflection" of Narcissus' physique thus comes to represent more than his appearance, at least to him who now sees himself as another and, thereby, as an "object." Can this "object" be understood as a representation of the ego or is the knowledge involved here a delusion? - The question of

reflection is related to the question of knowledge in terms of whether or not the self can, in fact, be seen as an object. Object relations theorists Segal and Bell argue that "from the subjective point of view [...] the objects that are identified with the self are not part of the self. When Narcissus gazes at his reflection in the water, he does not know that what he sees is himself" (Sandler 162). Is this "not knowing," perhaps, a condition of self-reflection and, therefore, self-representation? Or does the "knowledge" of narcissism consist in the recognition that it may be impossible to see oneself except with the help of images?

In response to these questions, let me look at the "object" which appears to be the "actual self," presumably the body.<sup>5</sup> First of all, Freud's libido theory posits a circulation of psychical energy which can be seen as analogous to the organic entity of an actual body animated by the circulation of blood. However, just as the body could be represented as a kind of automaton, Freud's description of the "mental apparatus" ("seelischer Apparat") - which appears in conjunction with his reference to hypochondria - is mechanistic: "ein Mittel [...] welchem die Bewältigung von Erregungen übertragen ist" (169) - "a device designed for mastering excitations" (28) The task of this "device" is

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<sup>5</sup> The relationship between "self" and "body" continues to shift in Freud.

to perform an internal working-over ("innere Verarbeitung") of object cathexes; objects, real or imaginary, are said to have the purpose of facilitating "die innere Ableitung von Erregungen, die einer unmittelbaren äußeren Abfuhr nicht fähig sind" (169) - "an internal draining away of excitations which are incapable of direct discharge outwards" (26). Although Freud does not, at first, differentiate between "real" and "imaginary" objects, he goes on to say that the latter have the potential to lead to the damming up of libido because of a kind of slippage, where the libido "nicht bei Objekten in der Phantasie bleibt, sondern sich aufs Ich zurückzieht" (169) - "does not remain attached to objects in phantasy, but withdraws onto the ego" (29). Here, the ego is clearly distinguished from objects, even though, as Laplanche and Pontalis have pointed out, it must be understood as an object in relation to a subject (see above). Thus, whether or not the ego is an object proper, it can be said to differ from other real or imaginary objects that are invested with libido. At the same time, as I have tried to explain, the ego cannot be defined except in relation to its counterpart, the ego ideal. In this, as I also mentioned, Freud's definition of pathological narcissism holds that object-libido is withdrawn from external objects and then re-attached to the ego; this new ego-cathexis is "secondary" and is used as an

explanation for what happens in schizophrenia. But where Jung had used the term "introversion" (where objects do remain in phantasy) to distinguish between external and internal object relations, Freud equates real and imaginary objects as a way of introducing narcissism (i.e. ego-libido). This, in turn, permits him to draw a distinction between "transference neuroses," in which object relations are involved, and "paraphrenia," where the person "seems really to have withdrawn his libido from people and things in the external world, without replacing them by others in phantasy" (18). Paraphrenia, unlike schizophrenia, also includes paranoia<sup>6</sup>; and paranoia, in turn, involves a re-attachment of libido onto objects (people perceived as observers and persecutors). In this difficult passage, Freud calls the manoeuvre of re-transforming ego-libido (which is already object-libido withdrawn) into object-libido an attempt at "restoration." but he does not explain how one would be able to tell the difference between it and "normal" object relations, including the "transference neuroses."<sup>7</sup> Paranoia is thus not only related to "introspection" in

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<sup>6</sup> According to Laplanche and Pontalis' Language of Psychoanalysis (140), the term "paraphrenia" came to be replaced, once again, by the term "schizophrenia."

<sup>7</sup> This problem is compounded by the fact that, as Freud admits, "ego-libido is [...] only conveniently accessible to analytic study when it has been put to the use of cathecting sexual objects, that is, when it has become object-libido" (83).

general, (i.e. knowledge) but also to object relations so that it becomes difficult to distinguish it from "normal" behavior in conceptual terms. Clearly, Freud's concept of paranoia depends on empirical evidence, i.e. an individual's symptoms. Nevertheless, this conceptual confusion between neurosis and paranoia exists and can even be seen as productive when it comes to the significance of the ego ideal: whereas, in narcissistic object choice, the ego ideal itself is projected onto the object, paranoia discards the notion of a specific "image" in favor of the differentiating function itself, namely the "special agency" whose function it is to observe both the ego and its ideal - in some sense, a reflection of the self/body and its "reflection." And, in this way, it is indeed not the ego but its reflection (ego ideal) which functions as an "object" vis-à-vis the self-observing gaze.

However, the ontological status of this "object," the ego ideal, is highly uncertain: compared to its presumed function as a "reflection," it now has the added function of a "representation," as it can be presumed to be perceived by a third, the "observer" (monitoring device). While mirror images are fleeting, representations (even photographs) are never identical with their referent. Thus Freud's introduction of the super-ego *avant la lettre* revises the myth of Narcissus insofar as it transforms the subjectively

perceived reflection in the pool into a representation which may then take on the function of an "object." Similar to the work of art, in which objects are perceived (seen) from the perspective of a third as "representing" a more or less subjective reality, the ego ideal now appears as a representation and a reflection. The question remains as to what exactly it represents or reflects - is it the body or is the body always already linked to its reflection?

**Conclusion: What about the Body?**

Freud's "Diskussion des Selbstgefühls beim Normalen und beim Neurotischen" (182) - "discussion of the self-regarding attitude in normal people and neurotics" (40), in which his essay on narcissism culminates, is based on a gaze which originates from within the body itself. Following his discussion of paranoia, Freud cites research by Herbert Silberer on dreams<sup>8</sup> in order to confirm the existence of the "special psychic agency," - the "conscience" which he had also called, emphatically, a "*zensorische Instanz*" (180) - "censoring agency" (38). In this passage, Freud describes a "translation" from thoughts into images whose "content" is the representation of the subject's immediate physical condition:

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<sup>8</sup> Freud actually added this to a new edition of The Interpretation of Dreams (orig. 1900).

Silberer hat bekanntlich gezeigt, daß man in Zuständen zwischen Schlafen und Wachen die Umsetzung von Gedanken in visuelle Bilder direkt beobachten kann, daß aber unter solchen Verhältnissen häufig nicht eine Darstellung des Gedankeninhalts auftritt, sondern des Zustandes (von Bereitwilligkeit, Ermüdung usw.), in welchem sich die mit dem Schlaf kämpfende Person befindet. [...] Gehen wir in die Struktur des Ichs weiter ein, so dürfen wir im Ichideal und den dynamischen Äußerungen des Gewissens auch den *Traumzensor* erkennen. Selbstbeobachtung und Selbstkritik, mit Inhalten, wie: jetzt ist er zu schläfrig, um zu denken - jetzt wacht er auf, [leisten] einen Beitrag zum Trauminhalt. (181-2)

Silberer, as we know, has shown that in states between sleeping and waking we can directly observe the translation of thoughts into visual images, but that in these circumstances we frequently have a representation, not of a thought-content, but of the actual state (willingness, fatigue, etc.) of the person who is struggling against sleep. [...] If we enter further into the structure of the ego, we may recognize in the ego ideal and in the dynamic utterances of conscience the *dream-censor* as well [...] self-observation and self-criticism - with such thoughts as 'now he is too sleepy to think,' 'now he is waking up' - [make] a contribution to the dream. (39)

In this passage, the notion that the actual physical state of the dreamer contributes to the content of the dream suggests that "thought-content" is framed by the body as a "container" from which its meaning is also generated. With the body acting as a kind of medium, the "censoring agency" does not only observe but also translates ("thoughts into visual images"). Although the reader is led to believe that the ego ideal represents the internalization of "culture" in opposition to "nature," the body itself participates in its

generation. Through this link between the ego ideal and the body, Freud, in effect, anchors representation in the body.

While dreams, following The Interpretation of Dreams, are already related to the notion of an "actual self" in that they represent unconscious wishes that are repressed during waking life, the ego ideal, which is said to be based on culture, is here re-inscribed into the body in a way that links it, surprisingly, to "nature" in the form of an individual body. However, unlike the sexually determined body, whose ebb and flow of libido can be described only in metaphorical terms and whose "nature" escapes representation, this new body is represented in terms of its function as a container and transmitter of thoughts. This is where representation occurs and yet it occurs primarily in relation to its own mechanism, so that the "images" themselves are never not self-reflective. In fact, Lacan observes that Freud himself

explique en plusieurs endroits [...] que les instance psychiques fondamentales doivent être conçues pour la plupart comme représentant ce qui se passe dans un appareil photographique, à savoir comme les images, soit virtuelles, soit réelles que produit son fonctionnement. L'appareil organique représente le mécanisme de l'appareil, et ce que nous appréhendons ce sont des images. (142)

spelled out in several places [...] that the fundamental psychic agencies should be primarily conceived of as representing what takes place in a camera, namely as images, which are either virtual or real, produced through its functioning. The

organic apparatus represents the mechanism of the camera, and what we apprehend are the images.  
(123)

To this I would add that, if it were not for the ego ideal, which introduces the perspective of an "other" (and is, perhaps, seen as such by the subject), representations of the body would amount to the logical impossibility of a camera that films its own filming. It seems to me that Freud's shift from primary narcissism to the ego ideal, which his essay also performs in terms of a shift from "nature" to "culture," introduces the possibility of the body as a locus of agency insofar as it also participates in processes of signification. This posits the same problem of the "nature" of the body, yet it does so in a way that involves representation (including the intellectual operations connected with it). Unlike Narcissus, whose "reflection" was imposed upon him, the self-consciousness of the dreamer - who is, after all, "between sleeping and waking" - involves a certain amount of self-awareness on the part of the subject which can, therefore, represent itself to itself and, presumably to others. Freud's dreamer comes to know what his "willingness, fatigue, etc." look like but, of course, he would have to "translate" it into a real object in order to represent it to others - and such an

object, I would argue, is the text which claims to represent "subjectivity."<sup>9</sup>

As I have tried to show in this chapter, Freud's theory of narcissism relies on the notion that images are, somehow, secondary to "reality," yet it also connects representation to the body in a way that suggests that they are essential to it. Thus, whereas Freud refers to the body in actual terms, this dissertation is about texts which focus on the body in non-referential terms (in Hardenberg), as an imaginary and symbolic construct (in Barnes), and as a site of representation (in Zürn): in relation to primary narcissism, Hardenberg's poems show that the body can be articulated; in relation to the ego ideal, Barnes' novel shows how an object of desire is constituted in relation to self-reflection (which represents a reversal of Freud's concept); and, Zürn's text about artistic production and hallucinations raises questions about the origins of representation within a subject whose body is unable to separate itself from its "text."

Thus they elaborate on the themes discussed by Freud in ways that, as I will show, necessitate revising and expanding his theory of narcissism a theory of

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<sup>9</sup> This does not, of course, follow Freud's views of art as, for example, related to a subject's biography or to "sublimation," a process here described as transforming sexual into non-sexual drives through focusing on a non-sexual aim, i.e. art or religion.

representation. In fact, reading Hardenberg, Barnes and Zürn, the body appears to be neither an "other" nor just another culturally constructed "text," but rather a medium transforming thoughts into images, and then language - the reflection of a container, perhaps, whose "content" is its surface.

CHAPTER TWO  
BURIAL GROUNDS: THE SPECTRAL VOICE  
OF HENRIETTE HARDENBERG

**Introduction: The Strain of Becoming**

Compared to Freud's essay, Henriette Hardenberg's poetry shows that the subject of "primary narcissism" is not a mysterious, impenetrable "other" but can be, in fact, articulated. Here, the human body expands and merges with its environment to appear as an extension of nature. The poet's voice presents the reader with a body in motion as the subject of the text. Occupying the entire textual space, the voice is unable to speak from a particular place and the identity of the speaker is indefinite. From the position of an outside observer at the center of an inner landscape, the "I" is suspended between its solid body and a state of bodilessness. The struggle to transcend physical limitations, manifesting itself in representations of disembodiment and death, enables the voice to recognize itself as a creator of poetic language. The body in the text becomes a figure of speech and the speaker's actual body is her utterance. Separating body from voice, Hardenberg questions the notion of "self" and draws attention to the possibility of language as a means to construct subjectivity. Affirming writerly identity, she maps the body as a mental landscape without a definitive shape.

Suspending personal identity in order to explore a textual self, the author focuses on the limitations of the body, often a body under pressure, straining towards its own effacement in death with the prospect of being reborn symbolically, in language. Her texts, like the voice that speaks in them, have appeared, vanished and re-appeared on the literary marketplace, simultaneously with her real-life departure into exile and her death. Born in Berlin, Hardenberg first achieved literary success with the publication of two poems in the Expressionist journal Die Aktion in 1913. A student and performer of "Ausdruckstanz" (Modern Dance), she also worked as an actress and model. In 1916, she married the poet Alfred Wolfenstein and they moved to Munich, where she had a son and befriended, among others, Rainer Maria Rilke. A volume of her poetry, entitled Neigungen, came out in 1918, followed by further journal publications during the twenties. In 1930, she took on a secretarial position, which she held for over thirty years. This job, as well as her emigration to London in 1937 - she was Jewish and had to escape from the Nazis, - may account for the relatively modest body of her work. In order to make a living and survive, Hardenberg became silent. Although she never stopped writing in private, she was forgotten until 1988, when her early work was re-edited, followed by a posthumous edition in 1994, which includes all her unpublished writings.

Hardenberg's early work constitutes the majority of her oeuvre. She was closely connected to German Expressionism and a 1990 World Literature Today review of Dichtungen attributes the "characteristic features of expressionist poetry" to her work, listing "strong images; parataxis; pathos; themes of revolt and freedom; poems against the war" (Beth Bjorklund). Expressionism itself can be seen as a reaction to the de-humanizing effects of an increasingly technological and urbanized world, confronted by artists in the beginning of the twentieth century. Combining nostalgia for a state of nature with progressive utopian desire, Expressionists believed that it was possible to achieve radical social change through art. Along with other European avant-garde movements, they broke with nineteenth century social and cultural norms by turning away from the conventions of mimetic representation. Opposing the traditional model of an objective reality reflected by art, the representation of subjectivity became the new artistic paradigm. Kasimir Edschmid, for example, in his influential 1917 essay "Expressionismus in der Dichtung" declared that the task of Expressionism was to actually create reality: "Die Realität muß von uns geschaffen werden" (Anz & Stark 42). Departing from the Romantic concept of the artist as an individual genius, Expressionists tended to view themselves as representatives of human nature and their work as a universal message. Although much of Expressionist poetry is highly emotive, emotions were not seen in connection with

personal experiences. The move away from the personal resulted in the coinage of the term "lyrical 'I,'" which, according to Michael Stark, encompasses a split between an "empirical author" and an "anonymous and pre-conscious speaker authority" (Anz & Stark 632). As the titles in the popular 1920 anthology of Expressionist poetry Menschheitsdämmerung illustrate, Expressionist poetry was meant to be allegorical, eliminating historical specificity in favor of general categories that promote the idea of a common ground for all human beings: "Sturz und Schrei" [fall and scream]; "Erweckung des Herzens" [awakening of the heart]; "Aufruf und Empörung" [outrage and uprising]; "Liebe den Menschen" [love mankind]. To express these general truths, Expressionist writers and artists tended to portray themselves and others as types, often social outsiders, like the mentally or physically ill, children and "savages." They also emphasized movement, showing, for example, anonymous human bodies involved in dance or athletics.

Hardenberg's first published poem, later entitled "Wir werden" [We become] is endowed with the rhetorical force of a manifesto, combining the first person perspective of a single body with the plural of an unidentified "we." It evokes movement as a means of physical and spiritual transformation:

Wir werden herrlich aus Wunsch nach Freiheit.  
 Der Körper dehnt sich,  
 Dieses Zerrende nach geahnten Formen

Gibt ihm U e b e r spannung.  
 Schwere Hüften schauern sich zu langem Wuchse;  
 Im Straffen beben wir vor innerem Gefühl -  
 Wir sind so schön im Sehnen, daß wir sterben  
 könnten. (G 116)

[We become magnificent in our wish for freedom.  
 Our body stretches,  
 contorting itself towards intuited forms  
 with t o o m u c h strain.  
 Heavy hips tremble into growing tall;  
 Tightening, we quiver with inner feeling -  
 We are so beautiful in our longing that we could  
 die.]<sup>1</sup>

The poem refers to a process in which a subjective body must objectify itself in order to transgress its own physical boundaries. The body appears to be the manifestation of a desire for the possibility of transcendence that is death. Describing the effect of bodily contortions as "too much strain" at the center, the poem draws attention to the body's struggle to expand beyond its physical limitations. Replacing a "Wunsch nach Freiheit" [wish for freedom] with "innerem Gefühl" [inner feeling], the second half of the poem repeats the upward movement of the first after what seems to be a momentary release from tension in the middle. Although the body strives to negate its own bodily existence with the invocation of death in "Wir sind so schön im Sehnen, daß wir sterben könnten" [We are so beautiful in our longing that we could die], a tension between the physical and the abstract remains. Death

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<sup>1</sup> The translations of Hardenberg are mine. They are, however, mere workmanlike renderings intended to help the English-speaking reader, i.e. not to be read on their own.

is announced as possibility, not as reality, by the use of the subjunctive.

However, in spite of the length and significance of the last line, the reader's gaze is, physically, drawn towards the central line, where expansion is visually highlighted through the insertion of extra spaces between letters, objectifying the tension the line refers to. At the end of the poem, this tension is repeated and kept in suspense. While indicating the present tense, the verb "werden" [becoming] denotes a move towards the future. The use of "sein" [being] in the end creates the impression of a movement arrested into an ongoing present, where time no longer seems to exist. However, time does exist in a moment of suspended desire, which objectifies the body into being "schön" [beautiful] and arrests it in an image. To be "beautiful" through desire is a contradiction to the negativity of death. Because the possibility of dying is not synonymous with dying, death reveals itself to be a trope for living differently, living, perhaps, in a state of permanent suspense.

The text performs the transformation from a language that is abstract to a language that embodies an image (beauty). The tension of the textual body, metaphorically represented by the body in the text, can be interpreted as the manifestation of a struggle for verbal signification on the part of an unidentified speaking subject. In keeping with the thematic shift from an ideal, "Freiheit" [freedom],

to an emotional condition, "Gefühl" [feeling], the poem traces a movement from the discourse of the sublime, i.e. "geahnte Formen" [intuited forms] in the first half, to the organic allusion of "Wuchs" [growth], replacing the generic "body" with the more specific "hips." Thus, while the subject seems to desire transcendence, the poem embodies a move towards the physical.

The poem ends with the possibility of death but the second half echoes the first and refers back to the beginning. There is a reversal within what seems to be a narrative of liberation: the upward movement of an idealism aspiring to certain forms descends into death as the result of a dispersal and condensation of energy suggested by "schwer" [heavy], "schauern" [trembling], "straffen" [tightening] and "beben" [quivering]. Reading the climax of the poem at its center instead of the end contradicts the interpretation of death as a trope for ultimate spiritual transformation. The poem ends with the body frozen into an image of its own desire; depending on where one reads the climax - in the visually stressed middle, after which there is a decline, or in the end, where "being" is the outcome of a process of "becoming," - it can be interpreted as collapsing or suspending of tension. With this ambiguity, the body in the poem may or may not be imagined to survive its own strain. Due to the tension between middle and end, the reader is left with uncertainty over the meaning of death for this particular body.

### Burying the Body with Words

Whereas "Wir werden" resists the figurative by refusing to frame the body from an outside perspective, another 1913 poem, "Requiem," presents the dead body as an image, enveloped by a natural environment. From a first-person perspective, a human figure is transformed into part of the earth in a symbolic burial over the course of the poem:

#### Requiem

Meine Mutter sitzt im Blütenschnee,  
 Vögel in ihren roten Haarbächen spielen Frühling.  
 Sie läßt sich kosen von Flügeln auf ihrem roten  
 Meere.  
 Es fließt um sie,  
 Schüttelt ihren winzigen Körper  
 Und füllt die alten Augen.  
 Du, mein rotes Blut im Schnee,  
 Ich kann nicht zu dir,  
 Dir nicht helfen aus deinen Lasten.  
 Du lachst so, Farbe -  
 Meine Mutter ertrank.  
 Blüten, küßt ihren Taubenleib,  
 Vögel, legt euch an sie heran,  
 Trinkt sie aus, deckt sie zu:  
 Ihr werdet alle rot, schimmrig braun,  
 Liebeserde.

#### [Requiem

My mother sits in a snow of blossoms,  
 Birds play spring in her hair's red brooks.  
 She lets herself be caressed by wings on her red  
 sea.  
 It flows around her,  
 Shakes her tiny body  
 And fills up her old eyes.  
 You, my red blood in the snow,  
 I cannot come to you,  
 Cannot help in easing your burden.  
 You laugh like that, color -  
 My mother drowned.

Blossoms, kiss her dove's body,  
 Birds, lie next to her,  
 Empty her, cover her:  
 You all are turning red, shimmering brown,  
 Love earth.]

The emphasis on the color red, the use of conventional symbols, such as the "burden" of suffering (evoking the figure of Christ) or the "dove" (symbolizing peace), as well as the presence of animals who respond to human language, endow the body with allegorical significance so that it resembles a religious icon. A requiem for a person, the poem also evokes past texts, resonating with German myth and folklore by using the motif of blood in the snow (for example, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, the hero falls in and out of a trance during a jest whenever his gaze happens to come across three drops of blood in the snow, because their color reminds him of the beauty of his wife; and, in the fairy tale "Snowwhite," the red of Snowwhite's lips is likened to blood and the whiteness of her skin to snow). Like the daughter who remains distant from the body of her mother but inserts herself into the picture by directing the burial with her voice, Hardenberg appropriates images from earlier texts and adapts them in her own language.

The poem contains a series of metonymical shifts: beginning with the mother sitting in a "Blütenschnee" [blossom snow], the image is altered to the phonetically similar "Blut im Schnee" [blood in the snow]. This

expression, in turn, designates the mother who is, genetically speaking, of the poet's "blood," and who is covered by blood. There is a semiotic overcoding of the color red, which not only designates the blood of the mother but suffuses everything around her, finally taking on human shape by seeming to "laugh" at the poet. Showing everything to be organically connected, the poem depicts the mother's body as a part of nature: her hair is flowing in streams, as indicated by the poetic word "Haarbäche" [literally: hair brooks]. This compound word, as well as "Blütenschnee" and "Taubenleib" [dove's body], is invented by the poet who distinguishes herself from her text by drawing attention to her linguistic creation: the blossoms, like the color red, are anthropomorphized to "kiss" the body, and the birds are asked to drink from the body; in the end, all boundaries between inanimate and animate nature are dissolved into a word, "Liebeserde" [love earth].

However, the body remains at the center of the poem. The second half explains the mother's cause of death, drowning, suggesting that she actually drowned in her own blood. This "blood" could be interpreted as the language that originates from the image of the body and also surrounds it. Not only does the poet bury her mother with words, she has also "drowned" her in language. In this sense, the body becomes the signifier of language's "other" that is mute matter. Although the poem refers to the speaker's loss of a real object ("I cannot come to you"), it

invokes the pleasure of composing poetry, showing language to be able to animate nature. The dead body endows the text with magnitude by opposing silence. Mother and daughter are nameless and the poem emphasizes a mythical distance. For the "poet-daughter," the silent "earth-mother" produces a language that has magical power so that, through her mother's body, the poet receives creativity. The final word, "Liebeserde" [love earth], combines an abstract quality, love, with substance, earth, which symbolically connects the poet with the mythological mother. Her burial (in her own metaphorical body) is also a celebration of artistic creation in the parallel theme of "Frühling" [spring], that is the "Blüten" [blossoms] and the gentle caress of the birds ("kosen"). As the poem refers to loss on a literal level, it also performs the poet's coming to language.

One way of highlighting this emphasis on the possibilities contained within language is to compare Hardenberg's work with that of one of her contemporaries, the poet Gottfried Benn. Unlike Hardenberg, Benn's language in, for example, "Morgue" (1912), a compilation of five poems, emphasizes the irreducibility of matter and the incapacity of language to transform consciousness. His bodies are on display for autopsy and their stories are told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator in the past tense. The following example from "Morgue" shows how the representation of death as a biological process can discredit language:

## Schöne Jugend

Der Mund eines Mädchens, das lange im Schilf  
 gelegen hatte,  
 sah so angeknabbert aus.  
 Als man die Brust aufbrach, war die Speiseröhre so  
 löcherig.  
 Schließlich in einer Laube unter dem Zwerchfell  
 fand man ein Nest von jungen Ratten.  
 Ein kleines Schwesterchen lag tot.  
 Die andern lebten von Leber und Niere,  
 tranken das kalte Blut und hatten  
 hier eine schöne Jugend verlebt.  
 Und schön und schnell kam auch ihr Tod:  
 Man warf sie allesamt ins Wasser.  
 Ach, wie die kleinen Schnauzen quietschten!

## Lovely Childhood

The mouth of a girl who had long lain among the  
 reeds looked gnawed away.  
 As the breast was cut open, the gullet showed full  
 of holes.  
 Finally, in a cavity below the diaphragm  
 a nest of young rats was discovered.  
 One little sister lay dead.  
 The others thrived on liver and kidneys,  
 Drank the cold blood and  
 enjoyed a lovely childhood here.  
 And sweet and swift came their death also:  
 They were all thrown into the water together,  
 Oh, how the little muzzles squeaked!<sup>2</sup>

Similarly to Hardenberg's "Requiem," the poem establishes a connection between nature and the body by positioning it in an animated environment. Again, there are animals who drink blood, but here they are "Ratten" [rats]. They drown, pitied by the poet in the last line, and the

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<sup>2</sup> This translation is by Babette Deutsch and was published in E.B. Ashton, ed. Primal Vision: Selected Writings of Gottfried Benn (New York: New Directions, 1960. 214.

to the "Mädchen" [girl]. The last line, the poet's exclamation over the rats' "quietschen" [squealing], emphasizes the irony of their death, which is gratuitous, considering that they have been able to live only by desecrating a corpse. In a culture whose traditions connect death with some kind of spiritual transformation, the representation of a girl's body as part of the food chain and the desecration of a corpse without an accompanying moral judgment is an esthetic transgression. Where Hardenberg animates nature in order to render it human, Benn anthropomorphizes rats. He fragments the body, dissecting it into stages (one could imagine ever smaller animals, like worms, participating in the disintegration of the corpse), while Hardenberg mythologizes it, as it dissolves and merges with its surroundings into an image of organic wholesomeness.

In Benn, according to Walter Sokel, "nature is [...] reconstructed by the will to demonstrate its hidden essence - total indifference to human values and universal death" (114). Focusing on biology, Benn stages scientific positivism in a disturbingly anti-humanist fashion. Recording death without personal involvement, the poet pretends to take an interest in the rats, as if to suggest that language is capable of falsifying evidence, glossing over the brutality of fact. He presents the reader with the morbid attitude of someone accustomed to seeing human corpses on a daily basis. The poem can be read in

psychological terms, as a staging of denial, with Benn commenting on his own detachment from his poetic persona. Opposed to the reality of matter, language becomes a way of stimulating physical excitement. Benn's horrifying image of long dead corpses differs from Hardenberg's extensive burial ceremony, which functions to bridge the same gap between observer and observed that Benn's poem widens by the way he constructs the medical gaze. Benn shows that language operates on a secondary level, as a transport for an immediate sensual impression, whereas Hardenberg endows its mediating function with a material significance of its own. Her corpse is expanded into words, whereas Benn's is reduced to its shock value.

#### **Dancing around Centers**

Combining reflections on life and death with a female figure in yet another way is a poem by Rilke, sonnet II:28 of Die Sonette an Orpheus (1922). The sonnet is dedicated to the memory of a dancer, Wera Ouckama-Knoop, who died from illness at an early age. Hardenberg and Rilke met in 1916, after she had married and moved to Munich. They were impressed by each other's literary talent and developed a close friendship that lasted until Rilke left Munich in 1919 and is documented by correspondence and entries in Hardenberg's journals (Vollmer). The work of both shows a pre-occupation with death, an interest in the nature of language and, along with Benn, an interest in the body as a

signifier for human nature. But where Benn's language seems to function as a way of alienating his readers, Rilke conceives of language as a means of transforming the reader's consciousness. Demonstrating that language has the power to animate objects, Rilke resurrects the dead Wera with his poetic voice:

O komm und geh. Du, fast noch Kind, ergänze  
für einen Augenblick die Tanzfigur  
zum reinen Sternbild einer jener Tänze,  
darin wir die dumpf ordnende Natur

vergänglich übertreffen. Denn sie regte  
sich völlig hörend nur, da Orpheus sang.  
Du warst noch die von damals her Bewegte  
und leicht befremdet, wenn ein Baum sich lang

besann, mit dir nach dem Gehör zu gehn.  
Du wußtest noch die Stelle, wo die Leier  
sich tönend hob - ; die unerhörte Mitte.

Für sie versuchtest du die schönen Schritte  
und hofftest, einmal zu der heilen Feier  
des Freundes Gang und Antlitz hinzudrehen.

Oh, come and go. You, almost a child, complete  
for an instant the dance figure, that it be  
a pure constellation by which we beat  
the order of stupid nature transiently.

Yes, for it was nature that first stirred  
fully just to listen to Orpheus' song.  
You were excited from the time you heard  
and felt it strange when any tree thought long

whether it would go with you by ear.  
You still knew where the lyre was raised to call,  
Resounding - the unheard-of center. Therefore

you tried the lovely steps and hoped to turn  
the eyes and footsteps of your friend to learn

for once the whole and healing festival.<sup>3</sup>

The poem is addressed to Wera but she no longer has a physical body so the poet calls her spirit into existence with his use of rhythm and melody. As Orpheus, he recalls her from the dead and makes her dance to his lyre. Compared to Hardenberg's body in "Wir werden," Rilke's representation of physical movement is not spontaneous and motivated from within, but mediated. The sound of the instrument symbolizes poetry. Rilke's work seems motivated by the desire to objectify his own voice rather than the desire to represent Wera. Unlike Benn's corpse, which is a mere shell, Wera is a sign of essence, as her body transforms itself into music even from beyond the grave. Wera is an artist in that she is superior to the "dumpf ordnende Natur" [dull organizing nature]. The sonnet conveys her movements, repeating the back and forth of "O komm und geh'" in the enjambement of the stanzas and the alliterative patterns (e.g. "mit dir/tönend - Mitte/schöne"), as if she were adding her interpretation to the end rhymes and the basic meter. The repeated reference to "hören" [to hear] implies that Wera dances to the music like a classical dancer who listens and counts her steps. Directed by the lyre, Wera is not creative but a performer whose task it is to interpret what is

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<sup>3</sup> This translation is by C.F. MacIntyre, Sonnets to Orpheus (Berkeley: U of California P, 1964). 111.

As a "medium," Wera has access to the "unerhörte Mitte" (the center that is "unheard-of" which, in German, has scandalous connotations). A similar notion of "center" exists in Hardenberg's "Wir werden," where "too much strain" is the climax, leading to further movement, as well as to potential death. While the focal point in "Wir werden" is comparable to the center of sound in Rilke's sonnet, Hardenberg's depiction of bodily transformation differs from Rilke's. Rilke's musical structure creates a sense of stability and harmony, but the bodies in Hardenberg's texts lack the centering effect of a subject that controls and directs its own bodily movements, as well as an external subject or object, such as the lyre. Her posthumously published 1914 prose text, entitled "Eigene Ergänzungen" [Personal Supplements], is a story about a dancer, named Sran, who begins to dance behind closed curtains, after the performance is over; she ends up fighting with her own body and, finally, erupts into a scream, fearing her arms might break from the tension of carrying herself. I have selected the following passage to illustrate how Hardenberg's concept of "Mitte" compares to Rilke's, as her dancer becomes the "Mittelpunkt:"

Muster drängten nach Erfüllung; sie blieb, ohne sich zu rühren. Sie empfand Druck auf ihrem Körper, jede Lage, Schiene war sie und mußte ihn selbst von sich tragen. Er war ohne Bewegung, mit ihr berührt, und sie wuchs aus sich selbst heraus. Die blauen Farben der Luft schenken die Angst, und die mächtigen Wiesen drehten sich vorbei;

immer war sie deren Mittelpunkt und kannte nicht Entfernung daraus. (SH 79)

[Patterns insisted on being carried out; she remained, immobile. She felt pressure on her body, in all positions, a rail she was, on it having to carry away her body, by herself. This body was without movement, in touch with her, and she was growing out of herself. The air's blue colors gave the gift of angst, and powerful meadows passed by in turning; always she was their center and knew no distance from this.]

Unlike Rilke's dancer, Hardenberg's dancer moves from within, on impulse, as if in spite of herself. Before movement can take place, the "Druck" [strain/pressure] of immobility rises, until tension must be released and the dancer can "grow out of herself" (the same metaphor as in "Wir werden"). By introducing objects she perceives when turning, "Luft" [air] and "Wiesen" [meadows], an opposition between inside and outside seems to be established. At the same time, the objects are endowed with agency, affecting the dancer by "giving the gift of angst" and taking on the attribute "mächtig" [powerful], so that the dancer's environment becomes a mere extension of her own activity. In the last sentence of the passage, it seems as if the result of the dancer's movement is that she becomes centered. Hardenberg expands the notion of "Mittelpunkt" [central point] in terms of a lack of "Entfernung" [distance] without a vantage point from which a distance could be perceived. Her dancer is immersed in a center without boundaries so that, in effect, she does not have a center. And, while Rilke's Wera moves within a musical pattern that marks the

passing of time, the use of "immer" [always] in Hardenberg implies that her dancer also finds herself in a state of timelessness. In her text, the center is the locus of the subject but the subject loses a sense of both space and time.

In contrast to the harmony conveyed by Rilke's sonnet, the syntax of Hardenberg's prose text is as unconventional as Ausdruckstanz compared to classical ballet. While the latter's orderly structure is designed to give all movements an appearance of ease, the former is an exploration of movement that can seem erratic and unfamiliar, favoring "Ausdruck" [expression] over form. For a verbal text, this means that ungrammaticality is not only tolerable but desirable. Hardenberg's writing shows at least two stylistic strategies: the first is parataxis, the absence of subordinating conjunctions or of all conjunctions (placing phrases on the same level) which is mentioned by Bjorklund as a characteristic feature of Expressionist poetry and has been defined as a property of "oral" language (Lanham 108); the second is hyperbaton, a departure from ordinary word order (Lanham 86) which, in Hardenberg often in conjunction with the omission of articles, results in an archaic and dramatic style (e.g. "Schiene war sie" instead of "Sie war eine Schiene"). Together, parataxis and hyperbaton give the impression of a more "primitive," more immediate language, in which the logical relationships implied by grammar are expanded to accommodate the ambiguity of emotional and

seemingly irrational ways of thinking. Parataxis not only eliminates but also produces causal relationships. For example, the phrase "Er war ohne Bewegung, mit ihr berührt, und sie wuchs aus sich selbst heraus" [This body was without movement, in touch with her, and she was growing out of herself] implies that "growing out of oneself" takes place as a result of the body being "without movement," simply because one follows the other. The "Muster" [patterns] offering themselves to be executed by the dancer are a body language that occurs involuntarily, making itself felt as "Druck" [pressure]. With various syntactical shifts and turns, Hardenberg's dancer enters a state of doubt over whether she is the one who sets the body in motion or the center of movement that occurs around her. Like the body in "Wir werden," she yields to this tension and embodies a condition that resists the objectification of representation.

Rilke's dancer, on the other hand, is always connected with language, i.e. the music of the lyre, so that the "center" is hinted at and approached but not actually represented. In both Rilke and Hardenberg, the center is, really, defined by its absence. Both Hardenberg's and Rilke's dancer are shown to be in need of a center. Compared to Rilke, in whose scenario language is celebrated as the prime mover, Hardenberg makes an effort to experiment with language to the point where its structure reflects the dancer's struggle to articulate the experience of

transcending physical boundaries. While the body as matter is transcended in Rilke, Hardenberg's work is engaged in an effort to verbalize body language. She conveys the sense of physical awkwardness involved in the dancer's having to "carry away" and, thereby, master her body. Rilke's "Mitte" is presumed to exist, even if only Wera can hear it and even though she is no longer alive, but Hardenberg's "Mittelpunkt" does not exist for a body that takes itself apart and carries itself like another. As the moving body appears to lose its sense of self, it is the desire of "expressing" patterns here, and of "becoming [...] beautiful" in "Wir werden" that provides an imaginary center for Hardenberg's divided bodies. Only the fantasy of an all-encompassing subjectivity displaces this desire, attempting to transgress all spatial and temporal boundaries and, thereby, de-center the subject's voice from its body. The "lack of distance" from the center is the lack of differentiation between self/other and inside/outside. Hardenberg's effort to verbalize the "Ungehörte" [the unheard-of] that Rilke alludes to, results in a challenge to the assumption that the dancer's act of having to "carry and master her own body" would automatically result in the dancer's becoming centered, simply by being in control of her body (an assumption that Rilke's representation of dance and poetry seems to support). Paradoxically, Hardenberg's bodies voice their desire to transcend boundaries in order to come to a particular place, wishing to eliminate the

distance between external reality and internal space in order to move in defiance of all physical laws.

### **Tracing Selves and Others**

I have tried to show that the subject who perceives herself as a body resists presenting us with an image of that body because such an image would constitute a self-identical form of representation that would constitute a physical limitation. This, in turn, would not seem to permit the kind of spatial transformations Hardenberg's poetry offers. The body image itself is, however, defined in terms of space. Elizabeth Grosz, calling it "a ghostlike icon of the subject" (63), explains this as follows:

The body image is not an isolated image of the body but necessarily involves the relations between the body, the surrounding space, other objects and bodies, and the coordinates or axes of vertical and horizontal. In short, it is a postural schema of the body. The body image is the condition of the subject's access to spatiality. (Grosz 85)

Hardenberg shows spatial relations but her movements do not congeal into fixed images; she represents bodies in motion whose imaginary center rests on the desire to move, not on the actual positionality the existence of an objective "self" would imply; her body cannot be an "icon of the subject" because her subject is without a fixed image. Nevertheless, Hardenberg's subject is not psychotic which, according to Grosz, would be the result of a kind of "de-

personalization" in which the subject is unable to locate herself in space at all (77). Rather, I would argue, Hardenberg produces a textual subject who is engaged in an ongoing process and whose supposed points of rest, "center" and "death," are really points of transformation, without a self-identical subject position to which one could ascribe the substance of an image.

"Eigene Ergänzungen," like "Wir werden," builds tension around a center and ends with death in the ominous phrase: "Sran, der Frau, starb ein Wunder in eben der Nacht, da es sie segnete" [A miracle died for Sran, the woman, during the same night it had blessed her]. This "miracle," I would maintain, is the illusion that it is possible to imagine a body being identical with itself. If that were possible, the process of self-representation would stop and language would be rendered obsolete. Yet it is also the painful realization that it is impossible not to distance oneself from one's center - if only in the negative, i.e. confusion, ambiguity - that provokes this conclusion of intense loss (the miracle) and gain (to be blessed). The dancer is "blessed" with the "miracle" of expression and erupts into a scream, marking the difference between body and voice as the point where the poet realizes the impossibility of representing the body (as a mute and passive "other").

However, language, including the non-verbal language of dance, is bound to structure: although a scream may represent voice without meaning, it will be interpreted

within the contexts of its surroundings. Even the representation of a fixed body image would not release the poet from the need to come to a specific linguistic place to represent her own subjectivity. Hardenberg's play with an imaginary center can be understood as a way of distancing herself from the idea of "center" as a signifier for identity. She shows a subject seeking to create movement in order to come to a place. As the reference to death implies, Hardenberg's imaginary subject is engaged in a process of voicing her desire to come to a center that will, eventually, arrest her movement within real spatial limits. These limits, in turn, can be marked by others.

Defining the nature of one's self is to evoke the presence of an "other." So far, I have been discussing single bodies and the dilemma of self-representation. I would now like to look at the way in which Hardenberg defines herself vis-à-vis others, beginning with the way in which she represents relationships. The following poem was published below "Wir werden" in Die Aktion, and was only later entitled "Liebe" [Love]. Written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, it describes a couple walking through a forest, tortured by their bodies:

Zwei gehen nackt durch einen Wald;  
 Sie schreiten hoch  
 Und lachen mit den Vogelschreien.  
 Der wunde rasende Klang würgt ihre Kehlen.  
 In ihren Häuten brennen sie eisig,  
 Atemstücke brechen aus verschütteten Massen.  
 Menschen reißen sich höher:  
 Ihr Kopf starrt vor;

Augen, die tief bluten,  
 Stürzen in Schädel zurück.  
 Arme und Beine sind Stricke;  
 Sie meistern krachende Leiber.  
 Zwei fühlen sich breit verschmelzen und berühren  
 sich nicht.  
 Sie schlingen sich um Bäume  
 Und brechen entzwei.

[Two walk naked in a forest,  
 They strut high and  
 Laugh with the cries of birds.  
 The sore burning sound chokes their throats.  
 They burn like ice in their skins,  
 Pieces of breath break away from buried masses.  
 Humans tear themselves upward:  
 Their head stares forward;  
 Eyes bleeding deeply,  
 Fall backwards into skulls.  
 Arms and legs are ropes;  
 They master crashing bodies.  
 Two feel themselves melt broadly into one another  
 and do not touch.  
 They coil around trees  
 And break apart.]

The frame of the poem, beginning with the two figures in the forest and ending with their coiling around trees, may evoke a romantic atmosphere, yet what happens to them is hardly a love story. They suffer from being out of control and are prevented from coming together, unable to master their bodies or approach one another. Nature, in the shape of trees, may promise some kind of rescue but human nature, here the human body, determines the events. The way they walk ("schreiten") suggests pride; they are naked, outside civilization; laughing with the birds, they act as if they belong to nature; the pain resulting from laughter seems to be their punishment. The poem's focus expands from the two individuals to "Massen" [masses] and "Menschen" [humans] and

an intensification of physical pain portrays the body as a container to be restrained by force. The bodies are fragmented, taking on a life of their own, like puppets made from human flesh, with bleeding eyes popping out of their skulls. The poem ends as it began, with "zwei" - which means "two" (whereas "entzwei" means "apart") so that story comes full circle but also indicates division: when the "lovers" finally relate to one another and their surroundings - illustrated by the use of the more gentle-sounding verbs, "verschmelzen" [to melt together] and "umschlingen" [to coil/entwine], - they can only feel each other without touching and end up breaking apart ("entzweibrechen"). The poem's sound-pattern, in keeping with the violent imagery, is harsh, with consonants and consonant pairs that mimic the forest-like sound of breaking and grinding, such as "-ck," "-rz," "-schr," "-rgt," and vowels that create a sense of panic by sounding shrill and hysterical, such as "-ü" and "-ei." As if pain were the consequence of trying to mimic nature artificially, with a human voice, the throats of the two lovers hurt after they laugh.

The two figures represent bodies unable to "contain" themselves. With its allusions to the Biblical fall, as they "schlingen sich um Bäume" [coil around trees] like the snake in Genesis, the poem can be interpreted in terms of transgressing physical rather than moral laws. Although the poem may implicitly refer to sexual transgression, the two bodies are not described in terms of sexual difference. With

the exception of "zwei fühlen sich breit verschmelzen" [two feel themselves melt broadly into one another], the poem shows little of the eroticism prevalent in Hardenberg's other work about relationships. The sense of distance between the lovers, however, established in this first poem, is typical of the way in which Hardenberg represents physical relationships, as she often describes encounters in which the speaker seems caught in a process of physical transformation and not in direct contact with the other, even if intimacy is suggested. Hardenberg approaches sexuality as a way of defining her poetic voice in terms of a bodily self. At the same time, she refuses to define the body as a sexually specific object. Often, her figures seem "inhibited," perceiving the other without a specific image. As I will show, all of Hardenberg's love poetry represents the fantasy of sexuality taking place without the creation of an object of desire. The real transgression in "Liebe" is not the breaking of the bodies but the possibility of "feeling" without "touching," an idea that contradicts the poem's supposed struggle for containment. As in "Wir werden," the concept of "Gefühl/fühlen" [feeling/to feel] transcends the physical and is able to permeate the limitations that keep the lovers from "berühren" [touching].

Because Hardenberg's textual bodies are represented as mere surfaces, it becomes difficult to visualize them. Elizabeth Grosz writes that there is a connection between

the existence of a body image and one's position as subject of sexuality:

A stabilized body image or imaginary anatomy, a consistent and abiding sense of self and bodily boundaries, requires and entails understanding one's position vis-à-vis others, one's place at the apex or organizing point in the perception of space (which, in turn, implies a knowledge that one could also be an object in the spatial fields of others), as well as a set of clear-cut distinctions between the inside and the outside of the body, the active and passive positions, and, as we will see, a position as a sexually determinate subject. (48)

I would argue that Hardenberg's continued alteration of bodily images can be interpreted as an attempt to withdraw from this "position as a sexually determinate subject." In the 1914 poem "Gefühl," the phenomenon of verbally expanding and defining the body's shape without a fixed image takes place when an "I" addresses a "you" in terms of lines, sides, and depths. Hardenberg introduces the idea of bodily definition by using the visual metaphor of geometry:

Gefühl

Meine Stirn ist dein großer See.  
 Du mußt mich lieben.  
 Meine Linien führe ich an dich heran,  
 Daß sie dich rühren.  
 Du bist zu weit zu erreichen an allen Seiten,  
 Und meine Tiefen dehnen sich langsam;  
 Ich kann sie nicht bringen,  
 Wenn ich zart bin.  
 So schmerzen wir uns immer,  
 Ich bin dein matter, hängender See,  
 Dein nasser, glitzernder Abendstern.

[Feeling

My forehead is your large lake.

You must love me.  
 I am guiding my features towards you,  
 So they will move you.  
 You are too wide to be reached on all sides,  
 And my depths extend gradually;  
 I cannot bring them,  
 When I am tender.  
 This is how we always hurt each other,  
 I am your weary, hanging lake,  
 your wet, glistening evening star.]

The first line of the poem indicates proximity between the "I" and the "you," switching the point of view and expanding the perspective from a part of the speaker's body, the "Stirn" [forehead], to a part of the landscape, a "See" [lake]. The image of the lake is repeated in the next-to-last line, where it is turned into a metaphor, with the addition of the last line. The "body" of the text seems to be written from the perspective of the lake whose properties, i.e. lines, sides, and depths, suggest the shape of a human body. This effect is achieved with the alternate use of vocabulary that refers to landscape architecture, e.g. "heranführen" [to guide towards], "erreichen" [to reach], "bringen" [to bring] and vocabulary from the register of emotions, e.g. "lieben" [to love], "rühren" [to move], "schmerzen" [to hurt]. The relationship between these two spaces, "body" and "lake," is organic. The voice, speaking as the "lake," is focused on the other whom she seems to want to envelop. She approaches the other in the first four lines, then withdraws in pain ("schmerzen"). The connection between pain and lack of connection is familiar from the poem "Liebe;" here, the "I" and the "you"

disconnect and the "I" ends up transforming herself into a distant star. The poem has, thus, performed the process of an "I" coming to represent herself as an image to an other. This image becomes possible through distance, which is also symbolized by the "Stern" [star] in the last line, yet the actual existence of the "I" is bound up with the presence of the other. Desire, as in "Du mußt mich lieben" [You must love me], turns into withdrawal, "Ich kann sie nicht bringen" [I cannot bring them] and is, finally, objectified. The concept of the "body image" is based on the concept of a physical shape and the last two lines may be read as an escape from the ambiguity over how to separate the two bodies in order to find a position vis-à-vis the other. Hardenberg's solution to the seeming necessity of creating a more clearly defined body image is the creation of a poetic metaphor, a star. The image of the star is catachrestic (i.e. within the overall context of the poem, it is a metaphor about a metaphor), so that language itself conveys the illusion of "depth" thematized in the poem.

Consequently, the poem can be read as a love poem in which a verbalized physical encounter produces a poetic image. Its eroticism is in the way in which it outlines the yielding of bodily surfaces: "meine Tiefen dehnen sich langsam" [my depths extend gradually]. The last two lines, however, border on the sultry with a sudden overload of mismatched adjectives. The return to the beginning - the "I" claiming itself as a property of the "you" - does not gloss

over the fact that the last two lines differ from the rest of the poem. The "I" defines itself as a catachrestic image, a reminder of the power of images to arrest "feeling" and turn it into objects. As if to highlight the different ways of representing spatial relationships, the poet's voice inscribes a metaphor (the figure of substitution) onto the "body" of the poem. If, as Elizabeth Grosz explains, "a stabilized body image or imaginary anatomy, a consistent and abiding sense of self and bodily boundaries, requires [...] a position as a sexually determinate subject," much of Hardenberg's work is in defiance of such a position. The poem "Gefühl" presents one of the many textual strategies by which she explores the consistency of "body images" that are unstable.

### **Mapping the Erotic**

A 1914 prose text "Tröstung" [Consolation] raises the question of how one is to inhabit one's body. The story dramatizes the narrator's physical vulnerability and represents her as an entire landscape. "Tröstung" marks the shift from a body that is not gendered to a female body approached by a male. Illustrating the separation of body from environment, it is an evolutionary tale about a creature torn from a state of nature by a "Sonnenfreund" [sun friend] who liberates her by melting the frozen surface of the primeval swamp that is her "Haut" [skin]:

## Tröstung

Die Kröten schreien im Teich, sie müssen schlafen, es ist Winter. Meine Haut ist starkes Eis, viele Meter um mich herum liegt es einsam, und der Kopf hängt darüber hinaus und schlägt nach allen Seiten auf. Ich denke ganz Bestimmtes, ganz Dasselbe, und der Kopf schlägt langsamer, heftiger. Weit hinten seh ich einen hellen Morgen gehen, der sollte zu mir mit seinem Licht, den Strahlenwald durch meine toten Berge führen, den armen Kopf in seine warmen Täler legen, obgleich es ihnen wehe tut, den abgeschnittenen Stumpf in ihrem frischen Schoß zu halten. Gesund zu wachsen würde er mir helfen, Glieder bewegen, Gedanken rühren in meiner Körperkraft.

Der Sonnenfreund war dicht zu meinem Königshaupt gekommen, und als er das Kranke sah, zog er seine schützenden Tücher auf meinem gefrorenen Körper aus und sagte: ich will auf deinen kalten Flächen gehen, bis du die Arme zu mir legen kannst, bis dein dunkel Seidenaug, in seinen grünen Sümpfen verloren, mir seine Schmerzen zu tragen erlaubt.

Das war meine Liebe, die aus Enge gewachsen war, die herausstieß, die weiter wurde als meine riesenkalten Flächen, die mich einmal besiegte.

Blut fließt, und Menschen, die vorübergehen, schütteln sich. (D 64)

## [Consolation

The toads scream in the pond, they must sleep, it is winter. My skin is strong ice, lying lonely for many yards around me, and my head hangs down from above, falling and striking all sides. I think about certain things, the very same things, and my head beats down more slowly, more forcefully. From afar I see a bright morning walking, he should come to me with his light, to lead the forest of beams through my dead mountains, to lay my poor head into his warm valleys, although it hurts them to hold in their renewed lap the stump that was cut off. If it would grow healthily, it would help me to move my limbs, to stir thoughts with the strength of my body.

The sun friend had come close to my royal head, and when he saw where it was ill, he took off his protective cloths, spread them on my frozen body, and said: I want to walk on your cold planes until you can lay your arms towards me,

until your dark silk eye, lost in its green swamps, will allow me to carry its pain.

This was my love, which had grown from restrictedness, which thrust out, which became larger than my huge cold planes, which defeated me once.

Blood is being shed and people who pass by are shuddering.]

The story is told by a creature both human and plant-like, with a voice that seems to come from a kind of vegetative state, speaking from a place that is its own monstrous body, with a surface that perpetually expands. Evoking a mythical primal scene, the text shows a gradual emergence of the voice from a primitive state of nature into being human. In the beginning, the world is an organic totality with animals, plants, climate, water, and mountains; nature speaks in a voice that identifies itself as a creature frozen into a lake. The first sentence constructs a presence modified only by an imperative: "Die Kröten schreien im Teich, sie müssen schlafen, es ist Winter" [The toads are screaming in the pond, they must sleep, it is winter]. An absence of conjunctions results in each phrase becoming a new reality. The text belongs to the realm of fantasy, as the toads can be associated with frogs who appear in fairy tales. It is, however, in generic disguise: a prose poem, it has no narrative at first and turns only gradually into a story. It is the story of breaking out of the confines of one's body and the body of grammar which is presented as a narrative about a body.

Only in the second sentence does the narrator identify herself. She is the landscape: "Meine Haut ist starkes Eis, viele Meter um mich herum liegt es einsam, und der Kopf hängt darüber hinaus und schlägt nach allen Seiten auf." [My skin is strong ice, lying lonely for many yards around me, and my head hangs down from above, falling and striking all sides]. The voice appears to be the voice of the pond, yet it has a "Kopf" [head.] Only in the third sentence, which introduces the unmodified "I," does it become clear that this is an inner landscape, one that has no resemblance to external reality. The text uses skin as a central metaphor. Skin demarcates the border between inside and outside, enveloping the body as its outermost layer, a surface suggesting depth, acting as a protective coat, and suggesting, in turn, containment and impenetrability. In "Tröstung," however, skin is spatialized as a site, eliminating the difference between outside and inside (and representing, at the same time, paradoxically, the borderline that keeps this difference in place.

Hardenberg's text establishes spatial boundaries within the frame of a narrative of becoming different from one's environment. Language emerges, from a non-verbal origin, to reveal a human being. The voice speaks and raises doubt over the nature of its source. As the landscape is anthropomorphized, a human figure emerges as the narrator, i.e. the creator. The landscape-body and the storytelling-language have to strain to achieve a definite form, as the

boundaries are flexible. "Tröstung" is about ice that turns into a swamp, a transformation from a form that is too hard, into a form that is shapeless, threatening to engulf the subject. Skin, if seen as a metaphor for language, is a surface without shape; in order to have a shape, it has to "contain" something. On a metalinguistic level, Hardenberg's bodies are her texts. They may be engaged in a struggle for substance (body) because their surface (language) is unstable.

The final separation between landscape and voice takes place after the appearance of an outsider. He, too, emerges as part of the environment and becomes a separate entity. The voice calls him "Sonnenfreund" [sun friend] and herself "Täler" [valleys]. The story becomes romantic and is, retroactively, titled "the story of my love." However, the next-to-last sentence is ambiguous, stating that the speaker's love is powerful enough to defeat herself ("besiegt"). As the ice has melted, the voice takes authorial control of the story: the switch from present to past tense in the last third of the text enables her to fully distance herself from what she is immersed in and to frame the story by giving it the title. While the first half of the text is an erotic fantasy, the second half marks the intrusion of temporality with the simultaneous switch from present to past tense and from subjunctive to indicative. This formal "rupture" in the middle of the text forces the reader to de-historicize the beginning and to recognize the

violence of temporality: marking the difference between mythical and historical time, the sun friend melts the woman's skin by traversing its surfaces in a kind of "writing."

But language does not function as a coherent structure. The voice's "head," a signifier of reason, is cut off almost in the beginning. Some sentences describing the encounter between the two creatures refuse to follow a logical sequence. Linguistically, as well as figuratively, the voice has descended into the swamplike realm of the irrational. This theme, in fact, is not unique to Hardenberg: "Tröstung" can be read in conjunction with Benn, who celebrates "retrogression" into a pre-verbal unity with nature. However, compared to Hardenberg, he does not return to writing or language. Walter Sokel, in his analysis of Benn's autobiographical novel Rönne, describes how, for Benn, "'Herr,' woman, and savage are only stages on the way to a more remote and primitive ideal, the subhuman and animal, and even further away, the protozoic, the vegetative, and the inert." He quotes from one of Benn's hymns, "O daß wir unsere Ururahnen wären/Ein Klümpchen Schleim in einem warmen Moor" [O that we might be our ancestors' ancestors/A little ball of slime in a tepid moor] and concludes that "retrogression thus becomes the self-hating intellectual's ideal" and Rönne "would have been happier as a jelly fish" (91). While Benn seems to use the idea of retrogressing into a vegetative state as a way to escape from self-doubt,

Hardenberg adds a dimension of self-consciousness to her texts. Speaking as author, she revises "Tröstung" by referring back to the beginning, when she declares that she has been "defeated" by what she calls, in retrospect, "meine Liebe" [my love]. This could be read as the actual "Tröstung" [Consolation]. The story is, really, about the loss of an innocence that did not exist in the first place, because the narrator must first bring herself into existence in order to fantasize about her origins. In this sense, Hardenberg's work responds to Benn's "self-hating" ideal by opposing a voice that emerges from retrogression into language.

Nevertheless, in the end of "Tröstung," the syntax collapses into ambiguity, the narrator's "I" disappears, and the story ends with "Blut" [blood]. In this very last sentence, another external world cuts in, when "Menschen" [people] pass by. Hardenberg edited this sentence from a later publication, where she seems to have decided to lessen some of her pathos, replacing, for example, the fantastic word "Königshaupt" [royal head] with the everyday word "Kopf" [head]. In the original version quoted here, the addition of "Menschen" [human beings] is a way of rhetorically expanding the scope of the events and to endow it with a universal perspective. In this sense, Hardenberg's work also seems to refer to another of Benn's concepts, "Südllichkeit" [southernness]:

By universalizing his personal plight into the plight of mankind and postulating retrogression as an absolute ideal, the poet is not merely enabled to act in revolt, but to establish contact with a deeper layer of life, which corresponds closely to Bergson's vitalist Reality and to Jung's concept of the 'collective unconscious.' A spontaneous feeling wells up, breaking the crust of a cerebralized self, and beckons like the mirage of the blue ocean in desert wastes. 'Südlichkeit' ("Southernness") is the leitmotiv of these visions. It is associated with a tropical bliss of inactivity and sensual release... (Sokel 92)

Hardenberg wrote a poem in 1918, called "Südliches Herz" and selected by Benn for his 1955 anthology Lyrik des expressionistischen Jahrzehnts, in which she is the only female author besides Else Lasker-Schüler. According to Vollmer - who, incidentally, connects the creation of this poem with Hardenberg's intense admiration for Rilke - the poem marks the "Verwandlung des Ich [im] Prozeß einer 'Naturisierung' des Ich, getrieben von der Sehnsucht nach menschlicher Allverbundenheit" [the transformation of the 'I' in a process of 'naturalization' of the 'I,' driven by the desire for an omniscient connection of humankind] (76). I find that the defining quality of this poem is in its sexual imagery, bordering on the cliché but managing not to become one:

Südliches Herz

Blüte sitzt tief,  
Bergspitzen biegen sich hin,  
Wind ausgeruht liegt,  
Der Baum steht starr.

Da plötzlich erblüht  
Mitten ins Herz hinein

Brennend sitzt du mir im Baum.

Nirgend ist Ruhe in mir,  
In Flammen schreie ich auf,  
Ein Meer ist in allem bewegt.

Da zucken auch sie,  
Blüte und Baum,  
Schon rot von ihrer Süße.

[Southern Heart

Blossom sits deeply,  
Mountaintips bend themselves into shape,  
Wind lies calmly,  
The tree stands rigid.

There suddenly blooms  
Right into the middle of the heart  
Burning, you are sitting in my tree.

Nowhere is calmness inside of me,  
I cry out in flames,  
an ocean is turbulent everywhere.

There they, too, are stirring,  
Blossom and tree,  
Red already from their sweetness.]

Once again, this is a poem which focuses on the idea of center ("Mitte"), as in "mitten ins Herz hinein" [right into the middle of the heart]. The poem was first published in a journal in 1920 but Südliches Herz is also the title of Hardenberg's posthumous edition of collected works; in his afterword, Vollmer, the editor, calls the "Herz" [heart] Hardenberg's central metaphor, claiming that, in comparison to Neigungen, this edition shows "eine verstärkte und unverhülltere Hinwendung zum Ich der Dichterin" [an increasing and more obvious attention towards the 'I' of the poet] (SH 196). However, "Südliches Herz" is a poem about

the penetration of an "I" by a "you," in the guise of a tree stem entering an ocean. The blossoms and mountaintops can be read as breasts, the rigid-standing tree as an erect phallus, and the ocean in flames as a female orgasm. Nevertheless, there is a literal emphasis on natural elements and the fact that they may represent parts of the human body draws attention to the ambiguity of the linguistic sign. Language is embodied, as the voice of a nameless speaker emerges, in a reversal of perspective, from the center of the tree by which it has also been entered; this tree-voice is human, for it refers to its "Herz" [heart]; flames and ocean, in this context, are the voice's metaphorical description of its own emotional state; subjectivity, in turn, is emphasized by the surrounding (objective) elements, mountains, blossoms and tree, as they are fixed in their position, appearing in the beginning and in the end of the poem from the perspective of an omniscient narrator.

This poem differs from the others discussed so far in terms of what constitutes a surface. Whereas both "Gefühl" and "Tröstung" are attempts to map some kind of body which is, somehow, connected with the "self" of the speaking voice, "Südliches Herz" positions the "I" in a fixed place, at the heart of the tree. The heart being the human reference, it is positioned geographically as well in the title, "südlich" [southern], so that it is part of the landscape. If one reads the landscape as a human body

consisting of metaphors for male and female sexual organs, the title suggests a displacement of the heart to a lower part of the body and one could interpret the encounter between the "I" and the "you" as an intercourse that takes place within a single body dividing itself. If, however, one reads the poem on a literal level, so that the objects in the environment remain separate from the "I" speaking from within one of them, the poem describes a cataclysmic event that takes place in nature and submerges the "I" in a flood of images. In this case, the shift in perspective, from a panoramic view to a focus on the heart of the tree, takes place at the same time the "you" is recognized. The switch from the impersonal "mitten ins Herz hinein" [right into the middle of the heart] to "brennend sitzt du mir im Baum" [burning, you are sitting in my tree] is a sudden switch in perspective, from that of an overall distant observer (such as in "Liebe") to a differentiation between "I" and "you." The question whether they are both in the tree or whether they are the tree remains unanswerable, just as the position of the dancer in "Eigene Ergänzungen" that Hardenberg describes as: "immer war sie deren Mittelpunkt und kannte nicht Entfernung daraus" [always she was (at) their center and knew no distance from this/it] remains an impossible place. The difference here, compared to the dancer, is that two selves may exist, inhabiting the tree like a body that makes them appear as one but also produces the very

inside/outside opposition that the dancer collapses within her single self.

In any case, the encounter with another is described with recourse to an objective space. Compared to "Tröstung," where the other has a transformative but also destructive effect on the self, the meeting in "Südliches Herz" seems to allow that everything returns to "normal." The poem begins and ends with an impersonal perspective. Only in the second and third stanza, an "I" appears and disappears, swept away by the greater force of nature. There is only a single occurrence of an unmodified "I" in "Südliches Herz," namely when the speaker cries out ("schreie ich auf"). Other than the scream, this "I" represents itself as passive, yielding to being acted upon, only indirectly in contact with its surroundings. This, I would argue, is where the split between authorial voice and poetic "I" is most obvious. This is also where the encounter with a "you" comes closest to a "swamp"-like experience. As a love poem, "Südliches Herz" seeks to recover a self at the same time that it proclaims the necessity of a loss of selfhood when merging with the other.

### **The Mask of Disability**

In a number of poems, Hardenberg's voice takes on a masculine persona. One of her friends, Richard Oehring, complained about this in a letter: "Etwas wunderlich finde ich es, daß Sie soviel Gedichte vom Standpunkt des Mannes

aus schreiben, obwohl ja gerade erst Ihre Mädchenhaftigkeit so wesentlich mir an Ihnen erschien" [I do find it rather strange that you write so many poems from the male point of view, considering that, to me, your girliness, in particular, seemed to be the essence of you] (D 147). A more sympathetic, yet equally partial attitude is expressed by Hardenberg's 1990 reviewer, Bjorklund, who attributes the use of the masculine persona to a "difficulty of saying 'I' for women." Not taking into account that the number of texts in which Hardenberg uses a genderless or feminine "I" is disproportionately higher, this statement reduces Hardenberg's gender switch to a protective gesture, presumably based on insecurity. In addition, Bjorklund fails to acknowledge the implications of the fact that most of the poems written in a male persona show the male to be disabled (this will be addressed in my subsequent analysis of two "masculine persona-poems"). While Oehring seems motivated by sexism and Bjorklund by feminism, both have a rather rigid conception of sexual difference.

From a literary-historical perspective, Paul Raabe, Hardenberg's publisher, introduces her as, supposedly, presenting us with "eine[m] 'anderen Expressionismus,'" [an 'other Expressionism'], explaining that the "verhaltene Sprache der Expressionistinnen begleitet die wortgewaltigen Aufstände der expressionistischen Autoren. Die schreibenden Frauen korrigieren das Bild einer literarischen Epoche" [the restrained language of the female Expressionists accompanies

the powerfully eloquent revolt of the Expressionist authors. The women writers correct our image of a literary period]. Ironically, this statement presents the author's marginalized position as supplementary to a (patriarchal) discourse that continues to remain in place: the women "accompany" men with their "restrained" language in order to enhance the picture, not change it.

However, it is likely that such an introduction would have suited Hardenberg. According to Elke Frederiksen, turn-of-the-century German feminism among bourgeois women like Hardenberg, was based on sexual difference and emphasized the uniqueness of a biologically determined female nature, in comparison to Anglo-American feminism (and the proletarian women's movement in Germany) which was based on the idea of gender equality (9). Judging from the way in which her language re-enforces traditional binarisms, i.e. the female as liquid and soft, and the male as hard and powerful, Hardenberg may have identified with the way in which Raabe describes her as "other" to Expressionism - a movement which has been characterized as chauvinist in its emphasis on the eruption of powerful emotions and primitive destructive forces disrupting the surface of conventions. For example, reacting against the sentimentality of Romanticism and celebrating masculinity as a way of confronting modernity, the Expressionist Carl Einstein demanded a more "masculine," more "intellectual" approach to art, claiming that "Gefühl hat immer statt, wenn es gilt,

Impotenz zu verbergen" [feelings are a way of covering up impotence] (Anz & Stark 656). Hardenberg herself was not as oblivious to her own social position as woman as the above quotes by Oehring, Bjorklund, and Raabe may indicate. In a posthumously published 1915 essay, "Nachdem ich Blüher's Arbeit über den Antifeminismus gelesen habe" [After I read Blüher's work on anti-feminism], she identifies as a working woman, arguing for professional equality and against raising girls as "passive appendices to their future husbands." (SH 143)

A more constructive approach to reading Hardenberg has been taken by Marina Krug who argues that the crossing of gender identities should be seen as part of Hardenberg's "desire to become immortal, i.e. to transgress the boundaries of one's body and one's identity" (7). But Krug also suggests that Hardenberg's "masking" of gender identity can be understood as a "homoerotic gesture" (explaining, elsewhere, that Hardenberg had said she was not lesbian) and argues that the desire to transgress all bodily identity is, really, a "problematizing of gender identity" (23). In spite of her interesting and detailed textual analysis, Krug settles for an extra-textual interpretation, interpreting Hardenberg's work as a result of her real-life experience as woman, Jew and poet (57). To explain why the male figures are disabled, Krug reads them as personifications of Hardenberg's socially marginalized "I." This seems to contradict her earlier observation that the use of a

masculine persona may constitute a transgression of actual boundaries. In any event, the act of marking an "I" as different (from an other) by taking on a persona shows how the artificial identity of social roles can be used as a mask. This mask, in Hardenberg, is a handicap to the subject for which it provides physical stability.

In a 1914 poem, "Der Bucklige spricht" [The hunchback speaks], a first-person speaker urges an other to approach and enter his body which is like a cathedral:

Der Bucklige spricht

Die Glaswände sind zerbrochen zwischen uns,  
 Ich sehe dich viel klarer  
 Und bin freigeschüttelt.  
 Du, ich muß Riese sein.  
 Ich bin so weit,  
 Daß du in meine Kirche wandern muß  
 Und alle frommen Dinge sehen.  
 Ich will, daß du jetzt alles weißt von mir.  
 Hör, meine Glocke brüllt für dich, nach dir,  
 Wie Feuer schlägt sie in mich ein,  
 Bis du sie niederlegst mit deinem Willen,  
 Ihr Tönen meiner Schmerzen wandelst.  
 Komm, eh ich sterbe,  
 Komm, eh ich mich begraben muß vor dir,  
 Damit ich dich nicht töte.

[The hunchback speaks

Glasswalls have broken down between us,  
 I see you much more clearly  
 And am shaken free.  
 You, I must be gigantic  
 I am so wide,  
 That you must wander into my church  
 And see all pious things.  
 I want you to know everything about me now.  
 Listen, my bell cries out for you, after you,  
 Striking me like fire,  
 Until you defeat it with your will  
 Changing its sound of my pain.

Come, before I die,  
 Come, before I have to bury myself in front of  
 you,  
 So I don't have to kill you.]

Because this body is not an organic landscape but a building, the voice is confined to a particular place. Magnifying the condition of the physical disability, the poem conveys the corporeality of the hunchback as a figure restricted by his body and doomed to live in it. Instead of merging with an external environment, the internal space expands into a building, allowing entry by another. Although the hunchback is immobile, expansion does enable him to draw the "you" into himself. Metaphorically, the body is transformed into a hollow space, a church, while the poem itself can be visualized in a shape that "bulges" like a hunchback. The "Schmerzen" [pains] of physical deformation are oppressive to the other: the hunchback voices his need by demanding attention in a voice that is a bell, publically audible from a distance; declaring that he is forced to be a "Riese" [giant] he turns himself into an institution accessible to everybody. The rhetoric used by the hunchback evokes liberation by destruction (zerbrechen, freischütteln, einschlagen) and spiritual movement (sehen, wandern, wissen, wandeln) so that the physical expansion is matched by an emotional openness. Perhaps it is because of his vulnerability and awareness of physical limitations that the hunchback so vehemently declares his desire.

He "cries out" ("brüllen") in desperation over his distance from the other, exerting pressure on the "you" to the point of threatening to commit suicide or murder. The poem shows similarities to "Gefühl," where Hardenberg uses the spatial imagery of becoming "wide" for an other and the demand for love, "Du mußt mich lieben" [you must love me], yet she portrays the hunchback as someone able to exert pressure onto others because of his disability. His unfortunate physical shape provides him with an identity forceful enough to conceive of the confrontation between self and other in terms of will power ("ich will...deinem Willen"). His passionate outcry is a verbalization of the non-verbal sound exerted by the bell: "Hör, meine Glocke brüllt für dich, nach dir" [Listen, my bell is roaring for you, after you]. Representing the voice, the bell is an object, part of his metaphorical body, the church, yet he speaks about it in the third person. The bell's tolling, "Komm...Komm" [Come...Come], rings in the threat of suicide and death.

Clearly, Hardenberg portrayed more of a "person" here than in texts where the "I" keeps changing its appearance. Because his physical shape is unalterable, the hunchback has a fixed identity and is able to address his opposite in a dramatic monologue. He suffers from an irresolvable conflict; death, for him, is not a state of suspense or a possibility for spiritual renewal but a weapon to turn against himself or the other. Imprisoned in his body, the

hunchback seems to "speak" ("spricht"), as the title tells, in order to draw the reader into his space. This space provides him with an identity as a particular body, yet it also reduces him to a mere body. Just as the church seems to have more substance than the shifting landscapes, the aggressiveness with which the voice addresses the "you" creates the illusion of a particular identity. It is an illusion because neither the voice (bell) nor the body (church) are autonomous to represent a coherent self and the hunchback suffers from this limitation.

In another poem, "Blinder Mann" [Blind Man], written in 1918, a man first experiences a state of bodilessness, due to a lack of visual perception, which then leads to a construction of internal space:

Blinder Mann

Ich ging nur tastend,  
Blutige Finger über Leben legend,  
Schleichende Füße öffneten keinen Weg.

Auf mir Hügel gebaut,  
Durch mich Täler,  
Wandern die Hände über gepreßtes Land.

Keine Blicke stürzten in andere hin,  
Aus mir standen nicht Morgen auf  
Und nicht sanfte Laternen zur Nacht.

Lächeln nicht zum Horizont,  
Aus der Welt,  
Hinein drang ich auf umringende Wand.

Winterfenster, glitzernd gespannt,  
Erwarte ich das Zerrissensein -  
Zum Frühling zu gehen,

Bloß wie ein Kind aus dem Mutterleib

Aus mir selbst zu erstehen,  
Zu Leben und Tod. (D 28)

[Blind Man

I walked, groping,  
laying bleeding fingers across life,  
my feet were hovering, not opening a path.

Hills built upon me,  
Valleys through me,  
my hands wander across a squeezed land.

Glances did not hurl themselves into others,  
mornings did not rise from me  
no soft lanterns for the night.

Smiling not at the horizon,  
out of this world,  
I pressed to the inside at a surrounding wall.

Windows of winter, glistening tensely,  
I wait to be torn to pieces -  
To walk towards spring,

To bring myself into existence  
naked like a child from the womb  
into life and death.]

Grouped among the anti-war poems in Neigungen (as opposed to "Der Bucklige spricht," which belongs to the love poems), "Blinder Mann" suggests injury rather than innate blindness: the opening lines of the poem present someone who has "blutige Finger" [bleeding fingers] and difficulty finding his way. And, although the poem ends with a reference to birth, the figure of the blind man is marked by negativity, as the poem contains a total of five negations (keinen, keine, nicht, nicht, nicht). Although the division into stanzas of three lines gives the poem an orderly appearance, the blind man's desorientation is reflected in

the irregular occurrence of rhymes and the changes between past and present tense. There is little difference in pitch and the choice of words does not offer points of emphasis, where stress occurs naturally; while the rhythm appears to be monotonous, suggesting linearity, it is also uneven, picking up speed and breaking off at times, as if to imitate the blind man's groping movement. The narrative consists in shifts away from the negative external space towards the blind man's interior. Escaping the external space that passes through his body, he withdraws: "Aus der Welt/Hinein drang ich auf umringende Wand" [out of this world/I pressed to the inside at a surrounding wall]. Sensing himself from inside, against the wall that separates inside from outside (his skin!), the blind man finds a "Fenster" [window]; "Winter" [winter] turns into "Frühling" [spring]; the poem ends abruptly, with a line that seems too short in relation to the rest, with reference to life and death in the abstract, grammatically on the same level (through the paratactical use of "and"), with nothing in between.

Originally suffering from his disability, the blind man gains a different sense of himself, when he visualizes his body as the site of creation. His seeming withdrawal from the world is a way of returning to it. After the fragmentation of "Zerrissensein" [being torn to pieces] he compares himself to a "Kind" [child] and his body becomes the "Mutterleib" [womb]. Although the poet's voice seems to take on a persona defined by masculinity and blindness, the

poem is "blind" to these restrictions: invoking the supernatural, Hardenberg discards the blind man's body by negating its existence: despite the allusion to an objective outside world, he lives in a subjective world of fantasy. Because he is unable to objectify his own body by situating himself in a visually perceived landscape, he succumbs to his imagination. The poem marks a shift from a literal representation of physical blindness to blindness as metaphor for the lack of distance between a self and its body that encompasses a different way of conceptualizing space and its boundaries. The blind man's freedom to reinvent himself is born from claustrophobia but the end marks a new beginning. The blind man, unlike the hunchback who is in need of an other, is able to recreate himself. Having left the impossible path of his memory, i.e. the temporal dimension in which space is immaterial, he finds a place within from which to forget the passing of time, i.e. the passing of things through his body. When he can no longer be defined and objectified externally, in terms of a physical shape and/or social persona, the problem of subjectivity can be solved through the invention of a new self.

#### **Conclusion: Twilight Zones**

As I have attempted to show, Hardenberg's exploration of subjectivity takes place as a re-configuration of the body in space. Her texts are flexible and in motion, like the body of a dancer, driven by the desire to transgress the

physical. The voice that speaks withdraws from the body of the text, constructing a frame around it, replacing the illusion of centeredness with the promise of a beyond. The structural body of the text contains a metaphorical body that expands and shifts between the human and the natural. Because of her emphasis on nature imagery, such as earth, trees, rivers and birds, Vollmer interprets Hardenberg's technique of turning human beings into objects and personifying objects in turn as a return to an "Urzustand" [primordial condition] (D 135). Nature and the body, Hardenberg's main tropes, are always related, as in "the heart of a tree," or the description of her skin as a frozen pond in a wintry landscape. And, because many of her texts deal primarily with the human body, using, for example, the motif of the dancer or the story of a sexual encounter, Vollmer sees the overarching theme of her work in a "Verwandlung des Ich" [transformation of self<sup>4</sup>] (SH 190). My own reading of Hardenberg connects the notion of "primordial condition" with the "self" in a different way: rather than a "transformation of self," her texts show a voice and a body that have not yet come into existence as a coherent self. In

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<sup>4</sup> I have translated the "Ich" as "self" because it is not the linguistic signifier "I" that Vollmer refers to but, rather, the "ego." Since my own argument rests on the assumption that neither self nor ego have been developed in Hardenberg's work, and considering that not all texts use the "I," I am using the general term "self" when referring to an overarching concept (combining subjectivity and subjecthood).

this sense, Hardenberg alludes to the "primordial," which is synonymous with the pre-verbal, in order to show the struggle involved in representing a "self" to begin with. Furthermore, her preoccupation with the body seems to raise the question to what extent the self is based on a bodily image, and how this image can be altered or effaced in representation.

Up to this point, I have tried to illustrate how Hardenberg's texts upset the spatial boundaries between inside and outside, surface and depth, self and other, with metaphors of movement. Eruption and withdrawal delineate the body in a state of suspense, often in relation to an "other" who enters the internal landscape and is received as a lover. Nonetheless, the "I" refuses to define itself against an "other." Instead, the body becomes "other" to itself, changing its shape from solid to liquid and transporting the voice through a text where the "I" becomes a disembodied floating signifier. In my last example, the 1918 prose poem "Bewegter Mensch" [Moved human being], the subject is afloat in water and air as part of the objective world, without encountering the resistance of physical boundaries:

Bewegter Mensch

Ich bin ein Fluß, über keine Landstraße gehe  
 ich mehr, die Steine sind versunken. Ich bin ein  
 voller Fluß. Vom Winde werde ich getrieben, ich  
 reibe mich an mir, ich bin so viel ich. In mir die  
 Glätte und der Schein, meine bunte Haut oben  
 ausgerollt. Die Flügel von Vögeln durch mich.  
 Geisterhände an mein Herz. Die Sonne kommt

herunter. Ich schreie. Weiß stehe ich auf und bekenne.

[Moved human being

I am a river, I no longer walk across any country road, all stones are submerged. I am a full river. I am drifting with the wind, brushing myself against myself, I am so much I. Smoothness and brightness inside of me, my colorful skin rolled out above. Wings of birds through me. Ghostly hands at my heart. The sun comes down. I scream. I get up, white, and confess.]

Lacking a solid shape, the "I" is no longer in need of a center. It floats through space until solidified by a narrative. The ephemeral "I" is transformed from a spectral voice into a resurrected body who screams. The text performs the expansion "ich bin so viel ich" [I am so much I], as the voice identifies with the elements of water and wind. There is an "in mir" [inside of me], but its external border, the skin, is detached and the phrase "meine bunte Haut oben ausgerollt" [my colorful skin rolled out above] refers to a space, "oben" [above], that marks the speaker's position as below. But the "I" is also in the air, where "Flügel von Vögeln" [wings of birds] pass through her, and it remains, up until this moment, like water and wind, in constant flux. While the elements of the texts belong to the objective natural world, the recurring linguistic designation "I" provides the illusion of constancy, though the speaker is bodiless.

With the "Geisterhände an mein Herz." [ghostly hands at my heart], the condition is marked as supernatural and the

"I" recognizes its immateriality. As with the blind man who gives birth to himself, after the passing of the landscape through him causes him to turn elsewhere for physical identity, the recognition of a self without body here is followed by a new beginning, a kind of resurrection. There is a switch from the natural (e.g. wings of birds) to the metaphysical, where the "I" is arrested by "Geisterhände" [ghostly hands]. Like shadows, they enter the textual space and force the "I" to recognize the vulnerability of her spectral condition as the sun comes down and marks the passage of time. The "Herz" [heart] is a reminder of the human body and human emotions, to which the "Geisterhände" [ghostly hands] are a threat. The rhythm changes from the wavelike alternation of longer and shorter sentences to a succession of seemingly disconnected sentences. While the phrase "Die Sonne kommt herunter" [The sun comes down] marks a return to the natural, it does not contain the "I" (it also differs from the everyday description of a sunset, "Die Sonne geht unter" [The sun goes down]). The speaker's screaming ("schreien") suggests that something terrible has happened, as if the "I" had been at play and now, suddenly, recognizes the horror of its bodilessness. Indeed, the section preceding the scream may also resemble a nightmare, as it conveys a sense of stasis by relying on prepositions instead of verbs. The scream announces the return to

corporeality and the "I" rises ("aufstehen") with a physical appearance, being "weiß" [white]. The positive transformation of the "I" into water and wind is lost when the poet becomes aware, through her own voice (the scream), of temporality (the sun). Touched by "ghostly hands," the spectral condition of the "I" becomes a body lying on the ground. The whiteness is the result of shock over death, whereas "aufstehen" [getting up] is resurrection ("auferstehen" in German). The scream is followed by "confession" ("bekennen"). What she confesses to remains open. However, in spite of the poem's apocalyptic connotations, it may be the pleasure of the illusion that it is possible to sense oneself without the limitations of a physical body.<sup>5</sup>

To conclude, in "Bewegter Mensch," Hardenberg's work presents us with an "I" unhinged from the body it inhabits. In all of her texts, her poetic voice is engaged in frequent shifts of perspective, escaping the confines of positionality. The landscapes she describes turn into the speaker's body, and the reader is drawn into the interior space of a "self" that has no outside and, therefore, no particular shape by which it could be defined; distinguishing between voice and body, Hardenberg raises

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<sup>5</sup> Apocalypse, as well as screaming, are of course frequently used topoi of Expressionism. Nevertheless, Hardenberg uses them in a rather unconventional fashion.

doubt over the nature of self. As the voice loses itself in the space of its utterances, her writing emphasizes death and physical transformation. The voice speaks from beyond, being always elsewhere, displaced from its identity as a human being through a language that traces the borderline of what can be said without a physical center, an other, a persona. Perhaps, the body that rises from the dead confesses that it speaks from a non-existing place, a place constructed by a language that is unable to provide repose to the subject before the threshold of death.

In the contradiction between a body and the voice, Hardenberg explores the possibilities of poetic language. Her bodies signify the material world that figurative language is able to transcend. They function as a metaphor for text, a metaphorical "body" which, like the physical body, functions as a container for an "I." But because Hardenberg linguistically creates the illusion of a natural body that precedes speech, she gives the impression that the "body" she refers to is language. Inscribing itself into an environment whose boundaries are permeable and flexible like the surface of the human body, the spectral voice is able to survive the very tension it continues to generate.

CHAPTER THREE  
NIGHTWOOD: OF MADNESS AND  
 REFLECTING SHADOWS

**Introduction: Of Darkness and the Night**

As I have tried to demonstrate in the preceding chapter on Hardenberg's poetry, Freud's concept of "primary narcissism" can, in fact, be articulated. In this chapter, I will turn to Barnes' novel, Nightwood, which relates to Freud's concept of the "ego ideal" as follows.

Barnes, like many of her contemporaries - notably William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce - experimented with narrative and linguistic technique to the extent that her text is, by definition, self-reflective. Her idiosyncratic style, used by both narrator and characters,<sup>1</sup> draws the reader's attention to the way in which language shapes "content." As my analysis will show, the overall structure of the novel is also self-reflective because it can be divided into two parts, with the second half reflecting back on the first: most of the action takes place in the first half and is discussed by the characters in the second, so that the plot comes almost to a standstill.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Hildesheimer, in his afterword to the German translation, Nachtgewächs (Suhrkamp, 1971), argues that the identity of the characters is blurred into subjectivity because they are using the same linguistic register ("das Sprachregister wird auf die Handvoll Sprecher verteilt; damit wird die Identität der Personen subjektiv verwischt" 193).

Like Narcissus, Barnes' characters are paralyzed by their own insights as to their relationships with one another. These turn out to be self-reflective as well: Nightwood is a love story about Nora Flood, the protagonist and author's alter ego, and Robin Vote, the object of desire, who rarely speaks and is mostly absent from the plot; however, as I will show, Robin is not so much a "character" as she is a reflection of Nora's own subjectivity. Although Robin was, in fact, modeled after Barnes' real-life lover, Thelma Wood, the character is not so much a representation of an actual person, but rather a reflection of the other characters' desire (including Robin's husband, Felix Volkbein, and her new lover, Jenny Petherbridge). What the novel represents, vis-à-vis Freud's definition of "the narcissistic type," is not so much the narcissistic identification with a real love object, but rather a desire which is objectless, i.e. more closely related to Narcissus' condition in the original myth: Nora's love for Robin is doomed because she cannot merge with the image that represents her own self-reflection.<sup>2</sup>

Compared to Hardenberg's poetry, in which a fragmented body merges with its environment while trying to transcend

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<sup>2</sup> This is consistent with Carolyn Allen's psychoanalytic reading of the novel as a representation of lesbian desire. Another useful essay on this topic is "A Story beside(s) Itself: The Language of Loss in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*" by Victoria L. Smith PMLA March 1999, 114:2, 194-206.

physical limitations, Barnes' characters depend on one another as projective surfaces, so that their identities become fixed in space. Speaking to one another, their "I" does not lose itself like Hardenberg's, and while Hardenberg's voice is lyrical, Barnes' novel borders on parody: having been a journalist as well, Barnes "sketches" people in broad strokes and, often, tends to turn them into types. Insofar as the novel draws attention to its own artificiality, the reader is unlikely to interpret its characters in realistic terms. Instead, they tend to have a cartoonish quality but, unlike figures in a real parody, they are also too serious to be really funny. Instead of laughing, the reader is likely to want to empathize with them and, therefore, I would hesitate to actually interpret the novel as a parody (this in spite of the fact that a number of passages, such as the description of Jenny Petherbridge, are hilarious). Within the confines of this project, I will limit myself to certain aspects of this novel, as they relate to my topic, narcissism.

Ironically, the characters seem to suffer less from the realities of their lives than from the limitations of language, i.e. their ability to represent themselves to one another: Nora's speeches, for example, evoke a reality of dreams and illusions which appears to be captured only insufficiently by her words. At the same time, they are

extremely eloquent to the point of sheer cynicism, an attitude which appears to deflect a more profound sense of loneliness.

One character, in particular, dominates the novel: Dr. Matthew O'Connor, a transvestite who claims to be a gynecologist, functions as an additional narrator as well as a counterpart to Nora who comes to confide in him about her sorrow over her failed relationship with Robin. As I will show, Matthew and Nora represent different points of view when it comes to understanding the nature of the "night," which is the novel's leitmotif. Structurally, the "night" manifests itself in terms of its "descent" into the darkness of desire and anxiety from what we may presume to be the light of reason: the narrative does not progress horizontally, through time, but vertically, into a dreamlike universe where strange visions illuminate the darkness but also arrest the flow of narrative.

In fact, Nightwood depicts physical, mental, and cultural decay but it does so without taking the moral highground: being neither tragedy nor comedy, it transgresses generic conventions and challenges the reader's expectations as to what is supposed to be "normal" in the first place. The characters are thus likely to generate a profound sense of sympathy within the reader who, through

them, may come to perceive his or her own essential "otherness."

In fact, as I would like to argue, the novel responds to Freud's paradigm of an "actual" and an "ideal" self by insisting on the "ideal" as a surface without which the notion of "actual" would not exist: the novel contains relatively little action, often condensed in only a few pages, which is then followed by lengthy philosophical discussions in which the characters reflect about their lives in abstract and poetic terms. This is, in effect, how they define themselves, through representations which are performative rather than "expressive."

Although everyone in Nightwood suffers, everyone is primarily concerned with appearances. Descriptions of interior designs and costumes abound, providing the characters with an identity which competes with "nature." In fact, as should become more clear from my reading, the novel's juxtaposition of theatricality and biology effectively challenges the Freudian opposition between "nature" and "culture" which I have discussed in my first chapter. In Nightwood, everything takes place in the darkness of night, and yet, everything is also directly on the surface, providing the illusion of depth like Narcissus' reflection in the pool.

In fact, Nightwood seems focused on the relationship between language and images. Instead of time passing chronologically, as in many novels which depict events according to some kind of logic, such as cause and effect, the plot here is reduced to different viewpoints reflecting on a limited number of central scenes. As Joseph Frank observes, the "chapters are knit together [...] not by the progress of any action but by the continual reference and cross-reference of images and symbols that must be referred to each other spatially throughout the time-act of reading" (32). This "cross-referencing," in turn, has a maddening effect upon the reader who is likely to find that, in spite of what appears to be an intricately designed pattern, the "images and symbols" never quite connect into a coherent whole. In this, Barnes technique, despite its emphasis on the intricacies of linguistic experimentation, is closer to Faulkner's than to Joyce's: like Faulkner in The Sound and the Fury (1929), she depicts a universe which appears to be "mad" in that it cannot be deciphered by the reader; and, even though her Jewish character, Felix Volkbein, has been compared to Leopold Bloom in Joyce's Ulysses (1922), her description, which borders on the anti-semitic, brings her closer to the issues of "blood" and racial identity in Faulkner's Light in August (1932). Still, as I would like to point out, Barnes' problematic emphasis on biological

"descent" is successfully countered by her insistence on masquerade.

Interestingly, an apparent conflict between "nature" and "art" is part of Barnes' biography, which I will briefly sketch before my actual analysis of the novel begins: According to Philip Herring, Barnes' most recent biographer, she was born "in a log cabin on a mountain overlooking the Hudson River" (xvi) and grew up in a rustic setting in a relatively poor family. Apparently influenced by transcendentalism, her family educated their children at home, an environment promoting, supposedly, artistic and sexual freedom. Barnes' father, Walt, openly practiced polygamy and Djuna grew up in a set of two families, headed by her paternal grandmother, Zadel, who once ran a literary salon in London (where she was friends with, among others, Oscar Wilde's mother). Djuna was close to her grandmother and, apparently, Zadel helped her in becoming a writer. In 1915, Barnes was able to move to Greenwich Village and to support herself, as well as part of her family, by working as a journalist and playwright. She became associated with Eugene O'Neill's Provincetown Players, for which she wrote a number of plays, and, in 1920, was sent to Paris by McCall's Magazine.

In Paris, Barnes fell in love with Thelma Wood, an artist. Nightwood is about their nine-year relationship and

many of the details in the novel, for example the description of Nora and Robin's apartment, match the reality of their life together. Wood's last name, as critics have pointed out, is part of the novel's title, whereas "Robin" alludes to Thelma's pet name "Bird."<sup>3</sup> Most of the other characters are based on real people as well, for example the doctor, who is modeled after Dan Mahoney, a friend of Barnes, to whom she "would sit for hours listening to, often taking copious notes, which became the basis for O'Connor's monologues in her novel" (210).

While it is tempting to interpret the novel in relation to the author's life, an autobiographical approach seems counter-productive to me because this would only reduce Barnes' formal accomplishments to another narrative. Due to its opacity, one might feel the need to supplement Barnes' text with information about the author's life because it seems inexplicable otherwise, yet such an approach would only compromise the fragility of its dreamlike structure. For example, the cryptic final scene, where Robin plays with Nora's dog, is hardly illuminated by the fact that, supposedly, the scene was suggested by Barnes' "friend Fitzi, who once, when drunk, playfully pretended that her dog, Buffy, was her sweetheart" (Herring 168). And, although

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<sup>3</sup> Robin's last name, "Vote," may refer to the suffragette movement in which Barnes was active; "Nora" evokes Ibsen's

Barnes' life is interesting enough to have become the subject of as much as four biographies, she herself wished to be known on account of her artistic merit, reacting with hostility towards critics who discussed Nightwood in terms of, for example, its sexual content.<sup>4</sup>

The apparent confusion over how to read Barnes starts with T.S. Eliot, whose endorsement, supposedly, helped secure Nightwood's success. Careful not to make any definite statements, Eliot's original preface focuses on what the novel is not: it is neither "a collection of individual portraits," nor "a psychopathic story" nor "a philosophical treatise" (xiv); while Eliot does "not want to suggest that the distinction of the book is primarily verbal, and still less that the astonishing language covers a vacuity of content" (xi), his comparison to Elizabethan tragedy does not take into consideration the specificity of Barnes' style. In fact, Eliot, according to Miriam Fuchs, altered

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feminist heroine; "Flood" may indicate Nora's feeling of being swept away by her feelings for Robin.

<sup>4</sup> In allusion to the fact that people were more interested in her life than in her work, Barnes described herself as "the century's most famous unknown." She preferred formalist criticism, notably by Joseph Frank, to attempts at interpreting her work in terms of its sexual or political content, notably by Kenneth Burke, whom she did not grant permission for citation (his essay, "Version, Con-, Per-, and In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood* " was printed with blank spaces in lieu of quotes). In general, Barnes' reception says more about the various academic trends by which it has been informed than about her actual

the manuscript by deleting "sexually charged words like 'faggot,' 'fairy,' and 'queen'" not only to escape censorship, but also because he wanted to "distan[c]e himself from Nightwood's treatment of nonheterosexuality [because] he knew, that Nightwood is an autobiographical fiction that Barnes drew from one decade of her life in Paris" (293).

In more culturally oriented autobiographical terms, Shari Benstock situates the text within the socio-historical context of the Left Bank expatriate community, which included famous modernists such as Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso, as well as the lesbian salon of Natalie Barney (the so-called "amazone of letters") where women writers, such as Barnes, had a chance to read their manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> According to Benstock, Nightwood is about "the tragic effect of woman's estrangement from her own self" (263) and one may only speculate to what extent this applies to Barnes. Within the milieu of the Paris expatriate scene, photographs from the time depict an elegantly dressed, beautiful woman, whose apparent self-confidence commands attention. In later

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text, which, consequently, exhibits a remarkable capacity for deflection.

<sup>5</sup> For information on the Left Bank literary expatriate scene, which included Janet Flanner writing for The New Yorker and Sylvia Beach co-founding the bookstore Shakespeare & Co., see the documentary film Paris was a Woman (1996). Alexandra Busch's Ladies of Fashion: Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney und das Paris der 20er Jahre (Bielefeld: Haux, 1989) also contextualizes this milieu.

pictures, however, after her return from Europe in the early forties, Barnes' face shows the traces of her alcoholism. Less fortunate than some of her contemporaries, such as Gertrude Stein or Peggy Guggenheim who were both independently wealthy (in fact, Guggenheim occasionally helped to support Barnes), Barnes eventually had to refrain from the kind of socializing she was used to in Europe. Back in New York, she rarely left her tiny apartment in the Village (maybe because she had so little money) and became known as a "recluse."

Sadly, during the over forty years of her life after the publication of Nightwood, Barnes never stopped writing, yet published only a rarely produced play, The Antiphon (1958), which deals with her family background in terms of violence and abuse. In 1928, she had published, among other things, a bestseller, Ryder, in which she parodied her family. Based on these works, critics interpreted her life and work in terms of her childhood, including the possibility of incest and sexual abuse, but again, I am not sure such an approach is helpful in understanding Barnes' art.

### **The Birth of the "Great Past"**

Nightwood takes place in a Europe of overwrought interiors, statues, castles, works of art, and aristocratic

families. In the opening passage, the narrator conveys the impression of a decadent atmosphere in which birth and death coincide:

Early in 1880, in spite of a well-founded suspicion as to the advisability of perpetuating that race which has the sanction of the Lord and the disapproval of the people, Hedvig Volkbein, a Viennese woman of great strength and military beauty, lying upon a canopied bed, of a rich spectacular crimson, the valance stamped with the bifurcated wings of the House of Hapsburg, the feather coverlet an envelope of satin on which, in massive and tarnished gold threads, stood the Volkbein arms, - gave birth, at the age of forty-five, to an only child, a son, seven days after her physician predicted that she would be taken. [...] She named him Felix, thrust him from her, and died. (3)

Starting with the figure of a year, the narrator endows the birth with the significance of an actual historical event, magnified by a succession of large-scale concepts ("race," "Lord," "people"). The gaudy decor gains weight through its design and the entire passage seems overwrought. Loaded with references and details, it has a list-like quality and a monotonous rhythm which distracts the reader away from its semantic content, the birth. Retrospectively, it appears as if the birth is the result of a pressure exerted from the accumulation of clauses, from beneath which Hedvig, the grammatical subject, emerges only to find her own end.

Considering that birth and death occur almost simultaneously, this initial scene is emblematic for the

novel as a whole: in addition to numerous references to death and disintegration, all narrative movement is followed by stagnation through the insertion of descriptions and reflective commentary. In keeping with this, the passage builds some kind of momentum, then dies down at the very moment of birth. As if the narrator were to remove herself from the grandiose setting she just established, the background no longer works as an introduction to what now appears to be an almost anti-climactic event, related in a matter-of-fact tone. Whichever action Nightwood's plot advances, it is bound to be reflected by such distancing moves. Descriptions become self-fulfilling prophecies and a seemingly downwards-spiraling syntactical structure is connected with the novel's overall theme of "descent." Matthew's wish: "How more tidy would it have been to have born old and have aged into a child, brought finally to the brink, not of the grave, but of the womb" (83) can be read as a paradigm for the way in which the novel revolves around the notion of retroactive growth. Throughout, time itself is described in terms of death.

As the novel is organized around the idea of physical decay, the cultural references here are characterized by "descent." A discourse of culture (history) is connected to a discourse of nature (biology) in the way in which Hedvig "thrusts" her newborn from her as if she were an animal, quite in contrast to the artificiality of her environment. What marks Hedvig herself as human is her name and the fact

that she names her son before she dies. The name, Volkbein, appears in conjunction with the House of Hapsburg as yet another sign of the pretense to historical truth into which Felix is born. Unlike the House of Hapsburg, the Volkbein coat of arms is fictitious but the reader, ironically, does not learn what it looks like. Translating into the image of a "leg of (the) people," the compound word appears to be related to the German word "Fußvolk" (footmen/infantry). Appropriately situated between the words "stood" and "arms," (the latter connoting weapons and human limbs) the name suggests a pompous militarism which dominates the design of the entire bed, including its content, Hedvig.

The narrator frequently describes people submerged by the surfaces of their environment, as in the case of a trapeze artist in whose "face was the tense expression of an organism surviving in an alien element" and whose body "seemed to have a skin that was the pattern of her costume" (12). Just as the trapeze artist is described in terms of her profession, Hedvig is described in terms of her reproductive capacity, a capacity which seems, however, vital to the environment in which she appears.

Hedvig's death is accompanied by a reference to time in terms of accurate predictability by a physician, performed according to the requirements of historical continuation in that she continues the family line. As if to mock the emphasis on descent, however, Felix carries on the family name and title as an orphan who drifts about aimlessly and

desperately wishes for an heir without being himself in any historical "place" by virtue of his "blood." Having briefly recounted the family's history, the narrator skips ahead thirty years: "what had formed Felix from the date of his birth to his coming to thirty was unknown to the world, for the step of the wandering Jew is in every son" (8). Felix continues to pursue the illusion of aristocracy, like his Jewish father who, as we learn, married Hedvig on account of her Aryan heritage and obliterated his Jewish background with a "pretense to a Barony [...] a coat of arms that he had no right to and a list of progenitors (including their Christian names) who had never existed" (5). In contrast to his father, Felix feels most comfortable in the company of circus people, being so fascinated by glamour that he does not care whether what it represents is real or not. However, he ingratiates himself by bowing to anyone in sight who seems superior (which is, to his mind, almost everyone) and "his embarrassment took the form of an obsession for what he called 'Old Europe': aristocracy, nobility, royalty" (9). Left with two life-sized portraits of his grandparents that turn out to be reproductions of "two intrepid and ancient actors" (7), Felix is attracted to the masquerade of the circus people because they adorn themselves with false aristocratic titles. His need for pretense is reminiscent of the description of the bed in which he was born, in which items like the "feather coverlet" of satin with the "massive and tarnished gold threads" are on the same level as

"history." A stereotypical product of his environment, Felix only confirms the narrator's initial "suspicion as to the advisability of perpetuating that race which has the sanction of the Lord and the disapproval of the people" as having been, unfortunately, "well-founded."

Subjected to this vicious circle, Felix does not have a place in the novel either. Except for another brief appearance in chapter six, his character is limited to being a husband and father to Robin Vote before she meets Nora. When Barnes' editor, Emily Coleman, wondered why Felix was not edited out of the novel, Barnes replied, in a letter of 8 November 1935, that his function was to counter the belief "that women would not fall in love with one another if a man had slept with them, if they had been well f----- and had borne a child" (Plumb xviii). A leftover from an earlier project by Barnes, "a book in progress whose chief figure is an Austrian Jew" which she decided to abandon when starting to work on Nightwood (Plumb ix), Felix is an orphan on a metatextual level as well. Not "related" to the rest of the novel, he may also be seen as providing a point of departure to question the concept of personal and cultural "history": his story sets up an opposition between history as narrative movement, and stagnation (i.e. "death") which the rest of Nightwood sets out to undo. The whole first chapter (appropriately titled "Bow Down") sets up an atmosphere cluttered with objects and mistaken identities, showing Felix to be confused between his racial background and a

proliferation of signifiers denoting "culture." Partially because of Felix, who may or may not "fit in," the novel raises the question what exactly constitutes a "story."

From the beginning on, the concept of "generation," including the generation of meaning through signs, becomes a questionable enterprise, when it is carried out upon the sacrifice of Hedvig's body. Felix wishes to have "a son who would feel as he felt about the 'great past'" (37). Like his father, he looks at his future wife only in terms of "the destiny for which he had chosen her: that she might bear sons who would recognize and honour the past" (42). However, his obsession with descent takes its toll: his son turns out to be retarded.

After dropping Felix from the story, the narrator parts with the concept of narrative as history: the "plot" is reduced to the story of Robin and Nora finding each other, separating, and finding each other again. Most of this is finished taking place by the middle of the book and the book's second half consists mostly of repetition and recollection. In fact, the narrative flow is interrupted for a larger number of pages than the narrative itself takes place: for example, the relationship between Nora and Robin, which is said to last ten years, is narrated in as few as ten pages, but Nora's coming to terms with it in her two lengthy meetings with Matthew takes up over fifty pages. The narrator skips ahead with large "cuts" in which time is condensed (for instance between Felix's birth and his

"coming to thirty"), then uses her characters to reflect upon the time in-between in flashbacks. Dialogues take place in so-called "real time" without any action so that the plot becomes an endless process of reflection.

As the death in childbirth suggests from the beginning on, the novel, which concludes with an image of madness, is a departure from the idea of creation and growth, both of which are shown to take place only to a limited extent. Birth is the point at which death begins by way of deterioration and the next child in the novel is already dead, a doll given to Nora by Robin as their "child." Most of the action takes place in dark interiors: Hedvig's overly decorated chamber, Robin's seedy hotelroom, the bars she frequents at night, the doctor's tomblike apartment, Nora's house and decayed chapel, etc. The only time the characters move through open space is when they are desperately trying to find something or to escape from something: Robin escaping from her child or Nora's jealousy; the doctor looking for male prostitutes; and Nora travelling frantically to find Robin. All are motivated by some kind of desire for self-destruction and the initial scene of death in childbirth, like a kind of omen, foreshadows a conclusion of tragic proportions. As the doctor quotes the metaphysical poet John Donne: "We are all conceived in close prison, in our mother's wombs we are close prisoners all. When we are born we are but born to the liberty of the house - all our

life is but a going out to the place of execution and death" (82).

### **The God of Darkness**

The doctor's first name is Matthew, the name of the author of the first gospel in the New Testament, the so-called "gospel to the Jew" which emphasizes the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah has come. It is designed to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and contains parables about his life, including his teachings. The Matthew of Nightwood, in contrast to his historical predecessor, tells parables about figures like the mad Bavarian King Ludwig of Wittelsbach and his philosophy comes from the "underworld" (31). Preaching a gospel of death instead of birth, his rhetoric plays upon the discourse of religion but will always return to himself: "Jehovah, Saboeth, Elohim, Eloi, Helion, Jodhevah, Shadday! May God give us to die in our own way! I haunt the *pissoirs* as naturally, in search of my man" (77). Describing himself as having "a face like a squirrel's" (27) and "a face on me like an old child's bottom" (77), Matthew is self-deprecating: "by his own peculiar perversity God has made me a liar [...] one who, in common parlance is called a 'faggot,' a 'fairy,' a 'queen'" (64). Calling himself "the Old Woman who lives in the closet" (115), he knows the night which is why people should listen to him: "No man knows it as I know it, I who am the god of darkness" (106).

When Felix meets Matthew at a party in Berlin, he quickly feels "that the evening is already lost [...] and that the whole affair was to be given over to this volatile person who called himself a doctor" (16). This turns out to be true: Felix recedes into the background as soon as the doctor appears on the scene and the novel continues to be dominated by the doctor's presence. The following passage introduces Matthew:

Standing about a table at the end of the immense room, looking as if they were deciding the fate of a nation, were grouped ten men, all in parliamentary attitudes, and one young woman. They were listening, at the moment of the entrance of Felix and the Duchess of Broadback, to a middle-aged 'medical student' with shaggy eyebrows, a terrific widow's peak, over-large dark eyes, and a heavy way of standing that was also apologetic. The man was Dr. Matthew O'Connor, an Irishman from the Barbary Coast (Pacific Street, San Francisco) whose interest in gynecology had driven him half around the world. He was taking the part of host, the Count not yet having made his appearance, and was telling of himself, for he considered himself the most amusing predicament. (13)

Like Felix, Matthew is portrayed in broad strokes, as a caricature, with his physical appearance reduced to the main features of his face and his posture. He too, carries a false title: calling himself a doctor, he is, actually, a "middle-aged 'medical student.'" Later, the narrator confirms that he "was not a licensed practitioner" (34) and his "interest in gynecology" seems to be more of a personal nature, because he wishes to have a female body: "no matter what I may be doing, in my heart is the wish for children

and knitting. God, I never asked better than to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar" (78). Living in Paris, in a "relatively small square, through which tram lines ran in several directions, bounded on the one side by the church and on the other by the court" (30), in a room "so small that it was just possible to walk sideways up to the bed, it was as if being condemned to the grave" (68), it is not Matthew's body but his mind that "is always wandering" (88). His philosophy is reduced to the limitations of the body: "No man can find a greater truth than his kidney will allow" (72). A parody of a prophet who suffers from knowing too much, Matthew is lonely and "telling of himself" is the only way he can relate to people.

The narrator illustrates the power of his speech by the way she presents his listeners "in parliamentary attitudes." But Matthew's speeches are also crucial to the development of the novel. Except for his use of the first-person-perspective, his style and tone are identical with that of the narrator, as if the author had decided to split her voice between an omniscient and a subjective point of view. Donna Gerstenberger puts it this way:

The reader of Nightwood experiences O'Connor largely as *narrative*. The novel inscribes him by story and narrative act (i.e., not to be confused with Barnes or the implied narrator of the novel but as a creator within the larger narrative), whose stories often seem to exist for their own telling. (136)

Usurping the position of the narrator, Matthew's presence draws attention to the narrator's absence and this is exactly how he is introduced: keeping the "guests" (i.e. readers) entertained in lieu of the "host." Turning the novel into a gathering of speakers and listeners, Matthew is in a position to subvert the concept of narrative as a succession of actions governed by cause and effect. His soliloquies are performances of a language consisting of epigrams and obscure allegories. They relate to the events of the story mostly in the abstract.

Not surprisingly, it turns out to be his relationship to Nora, the subject of the novel and his main listener later on, which "troubles" (130) Matthew. Nora becomes one of "the people in my life who have made my life miserable, coming to me to learn of degradation and the night" (133). She is first introduced by the narrator before him, as the anonymous "one young woman" in the group. A couple of pages later, she introduces herself by approaching him with a question about language to which he responds, literally, by paternalizing her:

The young woman, who was in her late twenties, turned from the group, coming closer to Felix and the doctor. She rested her hands behind her against the table. She seemed embarrassed. 'Are you both really saying what you mean, or are you just talking?' Having spoken, her face flushed, she added hurriedly, 'I am doing advance publicity for the circus, I'm Nora Flood.' The doctor swung around, looking pleased. 'Ah!' he said, 'Nora suspects the cold incautious melody of time crawling, but,' he added, 'I've only just started.' Suddenly he struck his thigh with his

open hand. 'Flood, Nora, why sweet God, my girl, I helped to bring you into the world!' (16)

Presenting himself as a kind of midwife to Nora, the doctor positions himself prior to her, even though the narrator mentions her before mentioning him. Instead of answering her question, he asserts his position as a storyteller, regardless whether his audience is interested or not. His attitude is that of a preacher and he later explains that "I talk too much because I have been made so miserable by what you are keeping hushed" (135). Nora, as her question indicates, does not seem to be impressed. As we learn later, she "was an early Christian; she believed in the word" (47). For her, the issue is to find a language which can bridge what she perceives as a discrepancy between internal "truth" and social "appearance." In her capacity of "doing advance publicity for the circus," she represents rather than performs. To her, rhetoric must also represent, namely a greater power whose essence is, however, non-verbal; talking cannot be the frivolous occupation that it seems to be for the doctor. What her question fails to address is that "just talking" is vital to Matthew. Because he seeks to exert power through language, Nora's question seems irrelevant to him. The two linguistic categories which Nora establishes are meaningless to him because "meaning," to him, is speaking. At the end of the party, she admonishes him: "You argue about sorrow and confusion too easily" (19) but she is, again, mistaken: his language consists of self-

fulfilling prophecies and determines even Nora's reality within the universe of the novel.

Addressing Nora as a "girl," he situates himself at the origin of the narrative, a strategy he repeats when called upon to "find" Robin who has passed out in a hotelroom. The story of Nora and Robin becomes Matthew's story, even though he is not directly involved. He becomes the matchmaker for the brief and unhappy marriage between Robin and Felix in chapter two and his prediction that "Nora will leave that girl some day; but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (89) comes true. Each of these instances constructs Matthew's presence as integral to the novel and he seems to "create" the book itself from inside its covers.

Matthew's prophecies can be read in reaction to other characters. For instance, when Nora forces him to listen, he walks out, unable to deal with her lament. He predicts "the end -- mark my words -- now *nothing but wrath and weeping!*" (136), as if to punish her for transgression his domaine (language). When Felix, at the party, laughs at Matthew's phrase "time crawling," Matthew puts him in his place in regard to history: "'The last muscle of aristocracy is madness - remember that -' the doctor leaned forward 'the last child born to aristocracy is sometimes an idiot, out of respect - we go up - but we come down'" (38). The narrator only has to follow along: "... as time passed it became increasingly evident that his child, if born to anything,

had been born to holy decay. Mentally deficient, and emotionally excessive, an addict to death" (90). The figure of time is, after all, central to the way in which Matthew operates: arguing that "we all carry about with us the house of death [...] Time is a great conference planning our end" (109), he places himself in a position prior to time, making it possible for himself to speak endlessly and, thereby, perpetuate the novel. Nora's resistance to Matthew, in this sense, could be read as an opposition to narrative. However, time, for Matthew, contains its own undoing: "In the acceptance of depravity the sense of the past is most fully captured. What is a ruin but Time easing itself of endurance?" (101). Nora's desire for Robin is perceived as ruinous by Matthew as early as chapter three: "The doctor, seeing Nora, out walking alone, said to himself [...] 'There goes the dismantled [...] Out looking for what she's afraid to find - Robin" (54). Later, he expands the metaphor of Nora's dismantlement, this time in connection with performance:

You went about the house like someone sunken under lightness. You were ruined and you kept striking your hands together, laughing crazily and singing a little and putting your hands over your face. Stage tricks have been taken from life, so finding yourself employing them you were confused with a sense of shame. When you went out looking for someone to go mad with, they said, 'For God's sake, look at Nora!' For the demolishing of a ruin is always a fine and terrifying spectacle."  
(119)

As his "reading" of Nora shows, the doctor positions himself to judge the other characters according to his philosophy of decay. Constituting a kind of audience for their internal "spectacles," he is in a position of superiority within the economy of the novel and describes himself not only as a "liar" and a "god" but also as a madman: "I was in on what was wrong with the world [...] and I went mad, I'm like that." And madness, to him, is performance, for example when he talks about the Bavarian King: "if wanting a theater all to yourself is madness, I'm madder than most" (23). Whereas Nora's madness over losing Robin is shown to be "serious" by the narrator, resulting in nightmares and tears, the doctor maintains his ability to distance himself from what happens by way of verbal reflection. Rhetoric allows him to relate to others but it also separates him from people because it is his way of making time, in a seeming deferral of events that would take place differently without his interjections and prophecies. Through speaking, the doctor expands the moment, yet making leaps into the future and the past as if he were not locked into any present situation.

But the god of darkness is not always in control. When Felix searches for him in the streets, he protects himself: "The Baron hailed him, and instantly the doctor threw off his unobserved self, as one hides, hastily, a secret life" (92). When they talk in a café, this impression is repeated: "To his surprise he saw that the doctor had 'deteriorated'

into that condition in which he had seen him in the street, when he thought himself unobserved" (97). Being only human, Matthew's divinity must be shared with another character, Robin Vote, whose powers of reflection make language seem obsolete.

### **A Wild Thing Caught in a Woman's Skin**

In the second chapter, "La Somnambule," the reader is introduced to Robin, the central figure of the novel. Found by hotel personnel as an anonymous "lady in twenty-nine who had fainted and could not be brought out of it" (33), she is presented to the gaze of Felix and the doctor:

On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten, left without the usual silencing cover (which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives), half flung off the support of the cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned her head, lay the young woman, heavy and dishevelled. Her legs, in white flannel trousers, were spread as in a dance, the thick lacquered pumps looking too lively for the arrested step. Her hands, long and beautiful, lay on either side of her face. (34)

The scene reiterates the opening of the novel: the subject of the sentence is introduced only after a series of descriptive clauses and both scenes focus on a woman on a bed (as if to parody this repetition of women in beds, the doctor, at a later point, also appears in a "narrow iron bed [...] in a woman's flannel night gown," 69). But the

atmospheres differ: whereas Hedvig's scene posits a certain point in time and introduces cultural references to identify her, the above passage starts with the location of a body. The opposition between nature and culture to which Hedvig is subjected is mellowed, as the decor here, "potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers," consists of a domesticated nature, enveloping its inhabitants like organic furniture. The narrator compares this image to a painting by Rousseau and explains that Robin "seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room" (34) so that nature and art, around Robin, are intertwined. In fact, "art" replaces "history" when one compares Hedvig's and Robin's setting and, consequently, Robin herself comes to represent timelessness. Nature determines Hedvig only from within (her environment is shown to "lock" her into a culture), but Robin is in harmony with her nature and her environment: lying "flung off the support of the cushions" like birds "left without the usual silencing cover," she evokes dance along with their song; like the birds who remain "unseen" in spite of the missing cover, she offers herself to the viewer's gaze without being mentally present. She is found as if "forgotten" by a "good housewife" and because she is exposed to the gaze of strangers, her visual presence fills the room along with the vocal presence of the birds.

Due to the fact that Robin is asleep, the scene is devoid of action and the way in which her posture suggests a frozen dance only highlights the absence of any dramatic

impulse at the present time. Robin's nature as "La Somnambule" extends even after the doctor has woken her with a splash of cold water in the face. Robin continues to be a static image and her primitive nature is connected with a mythical time which progresses cyclically, by way of "return." The following passage describes Robin's condition through Felix's eyes:

The girl was sitting up. She recognized the doctor. She had seen him somewhere. [...] She closed her eyes, and Felix [...] found himself seeing them still faintly clear and timeless behind the lids - the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye. The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a "picture" forever arranged, is for the contemplative mind the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory [...] as the unicorn is neither man nor beast deprived, but human hunger pressing its breast to its prey. Such a woman is the infected, carrier of the past - before her the structure of our head and jaws ache - we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers. (36)

Although she resembles a mythological figure, she does not actually represent or embody anything. Conceived of in terms of reflection, whoever looks at her will see himself, in this case Felix, who falls in love with her on account of her ability to be a "carrier of the past." As the narrator explains later, "his love for Robin was not in truth a selection; it was as if the weight of his life had amassed

one precipitation. He had thought of making a destiny for himself [...] Then with Robin it seemed to stand before him [...] he was taken aback to find himself accepted, as if Robin's life held no volition for refusal" (40). Passively, Robin destroys Felix' life, doing exactly what he wants her to do. When she gives birth and leaves him with their child, Felix asks the doctor "why did she marry me? It has placed me in the dark for the rest of my life" (95), as if he has not recognized Robin's "chiefest danger" in regard to his own desire.

Robin represents reflection. She is a projective surface, a "picture" which only seems to have depth on account of its ability to absorb the viewer into his own fantasies. Truly oblivious to others, Robin lives in her own world and eludes even the reader's grasp. Rather than being a character, she is a figure, an object on whose "possession" the novel may focus but who forces those who look at her (the "contemplative mind") to look, really, at themselves. Only Matthew is immune to her because he himself lives in "night world" in which Robin exists. Naturally, they recognize each other from the cafés they frequent.

But even though Robin represents nothing, the main metaphor used to describe her is that of the "beast turning human." The way in which she defies temporality appears in connection with animality even during the daytime:

Removed from her setting, - the plants that had surrounded her, the melancholy red velvet of the

chairs and the curtains, the sound, weak and nocturnal, of the birds, - she yet carried the quality of the 'way back,' as animals do [...] She was gracious and yet fading, like an old statue in a garden, that symbolizes the weather through which it has endured, and is not so much the work of man as the work of wind and rain and the herd of the seasons, and though formed in man's image, is a figure of doom. (39)

In keeping with her description as part of a painting, Robin is compared to a statue in nature. Her "animal" nature combines both categories, nature and art, and she comes across as un-selfconscious as well as overly refined. Representing a kind of "essence," Robin does not seem to be dependent on her environment. She does not need to orient herself in space with the help of visual perception and Felix is frightened by "the sensuality in her hands" because "when she touched a thing, her hands seem to take the place of the eye" (40). Gazed upon by others, Robin herself is blind which is why her gaze has "the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye." "Wild" and "unqualified" in her gaze with "no volition for refusal," Robin does not appear to be an agent of her destiny. Her only weapon is the way in which she yields to the gaze, drawing the viewer into her world without doing anything.

Thus, on the one hand, Robin dominates the novel and, on the other, she escapes definition. In fact, on the part of the author herself, there seems to be a struggle over how to articulate her, for she appears to differ with each new

description of her (which is why she appears to be an "essence" in some scenes and a "surface" in others). This is highlighted, for example, by the way in which the clothes Robin wears determine, in effect, her identity:

Her clothes were of a period that he could not quite place [...] heavy silks that made her seem newly ancient. One day he learned the secret. Pricing a small tapestry in an antique shop facing the Seine, he saw Robin reflected in a door mirror of a back room, dressed in a heavy brocaded gown which time had stained in places, in others split, yet which was so voluminous that there were yards enough to refashion. (40)

Here, Robin's clothes come to represent the "newly ancient" way in which she embodies the past and yet it is not the fact that the gown may be from a different period but rather that time itself has stained its fabric without destroying it. Like a kind of magic gown, it seems to have the capacity to renew itself, just like Robin, who seems forever engaged in wandering through the novel, with "yards enough to refashion." It seems as if, literally, the gown "covers" her up instead of revealing what may be underneath. In fact, Robin does not seem to have any substance, so that her very nature seems to consist of what she wears. In actuality, Felix, who believes to discover her "secret," learns nothing about her, except that she is, literally, contained by her own texture. What he sees is, in fact, the reflection of a surface, so that Robin's "secret" is her appearance. And, just like the gown, this appearance yields enough fabric, i.e. language, to be refashioned. Thus Robin

not only represents the reflective surface, onto which the other characters' desires can be projected but also, in the shape of her gown, the novel itself.

If, in fact, the gown is a signifier for the text which represents Robin, it is not surprising that her own language differs from that of the narrator and the other characters. Robin speaks a more "primitive" language of prayers, curses, and songs in response to what is happening to her. Much less eloquent than the other characters, she expresses herself only in situations of physical intensity, for example when she gives birth. Compared to Hedvig, however, Robin's gestures and non-verbal utterances seem much more active: "Amid loud and frantic cries of affirmation and despair, Robin was delivered [...] looking about her in the bed as if she had lost something [...] she kept crying like a child who has walked into the commencement of a horror" (44). In fact, Robin is quite powerful without words and capable of expressing rage in spite of her apparent passiveness: "One night [Felix] found her in the darkness [...] her chin thrust forward that the muscles in her neck stood out. As he came toward her, she said in a fury, 'I didn't want [the child]!' Raising her hand she struck him across the face" (45).

Nevertheless, Robin is said to be "unable or unwilling" to represent herself to the other characters or the reader. This task is left to the doctor, whose function in the novel, as I have explained, is to appear as if he were at

the origin of the narrative. In this sense, he competes with Robin for the reader's attention, making it seem as if he were, in fact, the novel's controlling principle. For example, in the following scene, after Robin has left husband and child, the reader only learns about her whereabouts through the doctor, who continues to remind people that he is in a superior position when it comes to such knowledge:

For three or four months the people of the quarter asked for [Robin] in vain. Where she had gone no one knew. When she was seen again in the quarter, it was with Nora Flood. She did not explain where she had been, she was unable or unwilling to give an account of herself. The doctor said: 'In America, that's where Nora lives, I brought her into the world and I should know.' (45)

Thus he initiates the next chapter, which takes place "in America," and the connection between the three main characters is established (although they are never all together at the same time). Still, the reader may wonder what to make of Matthew's "knowledge," knowing that he is not really the gynecologist he claims to be (and even if he had brought Nora "into the world," he would not necessarily know where she lives or that Robin was with her). In his function as a "narrator" who "gives birth" to characters and their stories, he makes things up (he even calls himself a liar) yet the reader, including the "people" he addresses, must believe him because no other explanation is given. Thus Matthew, in his function as a kind of representative for

Robin, i.e. someone who gives words to her silence, represents the possibility that language may be "false," making Robin's visual presence, paradoxically, seem more true.

Where Matthew is a self-described "god" who actively intervenes into and claims to have created the lives of other characters, Robin can be seen, in Kenneth Burke's words, as "an 'unmoved mover' [...] a kind of God notably different from the God of either the Old Testament or the New. It is the *eromenon*, the *loved*, a God that moves us not by paternal or paternalistic participation in our affairs, but purely as an impassive destination for us to aim at, like a target or a beacon" (243). However, the "primitive innocence" (100) and "perpetual childhood" (113) she embodies comes from a combination of opposites: she has "the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds - meet of child and desperado" and the physical characteristics of both genders, "a tall girl with the body of a boy" (43). Representing a primary narcissism on the one hand, Robin comes to represent madness, in which the self is split, on the other.

The narrator describes her in terms of illness, "a figure of doom [...] When she smiled, the smile was only in the mouth, and a little bitter, the face of an incurable, yet to be stricken with its malady" (39) and, later on, as being "in her own nightmare" (121). Suffering from hallucinations, her "engagements were with something unseen"

(138), even though she continues to have a powerful effect on others: "She was really like those people who, coming unexpectedly into a room, silence the company because they are looking for someone who is not there" (94). Robin's power includes transferring her madness onto others. Her narcissism as well as her madness transfer onto Nora who describes her relationship to Robin as: "She is myself. What am I to do?" (108). Alan Singer explains Robin's effect in terms of her inaccessibility, describing her as "the figure whose negation sustains all the other characters' desire [...] Robin must be denied by her lovers because she is inaccessible to them. [...] Desire [...] is tragically experienced by Barnes's characters as a crushingly narcissistic isolation. (70). Thus it is through the desire of others that Robin has a destructive effect, while her own cruelty is, in turn, based on obliviousness to others. Calling her "a practised whore who turns away from no one but the one who loves her" (51) Nora recognizes that Robin's motivation is based on lack and, therefore, need: "If I asked her, crying, not to go out, she would go just the same, richer in her heart because I had touched it, as she was going down the stairs" (125).

Describing herself as subject to Robin's cruelty, I would argue that Nora increasingly fails to see the narcissistic nature of her own involvement with Robin and that Robin, in turn, reflects only Nora's need to reflect herself. Providing the illusion of being an "other," Robin

is the youth reflected in the pool. Nora's drama, in turn, is her desire to merge, which can be fulfilled only in death. And, in this sense, Robin's narcissism, which seems to be her most defining characteristic (compared to Nora who is not, in actuality, described as being narcissistic), embodies a physical threat to Nora's integrity, which is, perhaps, why Matthew compares Robin to a cat "smiling sideways [...] with canary feathers to account for" (86).

#### **An Image is a Stop the Mind makes between Uncertainties**

As I have tried to explain, Robin represents by virtue of reflection, and this condition resembles that of narcissism. When Felix first sets eyes upon her, it is "as if this girl were the converging halves of a broken fate, setting face, in sleep, toward itself in time, as an image and its reflection in a lake seem parted only by the hesitation in the hour" (37) and, later on, he says to the doctor: "I find that I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her but that is not the same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties" (93). Nora, too, in order to withstand the uncertainty of their relationship, makes images of Robin without having a "clear idea of her." Unlike Felix' imagination, her visions of Robin are not limited to Robin's clothes or her potential place in the family tree but, rather, intimately connected with her own physical and emotional self.

Like Felix, Nora has a background before she meets Robin (whose background we do not learn, as she is a "found object"). Nora has introduced herself as a publicity agent for the circus but it is only in chapter three, "Night Watch," the chapter about their relationship, that she is fully portrayed by the narrator. More than Robin and the doctor, Nora is a typical American (Felix is the novel's only European) and she presides over a group of religious outlaws in a gothic wilderness:

The strangest 'salon' in America was Nora's. Her house was couched in the center of a mass of tangled grass and weeds. Before it fell into Nora's hands the property had been in the same family two hundred years. It had its own burial ground, and a decaying chapel in which stood in tens and tens mouldering psalm books, laid down some fifty years ago in a flurry of forgiveness and absolution.

It was the 'paupers' salon, for poets, radicals, beggars, artists, and people in love; for Catholics, Protestants, Brahmins, dabblers in black magic and medicine; all these could be seen sitting about her oak table before the huge fire, Nora listening, her hand on her hound, the firelight throwing her shadow and his high against the wall. Of all that ranting roaring crew, she alone stood out. The equilibrium of her nature, savage and refined, gave her bridled skull a look of compassion. (46)

Compared to the European gatherings in chapters one and two, the purpose of this salon is to provide sanctuary, not entertainment. Nora projects an image of strength and her later relationship to Robin is characterized by the fact that she provides a home for Robin. But she is also a source of darkness and silence, magnified by a "shadow" which

includes her hound. The whole setting, particularly with the hound, makes her come across as a kind of witch. Considering that the "hound" is the same "dog" which finds Robin in the "decayed chapel," this image foreshadows the end. Including the dog, Nora's personality seems based on mastering the "savage" inside herself in order to achieve an external "equilibrium." However, as the portrait of Nora continues, the narrator explains that "there was some derangement in her equilibrium that kept her immune to her own descent" (47). Puritanical and selfless, Nora "rob[s] herself for everyone" (47) and is forced to realize, later on, that "there's something evil in me, that loves evil and degradation - purity's black backside" (113). In other words, she is depicted with a shadow to symbolize the "shadow" she carries within herself.

While Nora generally appears to be Robin's victim (their relationship ends over Robin's unfaithfulness), it is her own double standard which forces Robin into the role of the villain. As Matthew says: "You were a 'good woman,' and so a bitch on a high plane, the only one able to kill yourself and Robin" (121). Attracted to Robin's essential "otherness," Nora loves Robin to compensate for her lack of self-love: "I thought I loved her for her sake, and I found it was for my own" (125). Just as Robin represents a way of dealing with the weight of history to Felix, she represents a lost part of Nora's self. Before meeting Robin, Nora is emotionally numb: "The world and its history were to Nora

like a ship in a bottle; she herself was outside and unidentified [...] Then she met Robin" (48). To stop Robin's habit of "wandering," Nora draws Robin into her orbit in both the beginning of their relationship and at the end of the book: they meet at a circus performance in New York and again in Nora's chapel.

Nora's main problem is that she is neither privileged nor likeable: "She was by fate one of those people who are born unprovided for except in the provision of herself" (48). Her eyes are described as having "that mirrorless look of polished metals which report not so much the object as the movement of the object" (48). In a position to trace Robin's movements, Nora remains "blind" to the way in which she is affected by the object itself, being able to perceive only its contours. Thus, instead of perceiving Robin, Nora's strategy is to imagine her and Robin, as I have explained, lends herself perfectly to this approach.

While Robin is said to hallucinate, we do not learn what she sees. Nora's visions, on the other hand, can be read as attempts to re-configure her own internal structure through Robin. In the following passage, the narrator tells how Nora incorporates Robin in a kind of "writing," waiting for her to come home at night:

Love becomes the deposit of the heart, analogous in all degrees to the 'findings' in a tomb. As in one will be charted the taken place of the body, the raiment, the utensils necessary to its other

life, so in the heart of the lover will be traced, as an indelible shadow, that which he loves. In Nora's heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora's blood. [...] Nora's mind [...] became so transfixed that, by the agency of her fear, Robin seemed enormous and polarized; all catastrophes ran toward her, the magnetized predicament; and crying out, Nora would wake from sleep, going back through the tide of dreams into which her anxiety had thrown her, taking the body of Robin down with her into it, as the ground things take the corpse, with minute persistence, down into the earth, leaving a pattern of it on the grass, as if they stitched as they descended. (51)

Describing the "heart" as a "tomb," Nora buries Robin inside her body in what seems to be a reverse birth, with the heart acting like a womb. When Robin becomes a threat from growing too large in Nora's imagination, Nora takes her "down with her into" her subconscious (which is the "tide of dreams") now expanding the initial metaphor to bury both of them in the larger womb of the "earth." Interesting here is the connection with a particular technique of representation: Nora refers to an "intaglio of her identity," according to Webster's, "an engraving or incised figure in stone or other hard material depressed below the surface of the material so that an impression from the design yields an image in relief;" as they move in descending she actually describes the process of pressing the image into the surface in a way that could be read as a metaphor for embroidering, i.e. "stitching a pattern," which would be the opposite of engraving. This reversal of modes of representation frames Nora's taking action to fend off

the threat of Robin's engulfment of her. Introducing the element of vertical movement transforms the "tomb" into an active burial, with Nora recasting herself in a different role.

After this scene, Nora and Robin are described together in the following way:

Yet sometimes, going about the house, in passing each other, they would fall into an agonized embrace, looking into each others face, their two heads in their four hands, so strained together that the space that divided them seemed to be thrusting them apart. [...] To keep her (in Robin there was this tragic longing to be kept, knowing herself astray) Nora knew now that there was no way but death. (54)

Like Narcissus wishing to embrace his reflection, Nora feels "that the space that divided them seemed to be thrusting them apart." Death here connotes a static position in which the agonizing "strain" of "looking" is frozen in time. With this passage, visual reflection becomes Nora's main way of relating to Robin, the proximity to whom has brought with it a fear of loss. As I will continue to show, vision becomes the most tangible reality to Nora.

In the following dream, Nora desires to hold Robin, imprisoning her in her gaze. Expanding on the metaphor of a "strained" gaze, Nora's fear of losing Robin is visually magnified within an architectonic construct which, like a substitute body, contains them both:

Nora dreamed that she was standing at the top of a house [...]

Nora looked down into the body of the house, as if from a scaffold, where now Robin had entered the dream, lying among a company below. [...] A disc of light, that seemed to come from someone or thing standing behind her and which was yet a shadow, shed a faintly luminous glow upon the upturned, still face of Robin who had the smile of an 'only survivor,' a smile which fear had married to the bone.

[...] The louder [Nora] cried out the further away went the floor below, as if Robin and she, in their extremity, were a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end, diminishing in their painful love; a speed that ran away with the two ends of the building, stretching her apart. (55)

The dream differs from the earlier vision of their descent, not only because Nora sees Robin escaping from her gaze but also because her position implies a hierarchy in which they are no longer on the same level. Having placed herself "on top," Nora may have saved herself from the depths but also sees herself in danger of losing Robin. Robin is no longer "inside" Nora and now clearly marked as a vision by the "disc of light," with the gaze itself taking on substance. In Nora's dream, visual perception becomes painful because it is connected with Robin (and vice versa). As the doctor observes earlier, when seeing Nora searching for Robin in the streets: "She sees her everywhere [...] Out looking for what she's afraid to find - Robin" (54).

The dream ends with Nora's recognition that "something [is] being done to Robin, Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain" (56) and, in the next scene, reality sets in as yet another painful vision.

After Nora wakes up, she looks out of the window and sees Robin embracing another woman:

[S]he saw a double shadow falling from the statue, as if it were multiplying; and thinking perhaps this was Robin, she called and was not answered. Standing motionless, straining her eyes, she saw emerge from the darkness the light of Robin's eyes, the fear in them developing their luminosity until, by the intensity of their double regard, Robin's eyes and hers met. So they gazed at each other [...] Nora saw the body of another woman [...] her arms about Robin's neck, her body pressed to Robin's [...] Unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech, experiencing a sensation of evil, complete and dismembering, Nora fell to her knees, so that her eyes were not withdrawn by her volition, but dropped from their orbit by the falling of her body. (56)

The difference between what takes place in Nora's imagination and what she really sees consists in her physical reaction: unlike the darkness of the earth, in which a visual pattern emerges only in retrospect, trailing behind the bodies, or the "disc of light" which illuminates Robin but is separate from Nora herself, the gaze is now no longer a medium but part of Nora's body. In order to see, Nora is "straining her eyes" and, when seen by Robin, is "unable to turn her eyes away" until the involuntary "falling of her body" pulls her away from the vision. Whereas the earth and the house are spaces which appear to be part of herself and can contain Robin, the scene in the garden expulses Nora from the illusive paradise of her imagination by presenting her with the truth she has been "afraid to find." Nora is physically cut off from the

connecting gaze by the "falling" of her own body. What began as a way of trying to "hold" Robin, a way of visually representing her during her absences by carefully "stitching" or gradually "stretching," has now turned into a "dismemberment," a separation from Robin which cuts apart the gaze between them (Nora's eyes "drop from their orbit") but also reveals Nora's loss of control over her own body and, in this sense, herself.

Looking back at Nora, Robin, who has been called an "amputated hand for Nora" (53), resists Nora's incorporation not only by actively returning the gaze, but also by distinguishing herself from the static figure, the statue, into which she had been cast. When Nora sees a "double shadow falling from the statue, as if it were multiplying," she is led to believe that this is Robin alone with the other shadow coming from the statue itself. Only after Robin looks back at her, Nora realizes that there is another woman present. Either the embrace between the two women is so tight that they appear as a single shadow or the statue itself does not have a shadow - in both cases Nora's perception would have been momentarily subjected to a *trompe l'oeil*. Tricked by the very sense through which she constitutes her subjectivity in regard to Robin, it takes Robin's return of the gaze for Nora to fully grasp the situation, i.e. perceive the other woman. Their mutual

stare, in fact, seems to hold Nora, forcing her to focus and notice the other woman in the periphery. Thus, even within the dismantling of the gaze, Nora is shown to be at the mercy of Robin.

Seeing what she sees and being held captive by it, Nora can avert her gaze only by going down on her knees (in the end, Robin will be on hers). Humbled and humiliated, her feeling of dismemberment is based on the fact that she has been split apart from what now appears to be a totalizing gaze. The "intensity of their double regard" sustains the gaze but makes it impossible for Nora to remain in control. The descent she previously imagined with Robin now takes place without her.

Nora is overwhelmed by being looked at by Robin at a moment when she believes to be unobserved in looking at her. Lacan, in "Du regard comme objet petit a," (which also refers to Freud's "On Narcissism") describes a split between "l'oeil et le regard [...] dans laquelle se manifeste la pulsion au niveau du champ scopique" (70) - "the eye and the gaze [...] in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field" (73).<sup>6</sup> According to him, this fundamental

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<sup>6</sup> Translated by Alan Sheridan, "Of the gaze as *Objet Petit a*" The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis (New York: Norton, 1977). 67-122. Also see Lacan's essay on the mirror stage, "Le stade au miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," Écrits (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), in which he first introduces the notion of a subject that is split in the imaginary.

split is profoundly disturbing to the subject insofar as it involves an apprehension of the "real": in phenomenological terms, he argues that the subject recognizes that the eye "n'est que la métaphore de [...] quelque chose d'avant [...] je ne vois que d'un point, mais dans mon existence je suis regardé de partout" (69) - "is only the metaphor of [...] something prior [...] I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (72). If the eye is only a metaphor, the gaze, on the other hand, is "butée de notre expérience, à savoir le manque constitué de l'angoisse de la castration" (70) - "the thrust of our experience, namely the lack that constitutes castration anxiety" (73). Robin's return of the gaze can be read as the intrusion of an "other" into Nora's narcissistic gaze which then causes her to feel her entire world falling apart. The fact that she is forced to her knees by this experience highlights her dependence on this gaze and shows that, paradoxically, maintaining the visual connection to Robin is more than just an illusion: seeing Robin, as this scene shows, proves itself essential to Nora's entire being at the moment when the gaze is separated - it is this moment that renders Nora aware of her desire: in order to live, she must restore the gaze.

Like Narcissus, Nora can turn away from the image only at the expense of her existence. Just as Narcissus becomes

aware of his condition but cannot do anything about it, Nora is shocked by Robin's betrayal and yet continues to be obsessed by her. Substituting her visual connection for a verbal one, she comes to the doctor to talk about Robin; she also continues to write letters to her long after they have lost touch. This way, Nora restores the feeling that it does not matter whether Robin is actually there, as long as she can be represented in Nora's mind. And yet, because Robin is a lost part of Nora, she must be physically recovered.

### **Love is Death**

The fourth chapter, "The Squatter," which begins after Nora has seen Robin in the embrace of another woman, introduces Robin's new lover, Jenny Petherbridge, "one of the most unimportantly wicked women of her time" (60). Jenny, like Felix, is a minor character who exists primarily in her function for other characters, in this case to take Robin away from Nora. The narrator's initial description of Jenny - if it were not so funny, - sounds rather mean-spirited so that the reader may assume that the narrator is, in fact, emotionally invested in denigrating this character. The chapter as a whole describes the meeting between Jenny and Robin, which takes place in the presence of the doctor at a dinner party, and ends with the garden scene, which concludes with an abrupt summarizing statement: "It was not

long after this that Nora and Robin separated; a little later Jenny and Robin sailed for America" (67).

After this repetition of what has been said to have taken place in the previous chapter from a different perspective, we return to Nora who, suffers from the breakup and comes to the doctor for advice. Chapter five, "Watchman, what of the night?" revolves around their conversation about "the night" in general and "the one particular night" with Jenny. Their conversation spills over, after a brief chapter six, into chapter seven, "Go Down Matthew," in which the doctor visits Nora in turn. The final chapter, "The Possessed," in which Nora and Robin meet again in America, is only four pages long and the entire second half of the book is dominated by dialogue between Matthew and Nora. Their conversations can be traced as follows:

When Nora asks the doctor about "the night," it is clear that she has no idea about the world he and Robin inhabit. Matthew enlightens her: "Well, I, Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor, will tell you how the day and the night are related by their division [...] Every day is thought upon and calculated, but the night is not premeditated." (70). He explains how the night is related to fear of the unknown upon which Nora responds: "I used to think [...] that people just went to sleep [...] but now [...] I see that the night does something to a person's

identity, even when asleep" (70). Matthew confirms this: "Let a man lay himself down in the Great Bed and his 'identity' is no longer his own" (70) but there are distinctions: "The nights of one period are not the nights of another. Neither are the nights of one city the nights of another. Let us take Paris for an instance..." (71). Because now the night appears to be more than a metaphor about sleep, Nora is prompted to ask: "I never thought of the night as a life at all - I've never lived it - why did she?" (71). Instead of answering Nora's question about Robin, Matthew explains that there is a connection between fantasy ("night") and reality ("day"), and argues that history is transformed into and depicted as imagery: "Take history at night [...] All through the night Rome went burning. Put that in the noontide and it loses some of its age-old significance, does it not? Why? Because it has existed to the eye of the mind all these years against a black sky. Burn Rome in a dream, and you reach and claw down the true calamity. For dreams have only the pigmentation of fact" (74). Accordingly, the night can be considered a space outside real time and yet existing along with it: "The sleeper is the proprietor of an unknown land. He goes about another business in the dark - and we, his partners, who go to the opera, who listen to gossip of café friends, who walk along the boulevards, or sew a quiet seam, cannot afford an

inch of it" (74). Having thus defined the night, Matthew explains its significance to the lover, i.e. Nora.

The night becomes a figure of betrayal: "For the lover, it is the night into which his beloved goes [...] When she sleeps is she not moving her leg aside for an unknown garrison? Or in a moment, that takes but a second, murdering us with an ax?" (75). Everyone, including Nora, who claims to be innocent of any knowledge of the night, is part of this destructive side of night: "There is not one of us who, given an eternal incognito [...] would not commit rape, murder and all abominations" (75). Having introduced the night as a universal concept, however, Matthew differentiates between night people, such as himself and Robin, and people like Nora who "would have the night combed with the great blind searchlight of the heart" (79). Even though she wishes to see herself as an outsider to the night, Matthew includes her into the group as "the lover":

and though your normal fellow will say all are alike in the dark, negro or white, I say you can tell them, and where they came from, and what quarter they frequent, by the size and excellence - and at the Bastille (and may I be believed) they come as handsome as *mortadellas* slung on a table [...] And it's the same with girls [...] those who turn the day into night, the young, the drug addict, the profligate, the drunken and that most miserable, the lover who watches all night long in fear and anguish. These can never again live the life of the day. When one meets them at high noon, they give off, as if it were a protective emanation, something dark and muted. The light

does not become them any longer. They begin to have an unrecorded look. (80)

The message in this passage is that the night people do not constitute a homogeneous group and that Nora, although not as much in the know as Matthew, is no longer in the position of "your normal fellow" being now "that most miserable, the lover who watches all night long in fear and anguish." Using the "handsome" sausages as a codeword for male genitals, Matthew refers to a night in which illicit sexual fantasies can be acted out, a night hidden from the sight of most people but with enough substance to extend into the day. It seems as if Matthew attributes a certain superiority to the night people because they extend into both worlds so that, according to his way of thinking, he and Robin provide access for Nora to the secret knowledge that constitutes the night.

Matthew embraces the philosophy of the night but Nora is now situated in-between day and night, as she feels herself belonging to neither. From the beginning, she has been shown to have more darkness inside her than she is aware of and one could argue that her encounter with Robin originates from her need to restore this knowledge. However, she argues from the point of view of someone having been dragged into the night involuntarily so as to blame Robin for her own attraction to her. Before knowing Robin, Nora was described as "immune to her own descent" (47) and now she begins to understand herself but she must realize that

the implications of this knowledge could be fatal for her: "Love is death" (115) Nora declares and concludes that "Robin's love and mine was always impossible, and loving each other, we no longer love. Yet we love each other like death" (116).

Whereas she had already made the metaphorical connection between love and death on her own, when with Robin, Matthew's response to her inquiry about the night seems to make this connection more disturbing. When Matthew explains that "night people do not bury their dead, but on the neck of you, their beloved and waking, sling the creature, husked of its gestures. And where you go, it goes, the two of you, your living and her dead, that will not die" (76), he reveals that Nora is caught in something fatal. She now sees herself, once again, inextricably connected with Robin: "Once, when she was sleeping, I wanted her to die. Now, that would stop nothing" (108). The wish to kill Robin, to get rid of her for good, was motivated by the desire for possessing her and Nora remembers herself thinking: "Die now, so you will be quiet; so you will not be touched again by dirty hands [...] die now, then you will be mine forever'" (120). But now that Robin is "hers" in principle, without even being with her, Nora interprets her own condition as madness: "I was going mad because I was awake and seeing it, unable to reach it [...] I had struck her sleep away, and I went mad and I've been mad ever since" (121).

In yet another reversal, she describes her madness as a reaction to Robin's somnambulism, then blames herself: "She knew she was driving me insane with misery and fright [...] she falls into everything, like someone in a dream [...] A shadow was falling on her - mine - and it was driving her out of her wits" (128). As if Robin were herself, Nora says: "she wanted darkness in her mind - to throw a shadow over what she was powerless to alter - her dissolute life, her life at night" (129). Exchanging visions for language, Nora creates a metaphor of darkness, using the same word to describe her condition and that of Robin, thereby continuing self-reflection while maintaining the presence of the "other." She has no recourse other than to return to the allegory of the night as the origin of both of their madness and Matthew, who offered his version of the night as a space of differentiation, cannot help her.

Nora constructs a circular argument around herself and Robin and, in what seems to be a vicious circle of reflection, in which even dialogue serves only to confirm the fact that they are hopelessly inseparable, she tells Matthew about an artificial object, a doll, which represents their union. As it turns out, the reason why she ended up throwing Robin out of the house was not having seen her with Jenny in the garden but having seen a double of their "child" at Jenny's house:

I kept thinking, what else is it that is hurting me, then I knew - the doll; the doll in there on

the bed [...] We give death to a child when we give it a doll - it's the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane; so when I saw that other doll -. ' Nora could not go on. She began to cry. (118)

Nora interprets giving dolls as giving death by explaining that the doll is "the effigy and the shroud:" a three-dimensional object, it is more than an image and it becomes uncanny as one projects life into it. Unlike a picture or a statue, a doll can be held, like a baby, and yet carries with it the "shroud" of inanimacy. It is up to its owner to breathe life into it so that it, unlike a reflection, becomes a creature in its own right, which is, however, fully dependent on whoever animates it. While Narcissus embraces his reflection in vain, confining pleasure to vision, the doll offers a sense of touch and can provide the illusion of intimacy. Like a human being, the doll can be embraced and offers no resistance. One can, with a doll, have the illusion of mastery, of fully possessing something like oneself. Because the doll stands in for "the life they cannot have," it includes the illusion that one has, nonetheless "created" it. In this sense, the doll functions like a work of art, an object fashioned from one's own self without "nature" interfering.

To Nora, the sight of the other doll was so traumatic that re-telling it causes her to interrupt her self-analysis and cry. Evidently, seeing the doll had an even more powerful effect on her than the vision in the garden, for

she had not previously decided to let go of Robin but, instead, to go see Jenny first. After the vision of the "double shadow," the vision of the doll's "double" triggers the actual breakup. The doll, as a tangible object, seems to have marked the relationship as "real." As long as it represented their "child," it could be endowed with special significance by Nora. But it is also a "trompe l'oeil" in that it, eventually, reveals itself to be nothing but dead matter. Its "sacred and profane" character is entirely based on its owner's willingness to suspend his or her disbelief and, unlike a real child, it dies in an instant when the stage conventions are violated. Therefore, the doll turns the entire relationship between Robin and Nora into a kind of "play," a performance in which the economy of reproduction, in which Felix is shown to operate, is only emulated.

The drama of the doll as an object representing artistic creation along with biological sterility marks the beginning of the end of Nightwood, following Matthew's prediction that

in the end you'll all be locked together, like the poor beasts that get their antlers mixed and are found dead that way, their heads fattened with a knowledge of each other they never wanted, having had to contemplate each other, head on and eye to eye, until death: well, that will be you and Jenny and Robin. (85)

Considering the recurring connection between "beastliness" and "knowledge," I would like to conclude by

relating the significance of the doll to the final image of Nightwood, in which the relationship between Nora and Robin is resolved in terms of a restoration of the gaze, a repossession of the object of desire (Robin) and a transference from the inanimate (doll) to the animate (dog).

**Conclusion: A couple of Velvet Dogs, or Dolls that Looked as if they had been up all Night**

During Nora's conversation with Matthew, we learn that the symbolical child has been abused by Robin who, as Nora recalls about one of their arguments, "picked up the doll and hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel into it; and then, as I came crying behind her, she kicked it, its china head all in dust, its skirt shivering and stiff, whirling over and over across the floor" (122). Showing the doll to be nothing but an object, Robin's treatment differs from that of her real child earlier in the story in which "one night, Felix, having come in unheard, found her standing in the center of the floor, holding the child high in her hand as if she were about to dash it down, but she brought it down gently" (44). And yet, the point of departure is the same, because Nora also finds Robin in a position of "holding the doll she had given us - 'our child' - high above her head, as if she would cast it down, a look of fury on her face" (122). One could argue that Robin's leaving their child with Felix constitutes a similar abuse as kicking the doll so that there would not be much of a

difference between the doll and the actual child. And, just as Felix saw his son to be a means to an end, an "heir," Nora acts like a mother when she comes "crying after" Robin to protect the doll. Although it signifies "life," giving the doll means giving "death," so that the animate and the inanimate are connected in an act of exchange; this, in turn, is reminiscent of Matthew's mentioning, at some point, that people at a fair were purchasing "a couple of velvet dogs, or dolls that looked as if they had been up all night" (87).

Drawing an analogy between the doll and "the third sex," Matthew shows the interconnection between animate and inanimate nature which, like night and day, cannot be truly separated. Defending Robin on account of her knowledge, he introduces the idea of a "third sex" as a concept instead of deviance from normalcy (just as he made an effort, earlier, to show that night people are not, as the "normal fellow" may think, all alike). Matthew holds up the mirror to Nora's puritanical and heterosexually oriented attitude when defending Robin:

Do you think that Robin had no right to fight you with her only weapon? She saw in you that fearful eye that would make her a target forever. Have not girls done as much for the doll? The doll - yes, target of things past and to come. The last doll, given to age, is the girl who should have been a boy, and the boy who should have been a girl! The love of that last doll was foreshadowed in that love of the first. The doll and the immature have something right about them, the doll because it resembles but does not contain life, and the third

sex because it contains life but resembles the doll. (123)

Matthew describes the doll as a "target" as if to explain that Robin's actions were, in fact, reflective of Nora's targeting her; thus Robin, who gives the doll and belongs to the "third sex," also is the doll. While she gives and represents death, she is redeemed by Matthew's assertion that there is "something right" about her. Matthew depicts homosexuality as androgynous and "lifeless," i.e. a sexuality without reproduction and Nora is forced to recognize her own investment in the concept of reproduction (which can be seen as "representation" in this context). Matthew turns the doll from a substitute "child" into the representative of a different sexuality, thus re-animating it by acknowledging its specificity. While the doll continues to signify the "life" it does not "contain," its existence makes the presence of the "other," the nightworld and its shadow figures, a tangible reality.

At some point, Matthew raises the question "what is this love we have for the invert, boy or girl?" (114) and Nora's answer is phrased in terms of narcissism: "A man is another person - a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own. If she is taken you cry that you have been robbed of yourself. God laughs at me; but his laughter is my love" (119). Carolyn Allen seeks to dismantle the traditional connection between homosexuality and narcissism in which "lesbian relationships are

conventionally described as self-enclosing" and, therefore, in terms of pathology. She argues that "the mother/child trope figures most crucially in Nightwood's palimpsest. Like positions of gender, mother/child stereotypes abound in discussions of lesbian relations" (186). In other words, while the attachment may seem narcissistic, it is acted out in heterosexual terms, as if to show that neither pattern actually works. Still, Matthew refers to "Love of woman for woman, what insane passion for unmitigated anguish and motherhood brought that into the mind?" (66), and addresses Nora as "you, who should have had a thousand children and Robin, who should have been all of them" (85). Nora herself remembers Robin as "my lover and my child" (129). Given the possibility of this kind of relationship (whether palimpsestic or not), biological motherhood - in Nightwood shown to result only in loss of life or mental retardation - certainly loses its potential attraction. What Matthew seems to explain is that the doll is not only a poor substitute for the real thing but that it symbolizes something entirely different in spite of the fact that it, ostensibly, connotes the "joy" of motherhood and the "sadness" of sterility.<sup>7</sup>

Inasmuch as Barnes herself was subject to the discourse of her time, I would argue that the text not only uses

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<sup>7</sup> For more on this, see my essay, "Zwischen Geburt und Tod: Das Bild der Anderen in Djuna Barnes' Nachtgewächs," in: Die Magie der Unterbrechung (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, forthcoming 1999).

stereotypes to dismantle them but also turns madness from a negative into a positive condition. Treating a doll like a child requires a certain amount of madness and the entire novel can be read as a celebration of art, with the subject establishing her position in space by creating artificial objects which are endowed with life. Although the novel is dark and negative, it is esthetically accomplished to the extent that the reader will take pleasure in even the most terrifying and disturbing visions and statements, precisely because it does not seek to represent "reality" except in the form of masquerade. Even narcissism is mocked by the doctor, who transgresses the surface instead of lamenting the disintegration of the image: "I'm an angel on all fours, going down face foremost, drinking the waters of night at the water hole of the damned, and I go into the waters, up to my heart, the terrible waters!" (81). Symbolically, he breaks through the economy of reflection into a space which seems beyond representation. This space, where representation no longer functions, is madness. In this novel, it is not characterized by hyper-reflexivity but by bestiality, corresponding more with "idiocy" than with mental illness. This way, it becomes possible to produce yet another vision, namely that art can simulate insanity without pathologizing itself. Madness is represented as a spiritual possession which takes hold in the body but, within the context of the novel, much of which is abstract and textual, it becomes a way of portraying the self-

destructive desire which Robin evokes from the very beginning.

Chapter eight tells of Robin finding her way to Nora's "decayed chapel" and of Nora sitting, once again, in her house, this time next to a lamp instead of a fire, hearing her dog running about and whining. The beginning of the end coincides with Nora's walking into the night and entering the chapel:

at the moment Nora's body struck the wood, Robin began going down, down, her hair swinging, her arms out. The dog stood rearing back [...] And down she went, until her head swung against his, on all fours now, dragging her knees. The veins stood out in her neck, under her ears, swelled in her arms, and wide and throbbing, rose up on her hands as she moved forward [...] Then head down, dragging her forelocks in the dust, she struck against his side. He let loose one howl of misery and bit at her, dashing about her, barking [...] Then she began to bark also, crawling after him - barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. Crouching, the dog began to run with her [...] until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (139)

With Nora now "possessing" the image of Robin, the gaze is restored and Nora herself is no longer mentioned by the narrator. Symbolically, Nora's hound, with whom Robin plays, could be read as part of Nora herself, the part which hunted Robin down in order to be returned to its place within Nora's shadow. Because of her animal nature, Robin is able to relate to the dog on an equal level until they are both exhausted. The vivacity of their play can be read in

opposition to the inertia of the narrative, as if the novel's energy were suddenly released into a single image which is, finally, born.

In sum, I would maintain that Nightwood reframes the concept of "creation" as natural (birth) by staging the text as a reverse movement towards stasis (death). Although the text seems to refer to nature as a condition beyond language, its insistence of the projective surface shows how Robin's animality is self-generated, a calculated work of art rather than an accident of nature. Madness, in turn, becomes desirable because it seems to restore the subject to itself, turning the self-reflexive stasis of Narcissus into a sensual experience. On this level, Robin embodies the text itself, whose body and soul are animated by the reader's desire to know the night, however disturbing it may be. The work of art is shown to be an object animated by the imagination, playing with the "dog" of the underworld in a dance of unknown gestures.

CHAPTER FOUR  
UNICA ZÜRN: THE MECHANICAL SUBJECT  
AND THE VIRTUAL BODY

There is no madness except as the final instant of the work of art - the work endlessly drives madness to its limits; *where there is a work of art, there is no madness; and yet madness is contemporary with the work of art, since it inaugurates the time of its truth.*

Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization

**Introduction: A Textualized Life**

Compared to Henriette Hardenberg's landscapes of the body and Djuna Barnes' self-reflective images of the night, Unica Zürn's (1916-70) account of a history of mental illness, Der Mann im Jasmin: Eindrücke einer Geisteskrankheit (1977, orig. pub. 1971 in France, transl. as L'Homme Jasmin; pub. in 1994 in English as The Man of Jasmine) transgresses its boundaries as a work of art.

Above all, Zürn's work seems interwoven with her life. Considering that the author spent a decade of her life in and out of mental institutions, the reader is tempted, as Sigrid Weigel put it (211), to read the nameless third-person protagonist of her text, "she," as an autobiographical "I."<sup>1</sup> But although Zürn's narrator is intimately familiar with the experiences of the mentally ill artist-protagonist, her voice remains distant, giving the

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the "I" in autobiographical narrative, see Vincent Crapanzano's "'Self'-Centering Narratives" Yale Journal of Criticism. Fall 1992. v.5, no.3.

reader the impression of two separate identities. This impression is re-enforced by the use of the present tense instead of the more conventional past tense, as if the narrator were recording the events involving the protagonist at the same time they take place.

The symbiotic relationship between the author and her work is best expressed by Zürn herself in an excerpt from "Die Begegnung mit Hans Bellmer," one of her last texts before her suicide:

Sie ist so mit ihrer Arbeit verbunden, daß sie sich selbst dabei den seelischen Tod gibt [...] Die Krisen des Wahnsinns [...] sind die Gründe, aus denen sie ihre Krankheit liebt. Der Wunsch, das Delirium zu erleben und die Verliebtheit ins Außergewöhnliche [...] die Entfernung von der Wirklichkeit wird zum brennenden Wunsch [...] der Flug der Phantasie wird ihr tägliches Brot. (v.5, 128)

She is so closely connected to her work that she gives death to her own soul [...] Her crises of madness [...] are the reasons why she loves her illness. Her desire to experience delirium and her love for the exceptional [...] distancing herself from reality becomes a burning desire [...] the flight of fantasy becomes her daily bread. [my translation C.R.]<sup>2</sup>

Religiously devoted to her work, Zürn's "she" thrives on "distancing herself from reality." While, on the one hand, writing about madness in Der Mann im Jasmin enables her to become an author, the process of artistic production is connected with self-destruction on the other.

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<sup>2</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, I will be using the translation by Malcolm Green.

The close connection between writing and madness is part of Zürn's family background: her father was a senior cavalry officer as well as an unsuccessful writer and Zürn strongly identified with his first wife, Orla Holm, who was institutionalized in the Dresden asylum *Weißer Hirsch*; Holm hurled herself out of a window after writing about her desire to do so in Dein Buch (1907) and Zürn followed this "script" when she pre-figured her own suicide in a manner identical with Holm's in Dunkler Frühling (1967).<sup>3</sup>

Zürn idolized her father who was often away on duty in places like the German colonies in Africa. Usually left to play on her own, she invented the kind of imaginary playmates that were to become the "Man of Jasmine," an imaginary and omnipotent father figure who both supports and destroys the writer-protagonist of Zürn's best-known book. Most of her texts idealize her childhood, especially in terms of its privileged surroundings, a villa with a large garden in Berlin-Grunewald where she grew up until her parents divorced.

While Zürn's work may have been motivated by personal experiences, she did not consider writing a private activity. Like Barnes, and unlike Hardenberg, she wanted to be a professional writer and, consequently, published her first short story (about her voluntary labor service) in

<sup>3</sup> Most of the biographical information to which I will be referring here is contained in the annotations to Brinkmann and Bose's Gesamtausgabe in fünf Bänden. 5 vols. Berlin, 1988-1991.

1935 in a Nazi youth magazine when she was only nineteen years old.

Having completed secretarial school in 1933, Zürn began working for the UFA (Universum Film AG) where she was promoted to "Werbefilmdramaturgin" (dramaturg for commercials) in 1936. While working for the Nazi film industry, she lived with her father and brother, both of whom actively supported Hitler. She herself did not join the NSDAP and most critics describe her as "unpolitical." Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that further information about the specific nature of Zürn's job continues to remain unavailable (Scholl 152).

In 1942, she married Erich Laupenmühlen, a wealthy industrialist. Der Mann im Jasmin is dedicated to their children, Christian and Katrin, whose custody Zürn lost when they divorced in 1949, supposedly because of Laupenmühlen's greater financial means.<sup>4</sup> She changed her first name, Ruth, to Unica (her third forename) and joined the so-called Berlin Surrealists. Living alone, she supported herself by publishing over 120 short stories in newspapers, as well as several radio plays and a children's book during the early fifties.

In addition, she wrote an early precursor to Der Mann im Jasmin, entitled Katrin - Die Geschichte einer kleinen Schriftstellerin (1953, pub. 1989), the story of "a little

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<sup>4</sup> No further information is available.

girl who wanted to become a writer and really became one." With the help of a youth magazine editor who replaces her natural father, a writer, Katrin ends up becoming a writer who begins to write her own story, "the story of a little girl who wanted to become a writer and really became one." Although she succeeds in writing, she does not have any other "story" than that of becoming an author so that the text ends up referring to its own origin in an endless loop.

During the same year Katrin was written, Zürn's self-described need for a strong father figure led to her infamous relationship with the Surrealist artist Hans Bellmer (1902-75), whom she met at a gallery opening and followed to Paris only two months later. Bellmer, at that time, was primarily known for his doll sculptures, female nudes with fragmented limbs, inspired by E.T.A. Hoffmann's doll Olympia (in "The Sandman") and depicted in often grotesquely contorted positions in Les Jeux de la poupée (Paris: Éditions Premières, 1949). His work, which also includes drawings of female nudes - primarily girls, - is disturbing because it suggests violation.<sup>5</sup> Bellmer explained his work in terms of the production of anagrams, which he

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion about violence in Bellmer's work, see Hal Foster's essay on Bellmer in Compulsive Beauty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). According to Foster, Bellmer's work can be seen as a critique of fascism insofar as it, supposedly, depicts the violence of the fascist gaze. However, as feminists, such as Susan Suleiman, have pointed out, the images may simply be violent and there is no reason why they are gendered.

also composed: "Auch der Satz ist wie ein Körper, der uns einzuladen scheint, ihn zu zergliedern, damit sich in einer endlosen Reihe von Anagrammen aufs Neue fügt, was er in Wahrheit enthält" - "The sentence too resembles a body which seems to invite us to decompose it, so that an infinite chain of anagrams may re-compose the truth it contains" (trans. Pierre Joris). This often-quoted passage is part of Bellmer's preface to Hexentexte (1954), a volume of anagrams by Zürn, who adopted the technique after meeting him.<sup>6</sup>

Once she became Bellmer's companion in Paris, Zürn's style of writing changed and she also began to draw. As many critics have observed, Bellmer's influence on Zürn's life and work was profound: not only did he introduce her to new techniques (in which she turned out to be quite successful), he also used her as a model for his own work, for example in a series of photographs taken in 1958, which depict her naked torso tied up with strings. Eventually, his doll showed her face and it has been suggested that he acted as a Svengali for her. Perhaps most telling, in this regard, is the way in which Bellmer has depicted their relationship in a photo, which depicts Zürn holding a doll in her arms,

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<sup>6</sup> Also see Bellmer's Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou L'Anatomie de l'image (Paris: Terrain Vague, 1985) and the special issue of Obliques on Bellmer (Paris, 1975).

life-sized and with her own face, while Bellmer dominates the picture from the background, as he looks down on both.<sup>7</sup>

Zürn, on her part, began to write about physical and mental illness. For example, in 1957, she wrote Das Haus der Krankheiten (pub. as The House of Illnesses in 1993), another precursor to the Der Mann im Jasmin which combines writings about leukemia with line drawings of hospital rooms named after body parts. Zürn became known for the work she produced in France. Renée Riese-Hubert points out that "the seventeen years spent as Bellmer's companion coincide almost exactly with the most productive period of her life" (141). However, those years were accompanied by great mental anguish and physical pain. Zürn's suicide, in fact, is likely to have been triggered by Bellmer's decision to end their relationship after he had been paralyzed by a stroke and was told by his doctors that being with her would be too stressful for him.

Although Zürn barely mentions Bellmer directly, she called herself "Frau von Bellmer" ("Bellmer's wife") on the original title page of the manuscript to Der Mann im Jasmin. However, the "Man of Jasmine" himself is not modeled after Bellmer but rather after Henri Michaux, one of Zürn's famous acquaintances with whom she shared a fascination with madness, and whose writings about drug-induced

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<sup>7</sup> Bellmer illustrated Kleist's essay, "Über das Marionettentheater" (1810); his preoccupation with dolls creates the impression that, in relation to Zürn, he took on the role of a puppeteer.

hallucinations are known to have influenced the American Beat poets. In fact, Zürn created an artistic identity of her own, apart from Bellmer who had her committed to mental institutions against her will and did not approve of her writing about madness. Ironically, her suicide by jumping from the balcony of Bellmer's sixth-floor apartment in Paris seems to follow his script as much as her own: in Die Puppe (1936), Bellmer articulated his own esthetic desire in morbid terms: "[man] möchte, daß die tragische und genaue Spur eines stürzenden nackten Körpers, vom Fenster aufs Trottoir, als seltsames Objekt erhalten bliebe" - "one would wish to conserve the tragic and precise trace of a falling naked body, from the window onto the sidewalk, as a strange object" [my translation C.R.]; it is through the surviving body of her writing, of course, that she left her own "tragic and precise trace."

Posthumously, she became a cult figure in France. Although some critics maintain that she, like Michaux, was not necessarily a Surrealist (Schneider 83), she adopted Surrealist techniques, notably that of composing anagrams, and her texts seem based on the juxtaposition of the two states, "dream" and "reality," which André Breton uses to define "surreality" in his first manifesto: "la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de *surréalité*" (MS 23) - [the future resolution of two states which seem to be contradicting one another,

namely dream and reality, into a kind of absolute reality - my translation C.R.]. Moreover, Zürn's fusion of her life and work can be connected to the Surrealists' programmatic attempts to tear down the boundaries between "life" and "art," as well as with the Surrealists' well-known fascination with female madness.

Der Mann im Jasmin is frequently mentioned in conjunction with Breton's Nadja (1928), a text about a male writer fascinated by a mentally ill woman. In this context, Zürn can seem less a victim of mental illness than a victim of the avant-garde's gender stereotyping,<sup>8</sup> especially when considering her relationship with Bellmer. As Susan Suleiman explains, "the women were generally younger [...] their version of Surrealist practice included a component of response to, as well as adaptation of, male Surrealist iconographies and mythologies" (27). However, this did not prevent Zürn, as several critics (Weigel, Hilmes, Conley) have pointed out, from identifying primarily with the position of the male author, a strategy which proved to be fatal in the long run.

Even more troublesome, from the point of view of reception, is the fact that Der Mann im Jasmin was first published in Germany by Ullstein-Verlag as if it were a psychiatric case history (the text is not edited correctly

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this topic, see Mary Ann Caws' "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art" in: The Art of Interference: Stressed Readings in Verbal and Visual Texts (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1989).

and makes Zürn seem incompetent as a writer, drawing attention to various spelling mistakes in her manuscript by means of asterisks, etc.). Zürn may have stylized herself into a "madwoman" and probably did suffer from manic depression, but her work is much too accomplished artistically to be read as a mere symptom of mental illness. Unlike, for instance, Marguerite Sechehaye's Renée - Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl (1950), in which a former mental patient recalls her symptoms of schizophrenia to be then explained by her analyst (the author) in the second half of the book, Der Mann im Jasmin is an artist's text, presenting "madness" as a poetic state of mind rather than a disease to be cured.

In fact, Zürn's text follows a literary tradition of asylum texts, such as the Surrealist Leonora Carrington's En Bas (1946), and Antonin Artaud's Lettres de Rodez (1942). However, unlike these two, Zürn uses the third person, which may be interpreted as a sign of her being "split" within herself, i.e. a "symptom" of schizophrenia, but also as a deliberate textual strategy to appear as if she were schizophrenic: since using the third person indicates that Zürn's "she" differs from what would be an autobiographical "I," I would definitely assume the latter (also, her text is much too controlled and artistically accomplished to be the mere outcome of "symptoms" beyond her control). Like Carrington, who writes in the first person past tense, from the point of view of someone who remembers the mental

illness she has gone through, Zürn makes a deliberate effort to represent madness. But, whereas Carrington's "I" writes from a safe distance, Zürn's "she," along with the use of the present tense, give the reader the impression that she is actually going through what she appears to be, at the same time, recording.

Artaud's letters, on the other hand, are written in the first person, yet his "I" is clearly deluded, for example when he explains that he is a prophet who is persecuted. Before he began to suffer from serious mental illness, to which his late letters clearly attest, Artaud was widely known for his "theater of cruelty"-manifestoes during the thirties and he wrote many texts whose intensity also seem to anticipate his later breakdown. In his case, the boundaries between madness and art seem much more fluid than in the case of Zürn, where no such development can be discerned: unlike Artaud, whose work deteriorated with his mental health, Zürn wrote her most accomplished work during a period in her life when she was also suffering from "mental illness," yet as we now know, Zürn was not, in actuality schizophrenic: this turned out to be a misdiagnosis and it is generally agreed that she suffered primarily from depression and paranoia. Still, she repeatedly refers to Artaud in her texts, for example when "she" is confined to the same mental institution, the Hôpital St. Anne in Paris, and she probably identified with him in terms of the tragic connection between madness and

art, which her work clearly emphasizes. Zürn even had herself analyzed by Artaud's former psychiatrist, Dr. Ferdière (who also treated Bellmer for alcoholism), yet unlike Artaud, she never lost control over her work. Instead, while both she and Artaud can be considered "martyrs" on behalf of art, Zürn's work actually comes to terms with the nature of representation itself, as I will now begin to demonstrate.

### **The Paradise of Childhood**

While Barnes uses the motif of a gradual descent into a world of darkness, Zürn emphasizes the figure of a sudden fall. In Dunkler Frühling, there is the fall from the window ("Fenstersturz") and throughout Der Mann im Jasmin, falling acts as a metaphor for the depression following her flights of fantasy: "das Gesetz ihrer Krankheit: [...] Halluzinationen, [...] und danach der Sturz, die Wirklichkeit, die Erkenntnis der Täuschungen. (240) -"the law of this illness: [...] hallucinations [...] and afterwards the fall, reality, the realization that it all had been an illusion" (113). The passages about "falling" uncannily prefigure the author's actual suicide but they also show the textual "illness" as precipitated by a symbolic fall from paradise, a "fall" which suspends the time between beginning (life) and end (death) insofar as it constitutes the origin of the actual narrative. Similar to the opening of Nightwood, which features the birth of one of

its characters, Der Mann im Jasmin sets the narrative in motion by introducing the protagonist in relation to her mother with a childhood flashback:

In ihrem sechsten Lebensjahr führt sie ein Traum in der Nacht hinter den hohen Spiegel, der in einem Rahmen aus Mahagoniholz an der Wand ihres Zimmers hängt. Dieser Spiegel wird zu einer offenen Türe, die sie durchschreitet [...] Der Eindruck dieses Traumes ist so stark, daß sie aufsteht, um den Spiegel beiseite zu schieben. Sie findet die Wand und keine Türe. Von einer unerklärlichen Einsamkeit erfüllt, geht sie an diesem Morgen in das Zimmer ihrer Mutter, um - wenn es möglich wäre, in diesem Bett dahin zurück zu gelangen, woher sie gekommen ist, - um nichts mehr zu sehen. Da wälzt sich ein Berg von lauem Fleisch, der den unreinen Geist dieser Frau einschließt, über das entsetzte Kind, und sie flieht für immer die Mutter, die Frau, die Spinne! Sie ist tief verletzt. (137)

One night in the sixth year of her life, a dream takes her behind the tall mirror which hangs in a mahogany frame on the wall of her room. This mirror becomes an open door through which she steps [...] The impression of this dream is so strong that she gets up in order to push the mirror to one side. She finds the wall and no door. Filled this morning with an inexplicable loneliness, she enters her mother's room in order to get into her bed and return, if possible, to whence she came so as to see nothing more. The mountain of tepid flesh which encloses this woman's impure spirit rolls over on to the horrified child, and she flees for ever from the mother, the woman, the spider! She is deeply grieved. (25)

As this paragraph illustrates, Zürn's voice is detached from her subject. Compared to Barnes' stylistically accomplished narrator, who meanders, loses herself in

details, and plunges into catachrestic metaphors even at the risk of sounding ridiculous, Zürn's narrator speaks in a serious, matter-of-fact tone. Even when she impersonates the child's reaction to her mother with an exclamation, switching from the declarative mode to *erlebte Rede*, she quickly withdraws again, ending the paragraph with a short summarizing statement, leaving the reader without further comment on this powerfully disturbing scene. However, inadvertently, this gesture also reveals the narrator's proximity to the protagonist, as she represents the inability to articulate her grief.

The protagonist, in the preceding dream, is introduced as a passive subject. Said to be "led" by the dream ("führt sie ein Traum"), the child does not actively dream but is "being dreamt." Phenomenologically, this corresponds with the position of the dreamer described by Lacan: "notre position dans le rêve est, en fin de compte, d'être foncièrement celui qui ne voit pas. Le sujet ne voit pas où ça mène, il suit" (72) - "our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows" (FFC 75). The narrator, in contrast, remains in a position of control, organizing the dream into a narrative the dreamer-protagonist can only follow.

Grounding her voice within the space of "reality," the narrator returns to details of the furniture in the second half of the opening sentence, while the protagonist is said

to have left the room to enter the "space" behind the mirror. The story leads the reader away from the room, but the narrator draws attention to the fact that reality continues to exist, even if the protagonist is mentally elsewhere. This gesture implies that the narrator maintains control over the narrative, regardless of the protagonist's state of mind. Drawing attention to the border between two worlds, dream and reality, the protagonist can be shown as transgressive perhaps only because the narrator occupies an omniscient position.

However, the protagonist turns herself into the object of another person's will: as the "Man of Jasmine" appears, he begins to control the protagonist's life and the two worlds begin to be confused. The fact that the protagonist walks through the "Rahmen" (frame) of the mirror implies a "displacement" which relates to the German word for being mad, "ver-rückt" (dis-placed). This, in turn, is connected with disembodiment: dreaming about passing through the mirror - like Alice in Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass, - the protagonist leaves the image of her body behind, as she passes through her own reflection. Mentally discarding the physical image of herself along with her material body - which is, presumably, asleep in bed, - "she" loses both substance and form of herself. In this sense, the dream symbolizes a process of disconnecting the "self" from its body (which is reminiscent of Hardenberg, as I will show later in this chapter).

Awaking from the dream, the child is confronted with a virtual nightmare. Disappointed in her need for darkness, the body of the mother offers itself as another kind of "wall behind the mirror," a grotesque vision of massive and impenetrable flesh. First imagined to be a cavernous retreat, perhaps a shell for the disembodied girl to slip into, the mother's body is described as a "mountain," a shape devoid of human form. Calling the mother a "spider," the protagonist continues the use of metaphor as if to gain control over her own humanity by means of using language.

Suddenly, vision imposes itself again: in what can be called her first hallucination (the narrator does not call it that), the fall into "reality" is dampened by the appearance of a savior:

Da erscheint zum ersten Mal die Vision: der Mann im Jasmin! Unendlicher Trost! Aufatmend setzt sie sich ihm gegenüber und blickt ihn an. Er ist gelähmt! Welch ein Glück. Er verläßt nie den Sessel in seinem Garten, wo der Jasmin auch im Winter blüht. Dieser Mann wird für sie das Bild der Liebe. [...] Und sie verheiratet sich mit ihm. Das schönste ist es, daß niemand etwas davon weiß. Und das ist ihr erstes, ihr größtes Geheimnis. (137)  
Diese stille Gegenwart erteilt ihr zwei Belehrungen, die sie nicht mehr vergißt: Distance.  
Passivität. (137)

Then her vision appears to her for the first time: The Man of Jasmine! Boundless consolation! Sighing with relief, she sits down opposite him and studies him. He is paralysed! What good fortune. He will never leave his seat in the garden where the jasmine even blossoms in winter. This man becomes her image of love. [...] And she marries him. The loveliest thing about it is that

no one knows. And this is her first, her greatest secret.  
His silent presence teaches her two lessons which she never forgets:  
Distance.  
Passivity. (25-26)

Unlike the mother, this new human figure is only an image, introduced as a picture to be "studied" from a distance. Turning the protagonist into a spectator who is "safe" from physical contact, the Man of Jasmine presents himself as a new kind of mirror image to the child who is now free to project her own desire onto him. Situated within a two-dimensional space, he perhaps covers and fills the void that the clash between "dream" and "reality" has opened up. Providing refuge from physical and emotional involvement, he reassures and patronizes the child by teaching her "lessons."

While the body of the mother is perceived as engulfing, the Man of Jasmine enters the mind of the girl from a distance. Zürn, who was familiar with psychoanalytic concepts, uses the cliché of an exaggeratedly physical mother figure and a distant father who imposes his law in a scenario which is reminiscent of the Oedipal drama, "a desire for the death of the rival - the parent of the same sex - and a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex" (Laplanche 282). Here too, the female protagonist comes to love her "father" by way of rejecting her mother. Zürn's twist is that the father is a figment of the child's

imagination - the authority ("author-ity") with which "she" identifies is, in fact, her own.

### **The White Man**

In Zürn's iconography, "childhood" and "art" are often connected. The Man of Jasmine preserves the mythical garden of childhood where time does not seem to pass because things do not change. ("the jasmine even blossoms in winter"). He is "art" because he represents a fantasy image, a mental creation as opposed to a natural phenomenon. Like a second, textual birth, he is dream life brought into waking reality through the mother (who is never mentioned again) and he guarantees a continuous sense of self into adulthood when it comes to the protagonist's other relationships: "über jede männliche Schulter, an die sie sich im Laufe der kommenden Jahre lehnt, blickt sie auf den Mann im Jasmin. Sie bleibt ihrer Kinderhochzeit treu" (138)- "over the coming years she sees The Man of Jasmine behind every male shoulder she leans on. She remains faithful to her childhood marriage" (26).

His appearance completes the rapid sequence of three different kinds of visual experiences with which the narrator sketches the protagonist's childhood: the dream, the vision of the mother's body, and the self-generated (hallucinatory) vision. Drawing attention to the "flight into fantasy" which comes to determine the protagonist's adult life as an artist, the text juxtaposes these three visions in a kind of montage with the Man of Jasmine acting

as a synthesis. Emerging from two familiar modes of perception as a third kind of visual experience, he attracts the protagonist to the very idea of "imagination." Motivating her desire to become an artist, he becomes a symbol for creativity as well as madness.

The two lessons he teaches the child take on their full meaning when he shifts his appearance to turn into the "white man" who then hypnotises the protagonist (from a "distance"), forcing her to become increasingly "passive" in following his commands. This new incarnation of the Man of Jasmine is introduced by way of an optical "shock":

[i]n einem Pariser Zimmer steht sie dem Mann im Jasmin gegenüber. Der Schock dieser Begegnung ist für sie so gewaltig, daß sie ihn nicht überwinden kann.

Sehr sehr langsam beginnt sie von diesem Tage an, ihren Verstand zu verlieren.

Das Bild ihrer kindlichen Vision und die Erscheinung dieses Mannes sind identisch. Mit dem einzigen Unterschied, daß er nicht gelähmt ist und daß es hier keinen Garten mit blühendem Jasmin gibt, der ihn umschließt. (139)

[i]n a room in Paris she finds herself standing before The Man of Jasmine. The shock of this encounter is so great that she is unable to get over it.

From this day on she begins, very very slowly, to lose her reason.

The image of her childhood vision is identical with this man's appearance. With the sole difference that he is not paralysed and that here there is no garden with jasmine blossoms surrounding him. (27)

Having left the garden safely and secretly contained within the protagonist's mind, the Man of Jasmine has

escaped his "frame" to enter a three-dimensional space which he now shares with the protagonist. His sudden physical emergence precipitates the loss of reason whose seeds are contained within the next sentence: presenting the reader with the two attributes of the Man of Jasmine's appearance (paralysis; jasmine), the narrator claims that these are what makes him differ from "this man's appearance." However, this is compromised by the fact that the reader has no previous information about the Man of Jasmine's physical appearance. The comparison itself is based merely on the subjective perception of the protagonist whose confusion the text continues to demonstrate.

The reader is led to doubt the man's actual identity: is he really a vision appearing in the flesh or has the protagonist already lost her mind? - The text does not provide an answer and the encounter can only be attributed to the mysterious workings of "chance." This ambiguity is maintained by the fact that the Man of Jasmine simply continues to exist along with "this man": while "she" realizes, on the one hand, that the man she met is just a "normal" person, who "hat nicht das Geringste getan, um sie krank zu machen" (192) - "has not done the slightest thing to make her sick" (72), she continues to believe in the existence of the Man of Jasmine.

Nevertheless, the "normal" person appears as if he were a ghost of an image which precedes him and thereby reverses the relationship between "reality" and "representation" in

the protagonist's (and reader's) mind. In this sense, one might argue that he embodies "art," in an idealist sense, as a manifestation of things not previously found in nature. Having transgressed his boundaries (i.e. her mind), he comes to signify representation in an uncanny way, seeming more "real" than the natural world and, at the same time, a supernatural spirit.

Although, eventually, the protagonist wishes him away ("Ach - wäre er nie erschienen, wäre doch der Mann im Jasmin [...] nichts als ein träumerisches Bild [...] geblieben" (235) - "Ah, if only he had never come, if only The Man of Jasmine [...] had remained nothing but an oneiric picture [dream picture, C.R.]" (109), she experiences a childlike sense of wonderment at first ("Unerschöpfliches Erstaunen über die Tatsache, daß eine Vision zur Wirklichkeit geworden ist!" (142) - "Ceaseless amazement at the fact that a vision has become reality!" (30). Letting herself be guided by him, "she" sees herself as his "medium" and is seduced by the hallucinations he "sends" her ("Er - der alles weiß - der alles zu tun vermag!" - "He - who knows everything - who can do everything!"). Under his influence, "she" begins to enjoy her new state of mind which is also connected with him "Ja! Wenn sie verrückt ist [beginnen] die schönsten, unglaublichsten Ideen zu blühen, wie der Jasmin" (163) - "Yes! If she is mad it will be no problem for her to amuse herself on her own. Ideas, the most beautiful, incredible ideas start to blossom, like jasmine" (48).

The narrator, in turn, is no longer in a position to fully explain what madness means to the protagonist: "Wenn sie selbst sich also - von fern her - von dem berühmten Mann im Jasmin oder seinem wirklichen, lebenden Ebenbilde hypnotisiert gefühlt hat, so bedeutet das, daß sie schon seit längerer Zeit verrückt ist?" (177) - "If, then, she herself had felt that she had been hypnotised from afar by the famous Man of Jasmine, or his actual living image, didn't that mean she had been crazy now for some time?" (61). But when "she" finds herself in problems, she convincingly delegates all responsibility to him: "Nicht sie ist verantwortlich für ihre Handlungen, die sie schließlich ins Gefängnis und in die Irrenanstalt gebracht haben, sondern er" (183) - "It is not she who is responsible for the actions which finally brought her into prison and the mental hospital, but he" (66).

Even before the "shock," the all-powerful Man of Jasmine provided the impetus for the protagonist's artistic production: "she writes six short manuscripts in the attempt to free herself from an impression which has become too powerful. But she does not succeed" (26) - "[sie] schreibt sechs kleine Manuskripte, um sich von einem zu mächtig gewordenen Eindruck zu befreien, was ihr nicht gelingt" (138). The manuscripts are dedicated to her favorite writer, Herman Melville, but "she" later sends them to the Man of Jasmine to "burn them" because she considers them

"worthless" (31). Under his influence, her opinion of herself as a writer deteriorates:

In Wirklichkeit hat sie ein 'Hühner-Gehirn' - zu schwach, zu klein, um eine große Erschütterung mit Stolz zu ertragen, um, wie es zum Beispiel Herman Melville möglich war, ein Werk aus dieser Erschütterung aufzubauen [...] Tagesträume - ohne die Fähigkeit zu haben, sie in einem Werk auszudrücken. (192)

she is 'hen-brained' - too weak, too small to endure a great emotional shock with pride and manage, like Herman Melville for example, to erect a work on the basis of this upheaval [...] Day-dreams - without having the ability to express them in a work. (73)

But, however self-deprecating this statement may be, "she" also turns out to be an author erecting a work when "sie [es] sich in den Kopf [setzt] das Abenteuer ihrer Krankheit in einem Manuskript niederzuschreiben. (215) - "she gets it into her head to write down the story of her illness" (92), the book we are currently reading. The "great emotional shock" and "upheaval" which caused Melville to start Moby Dick (1851) was, as the narrator explains, the result of an encounter ("Begegnung") with an Irish lady in a post coach while travelling across England. In retrospect, the protagonist's encounter with the Man of Jasmine resembles this encounter and the "illness" about which "she" writes also resembles that of Captain Ahab's search for the white whale. In fact, the Man of Jasmine, through a ritual of burning tissues into "white smoke" which the protagonist performs on several occasions to render him present (147),

does become "the white man" (Zürn uses the color white in several different ways; for example, he is also called "white" in relation to his ethnicity, as opposed to three other imaginary playmates from childhood, a "red" native American, a "black" Pygmy, and a "brown" Hindu (182). Thus, while the narrator first establishes an intertextual connection between the protagonist and Melville, the "white (whale) man" metaphorically connects her to Melville's fictitious character (Ahab), with the effect that "she" combines both "author" and "character" in what could be read as yet another one of Zürn's textual "tricks."

### **Moving Pictures**

As the "illness" develops, symbols begin to determine the protagonist's life. All signs seem directed at her personally so that "she" loses the ability to interpret them according to their context: "in fast jeder Annonce, in fast jedem Titel eines Theaterstücks oder eines Filmes glaubt sie, Botschaften zu entziffern, die sich an ihre Person richten." (216) - "she thinks she can decipher messages to her in almost every advert, in almost every title of the plays and films" (93). Acting indirectly, through media, the white man blurs the distinctions between private and public and turns her into the center of her own universe. His power even extends to the anonymous darkness of a movie theater where he corrupts the images on screen:

Sie beginnt, verwirrt zu werden. Die erste Krise beginnt in einem Kino. Als der Raum sich verdunkelt, sieht sie ihn eintreten. Er nimmt seinen Platz einige Reihen vor ihr ein und sitzt zugleich dicht hinter ihr. Ein Reklame-Film für ein bestimmtes Öl beginnt. In einer für sie unerträglich werdenden Reihe erscheinen Flaschen mit Öl gefüllt. Diese Flaschen werden zum Symbol des männlichen Geschlechtes - dieser Anblick bereitet ihr ein derartiges körperliches Übelbefinden, daß sie fürchtet, sich zu erbrechen. (142)

She begins to get confused. The first crisis starts in a cinema. She sees him enter as the lights dim. He takes a seat several rows away from her at the same time sitting directly behind her. An advertising spot for a certain oil begins. Bottles filled with oil keep appearing one after another until their sight becomes unbearable to her. The bottles turn into the symbol of the male member - the sight gives her such a feeling of nausea that she fears she must vomit. (30)

Zürn was familiar with the medium of film through her work at UFA and this scene draws attention to the way in which moving pictures can affect the spectator as if they were actual objects. However, "she" is not disturbed by the depiction of "the male member" but rather by its "symbol." And, as the narrator states, it is not the shape of an individual oil bottle but their "succession" that leads to this shift in perception, i.e. it is not the individual image but its repeated appearance over time that leads to the formation/recognition of the symbol of the phallus. In fact, the seemingly magical transformation from one object into another takes place only by way of technology and the "symbol" is the result of an optical illusion, a "trick" played upon the viewer through the repeated duplication of

an image. Even the white man duplicates his appearance: seating himself both in front of and behind the protagonist, he plays a kind of visual trick on her, generating a sense of omnipotence which makes him, in retrospect, seem connected to the symbol of the phallus. In this sense, the white man himself comes to represent the power of visual technology in a way that opens up the space for the hallucinations to follow.

Christian Metz compares the medium of film to a mirror but he observes that it "differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although [...] everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body" (45). Her first hallucination is called a "film" by the narrator but in it, "she" sees herself:

Plötzlich erscheint am nächtlichen Himmel vor ihrem geöffneten Fenster ein seltsam weißer Flugplatz, wie eine riesige Fotografie. Aber nein! Das ist eine bewegte Szene. Das ist wie ein Film im Himmel. [...] plötzlich sieht sie ihn [sic] im Vordergrund, [...] und in seinen Armen sie selbst [...] Voll höchster Verwunderung betrachtet sie diese beiden, die in das Flugzeug steigen, und sie sieht zu, wie dieses Flugzeug sich in die Luft erhebt und im Himmel verschwindet [...]

Suddenly a curious white aerodrome appears in the night sky before her opened window like a giant photograph. But no! The scene is in motion. It's like a film projected on the sky. [...] suddenly she sees *him* in the foreground [...] embracing her own self [...] Completely astonished, she observes the two of them as they board the plane, then watches as it ascends into the air and disappears into the sky [...]

In what is one of several escape fantasies in Der Mann im Jasmin, the white man has entered the image to embrace her and take her away. "She" is split into actor and spectator but, unlike the action in a home movie, the action in this fantasy takes place for the first time, i.e. is not previously recorded. Now "she" is able to duplicate herself and, thereby, produce her own film. This "film," in turn, unites her with the white man who seems to have become, once again, a benevolent fatherly figure. It seems as if, in retrospect, the child's dream of passing through the mirror has gained its full significance: succumbing to the power of images sent to her by the Man of Jasmine, "she" re-enters her imaginary (mental) space, with the sole difference that she is now widely awake. Perhaps this is why "she" sees the performing part of herself disappear into the "sky" to be transported elsewhere, into that "other" space which elevates her to the level of the white man, at the same time that it swallows her like an abyss.

When it comes to explaining this phenomenon, the narrator mirrors her confusion over whether these images are "real":

Sie ist sich nicht klar darüber, daß sie Halluzinationen hat. In dem Zustand, in dem sie sich befindet, werden die unglaublichsten, nie gesehenen Dinge zur Wirklichkeit. Wenn also Bilder im nächtlichen Himmel für sie erscheinen, so sind diese Bilder auch *wirklich* da. (146)

She is unaware that she is suffering from hallucinations. In her present state, the most incredible, hitherto unseen things become reality,

so that when these images appear to her in the night sky, they are *really* there. (33)

Although this is presented as a hallucination, the narrator's insistence on its being "real," rather than simply dismissing it, suggests the possibility that things exist beyond sight ("hitherto unseen things become reality"). The protagonist would, therefore, be privileged rather than deluded. In fact, many of the hallucinations, as I will show later on in more detail, open up a space for the protagonist to perform an identity which differs from the pre-determined identity imposed by the narrative of "illness." For now, however, the protagonist's imaginary body simply disappears into the unknown, leaving her "real" self with the knowledge of what it is like to transgress the two-dimensional surface of the screen.

Between the scene in the cinema and the "film in the sky"-hallucination there is a third passage on film. Positing a second point of origin for the protagonist's story - her move to France - this passage also contains references to the biography of the author insofar as it introduces a character called "der Freund" ("the friend") and, on one occasion, "Hans Bellmer":

Warum ist sie nach Frankreich gekommen?  
1953 - in Berlin - sieht sie dreimal den gleichen französischen Film, um betrunken zu werden, an einem bestimmten Gesicht, das nicht das geringste mit dem Gesicht des Mannes im Jasmin zu tun hat. Sie identifiziert sich so stark mit diesem männlichen Gesicht, bis man ihr plötzlich sagt: 'Du siehst ihm ähnlich.'

Einige Tage später begegnet sie einem Mann und erkennt in seinem Gesicht das Gesicht aus dem Film, dem sie selbst ähnlich geworden ist. Sehr überrascht hört sie jemand sagen: 'Dieser Mann sieht dem X in dem Film ähnlich.'  
Diese Bestätigung sowie seine Aufforderung, ihn nach Paris zu begleiten, geben den Antrieb für ihren Entschluß, Berlin zu verlassen. (143)

Why did she move to France?  
1953, in Berlin, she sees the same French film three times in order to get drunk on the sight of a particular face which has not the slightest similarity to that of the Man of Jasmine. She identifies so strongly with this masculine face that suddenly she is told 'you resemble him.' A few days later she meets a man and recognises his face as the one in the film which she herself has come to resemble. Highly surprised, she hears someone say: 'That man resembles X in the film.' This confirmation, as well as his request that she should accompany him to Paris, spurs her decision to leave Berlin. (31)

To an even greater extent than the meeting with the Man of Jasmine - which Zürn modeled after her meeting with Henri Michaux - this meeting is said to have affected the protagonist's life: whereas the first encounter led to a mental displacement, this encounter resulted in the physical displacement (voluntary exile) which made the other encounter possible in the first place, for if "she" had not gone to Paris, she would not have met the real-life incarnation of the Man of Jasmine. In this sense, the passage presents the reader with a more realistic, autobiographical angle to the story (apparently, Zürn saw Jean-Louis Barrault in "Les Enfants du Paradis" and found that he resembled Bellmer). Preceding the protagonist's production of any manuscripts as well as the "shock" in

Paris, which the narrator dates with "1957," it cuts through the chronological continuity of the story as yet another flashback (a "memory" triggered by the visit to the movie theater).<sup>9</sup>

The passage raises the issue of whether or not there may be a connection between "the friend" and the Man of Jasmine: subject to the cliché of a scripted "love at first sight," the protagonist, once again, falls in love with an image. This time, however, the distance is not maintained and "she" identifies and even merges with the image. "He," in turn, descends from the screen to enter the space of her life in a way that seems more "natural," i.e. continuous, than the sudden and unexpected appearance of the Man of Jasmine in the flesh. This underscores their respective roles throughout the narrative, where "the friend" acts as the protagonist's caring and supportive companion, while the Man of Jasmine, that is the "white man," dominates her from a distance and drives her deeper and deeper into madness.

Although the narrator here insists that the appearance of the man "she" follows to Paris has "nicht das geringste [...] zu tun" (not anything in the least [...] to do) with the Man of Jasmine, they are both "visions" transformed into "reality." Whereas "she" felt sick by the succession of oil bottles, she is now said to have been inebriated

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<sup>9</sup> Unlike, for example, the "realism" in Barnes, Zürn's "realism" conveys the impression of what may be called an "autonomous quality of events", as the text continues to refer to the extra-textual, similar to Breton's Nadja.

("betrunken") by excessive repetition on both the level of the story (she sees the movie three times) and the level of the text, where the word "Gesicht" appears five times in a, comparatively, brief passage. The word "Gesicht" means "face" in English but also has a different connotation in the original German where "Gesichte haben" is synonymous with "having visions," an archaic expression for hallucinating. Thus "Gesicht(e)" not only designates a word by which to determine identity, i.e. someone's "face," but also "seeing" itself (the word "Sicht" means "sight"). The protagonist does not seem to fall in love as much with the man himself, about whom we learn very little, but rather with "his image."

Within the context of the story, he comes to represent the continuity of identity insofar as he merges visual appearances rather than drawing attention to their discrepancies, like the Man of Jasmine/white man. Signifying the connection between a stranger (the actor) and someone familiar (herself), this "man" seems to connect the hallucinatory cinematic vision with reality in a way that renders it possible for her to change her life on the level of practical reality (i.e. the move to Paris). Nevertheless, by making this encounter seem "fated," the narrator also makes it seem as if the protagonist was, once again, subject to forces beyond her control. "Moved" to Paris by the force of destiny, "she" may not necessarily be able to distinguish

between the "friend" and the Man of Jasmine, even though the narrator may want to keep them apart.

The fluid boundaries between these two "characters," one representing the protagonist's "reality" (her real-life "friend") and the other her fantasy life, appear, for example, in the linguistic slippage from the initials H.M., which "she" discovers on the pillowcases of her hotel (Hotel Minerve) and interprets as the initials of Herman Melville (144). These initials appear in different places throughout the text and the reader is likely to see them as a reference to Henri Michaux, the "white man" who often appears in conjunction with Herman Melville and represents the text's most powerful influence. In French, the "white man," is "homme blanc," which has the same initials as: Hans Bellmer.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not Zürn was aware of this slippage - and, as my discussion of her anagrams in the following section suggests, she probably was, - the fact that this "hidden" connection between Bellmer and the Man of Jasmine exists, is symptomatic of a kind of text which derives much of its significance from the supposed omnipotence of the linguistic sign. As will become more evident from the following, this also relates to Freud's mentioning of a "belief in the thaumaturgic force of words" which he attributes to "children and primitive peoples" (19) in order to make the connection to schizophrenia.

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<sup>10</sup> This observation was made by Scholl, 89.

## Production

As a consequence of the "shock" of meeting the Man of Jasmine, the protagonist's literary production is altered by her sudden interest in numbers: "Mit dem Wunsch [...] die Realität zu vergessen [...] vertieft sie sich plötzlich in ein Manuskript 'zu Ehren der Zahl 9'" (139) - "She engrosses herself suddenly in a manuscript 'in honour of the number 9' with the aim of [...] forgetting reality" (27). Because numbers are stable signifiers (i.e. they always mean what they say), one could interpret this as a desire to come to terms with the conflicting perceptions, a way of introducing signification without shifting meaning. However, "she" soon interprets these mathematical figures like visual signifiers, for example when she considers the 9 her lucky number and attributes bad luck to the 6 by reading it as a nine turned upside-down. In what follows, "die Beschäftigung mit der 9 und der 6 wird zur Manie" (141) - "her preoccupation with the 9 and the 6 becomes a mania" (28), resulting in a scene where "she" inscribes a "6" into the palm of her hand (p.154) with a nail file as if to force a fusion between herself and the signs which seem to determine her, arresting their constant slippage by way of permanent inscription into the surface of her skin.

This violent merging of signifiers and the human body is also related to the manuscripts "she" produces during this time: in "Das Haus der Krankheiten" each hospital room

is named after a body part (and, Zürn's actual Das Haus der Krankheiten contains a series of drawings filled with handwriting, with both media together depicting the rooms); in another text, "Les Jeux à deux" a man attempts to devour a woman who tries to escape by multiplying herself and, thereby, loses her bodily integrity for good.

The fragmentation of the body in relation to language may be what attracts her to the production of anagrams, defined by the narrator as "Worte und Sätze, die durch Umstellen der Buchstaben eines Wortes oder Satzes entstanden sind. Nur die gegebenen Buchstaben sind verwendbar und keine anderen dürfen zur Hilfe gerufen werden" (148)- "words and sentences which are created by re-arranging the letters in a word or sentence. One may only use the letters which are available, and not draw on any others" (35). Over the course of the narrative, composing anagrams turns into a "dangerous fever" (118)- "gefährliche Fieber" (245) which, together with the hallucinations, constitute the symptoms of her "mental illness."

Interestingly, the production of these anagrams takes place independently of the white man (who otherwise represents her "illness") and the technique itself is introduced by "the friend":

Dieser Freund spricht ihr von Anagrammen und zeigt ihr, wie man solche Gedichte macht. Zugleich entdeckt er ihre Gabe zum automatischen Zeichnen, ermutigt sie und läßt ein Jahr später ihr erstes Buch, 'Hexentexte,' von der Galerie Springer in Berlin veröffentlichen. (143)

This friend tells her about anagrams and shows her how to compose such poems. He also discovers her gift for automatic drawing and encourages her. One year later, he has her first book, 'Hexentexte,' published by Galerie Springer in Berlin. [my translation C.R.]

It seems as if, through this practical support, the "friend" counteracts the detrimental effect of the white man whose primary influence is to provide her with the less "productive" hallucinations (i.e. "day-dreams"). However, Bellmer himself, in his preface to Zürn's Hexentexte (1954), relates the anagrams to bodily fragmentation, as I have explained in the beginning. According to him, the "body" is not an organic entity but a mechanical construct which can be re-organized into a different order of signification. Considering that the image of one's body is bound up with the "self," the claim that the initial sentence used to compose an anagram is synonymous with the composer's own body may mean that the production of anagrams becomes synonymous with a "de-composition" and "re-composition" of the self, i.e. madness as well as self-representation. If this process, in turn, is not based on an organic connection between body image and self, but on the self as a mechanical construct, the result might be an alienation between self and body, the kind of alienation in which people project their physical self away from their mental self. This is precisely what takes place in the hallucinations, yet it may well be, the text implies, that this condition is triggered

by the production of the anagrams in the first place. Note, for example, how the hallucinations appear secondary in the following description of one of her "crises":

Das alte gefährliche Fieber der Anagramme hat sie gepackt. Eines nach dem anderen entsteht. Gefährlich für sie, weil sie sich wieder vollkommen gegen ihre Umwelt abschließt. Eine neue Krise, von ihr nicht bemerkt, kommt auf sie zu. Keine Halluzinationen, nichts Außergewöhnliches, aber man bemerkt eine Veränderung an ihr. Sie schläft und ißt nicht mehr, sie will frei sein. Sie erklärt, allein leben zu wollen. Dieser Wunsch, der jedesmal zu einer Katastrophe für sie führt und dessen Folgen sie kennt, aber im kritischen Augenblick wieder vergißt. (245)

The old, dangerous fever of the anagrams has her in its grip. She creates one after another. Dangerous for her because once again she shuts herself off completely from her surroundings. Unnoticed by her, a new crisis descends. No hallucinations, nothing unusual, but people notice a change in her. She no longer wants to sleep or eat, she wants to be free. She explains that she wishes to live alone. This wish, which every time leads to a catastrophe and whose consequence she knows, but which she always forgets at the critical moment. (118)

The production of anagrams results in a desire "to live alone," i.e. to be independent from "the friend." Although the anagrams seem to be a way of establishing her own artistic identity, they also represent an obsession with control from which "she" wishes to escape, for example into the hallucinations sent by the white man (which I will discuss in detail later on). "The friend," who taught her how to compose anagrams, becomes synonymous with control: in order to protect her from being seduced by hallucinations,

he actually prevents her from producing anything but anagrams, for example when "she" begins to:

das Abenteuer ihrer Krankheit in einem Manuskript niederzuschreiben. Umsonst warnt sie der Freund vor den Gefahren, die eine zu intensive Beschäftigung mit diesem Thema für sie haben können. Sie stellt sich taub gegen alle Beschwörungen von seiner Seite, dieses Manuskript nicht zu schreiben. (215)

write down the story of her illness. Her friend warns her of the possible dangers of dwelling on this subject, but to no avail. She turns a deaf ear to all his entreaties to desist from writing the manuscript. (92)

But why does this "manuscript," i.e. Der Mann im Jasmin, contain so many anagrams? - According to the linguist Jean Starobinski, anagrams reveal "a language underneath language" ["eine Sprache unter der Sprache"<sup>11</sup>] so that they function like an oracle, revealing a deeper truth by way of "translating" hitherto secret connections into a new surface. Combining prohibition with chance, the activity of composing anagrams is a kind of "automatic writing" in which the unconscious takes over in order to discover a kind of mystical meaning whereby sentences that already exist (many of Zürn's anagrams, for example, are based on lines from poems, several by Michaux), are transformed into a highly personalized meaning. Composing anagrams demands a great deal of mental discipline and concentration because one has to be focused on the limited possibilities of

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<sup>11</sup> Starobinski, Wörter unter den Wörtern: Die Anagramme von Ferdinand de Saussure (trans. pub. 1980).

combining the letters at the same time that one must remain susceptible to "inspiration" regarding the possibilities to choose from (Scholl explains that an initial line consisting of only 16 letters allows for 871,781,312,000 possible permutations in a computer calculation). Thus it is an activity which is, paradoxically, based on chance at the same time that it provides the illusion of an individual choice. The letters are already given, i.e. the composer of anagrams does not have to "create" something from scratch, yet she also seems to write her own destiny in the sense that she "finds" her very personal combinations.

Unlike the hallucinations, which are "sent" by the white man, "written" by the narrator and passively "experienced" by the protagonist, the anagrams that are quoted in Der Mann im Jasmin are said to be invented by the protagonist, turning the protagonist herself into an author. However, as they provide a sense of control over language and symbolic meaning, they also reflect the way in which the protagonist perceives herself. For example, when an anagram ends with the question "ist es eine Irre?" - "is it a madwoman?" the narrator responds: "sie hat natürlich diese Frage auf sich selbst bezogen" (149) - "Obviously she had related it to herself" (36). As an "expression" of the protagonist's state of mind, the anagrams act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, driving her deeper and deeper into the totalizing and vicious circle of finding everything connected with everything else.

To give an example, let me briefly introduce the very first anagram that appears in Der Mann im Jasmin:

IHR HAETTET EURE AUGEN AUSGERISSEN  
 Euer Tag heisst: hart.  
 Eure Augen: sein.  
 Eure Haut ist Gesang - euer Rat: seh' ein.  
 Euer Haus ist getarnt. Eure Siege nah.  
 Eure Tat: ein sarg-gееintes Ruhehaus.

YE WOULD HAVE PLUCKED OUT YOUR OWN EYES  
 The dictum of your day: hard.  
 Of your eyes: being.  
 Your skin is song - your advice: understand.  
 Your house is masked. Your victories close.  
 Your deed: a resting place united with a coffin.<sup>12</sup>

Taken from a line in the Bible (Galatians 4, verse 15), this anagram pays homage to, while also displacing (by way of changing the letters), another powerful spiritual text. Alluding, perhaps, to the protagonist's ambivalence towards vision, "she" uses a line which refers to self-blinding and, in the following, continues to evoke biblical rhetoric by way of anaphora. Invoking language ("dictum") and the everyday, the first line may refer to the work of writing or of how work can be created/delegated verbally. In the second line, "eyes" are equated with "being," a gesture reminiscent of the way in which the "author" (i.e. the protagonist as well as Zürn) defines her identity in terms of work and vision (also discussed in my introduction); in the third line, "skin" is related to poetic language, introducing the

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<sup>12</sup> The translation is mine. C.R.

body and suggesting the state of heightened linguistic creativity which physically affects the subject.

These are just a few examples to show how this anagram may relate to the larger context of Der Mann im Jasmin. Note that, just as the letters are already "given," my own sketchy interpretation of this anagram is based primarily on an already existing context - the unique universe the anagrams seem to reveal is one which is boundless and, as I pointed out earlier, limited at the same time. What seems most interesting is not the "content" of the anagram itself but the way in which it draws attention to language. In terms of content, this is reflected, for example, in how the mode of address is maintained (second person plural) while there is a shift from subjunctive to declarative mode: it sounds as if the speaker were to impose her words on those who would have "plucked out" their eyes; subjecting herself to the implied "gaze" of her listeners, "she" places herself in a position of authority from which she determines what "they" are.

If above all, the anagrams reflect their own mode of production, they also defy representation to a certain extent (for what would be left to represent anew if everything is "already there"?). The experience of composing anagrams may manifest itself within the subject as an experience of total control along with complete effacement/disebodiment. The second half of the above-quoted anagram results in an evocation of death and this, in

turn, seems particularly emblematic of a technique designed to represent that which normally defies representation. For example, in a drawing the protagonist is said to produce in one of the mental hospitals, entitled "Rencontre avec Monsieur M (Ma Mort)," the text points beyond its surface, describing its "content" in terms of its process of production: asked by a psychiatrist why she covered "the entire surface of the paper right to the edges? On the others you've left the space around the motif white," the protagonist responds: "Weil ich gerade mit dieser Zeichnung nicht aufhören konnte oder nicht aufhören wollte [...] Ich wünschte, diese Zeichnung sollte sich bis über die Ränder des Papiers hinaus fortsetzen - bis ins Unendliche" (228) - "Simply because I couldn't stop working on this drawing, or didn't want to, for I experienced endless pleasure while working on it. I wanted the drawing to continue beyond the edge of the paper - on to infinity" (103). Naturally, we cannot even begin to guess what this drawing may actually depict.

### **The Body**

As I have tried to show, artistic production is represented as the protagonist's *raison d'être* and, therefore, a matter of life and death. In many ways, the anagrams, which constitute an emblematic text-within-the-text, refer back to the author, leaving little space for the reader to consider the protagonist as an independent

(literary) figure. On the level of the narrative, however, the relationship between language and the protagonist's body is represented in terms of more concrete experiences: when fellow asylum inmates ask her why she is there, "she" responds with reference to the poet Jean Arp: "Oh [...] ich habe gehört, wie in meinem Bauch ein großer Dichter ein Gedicht aufgesagt hat" (189) - "Oh [...] I heard a famous poet reciting a poem in my belly" (70); and, at a police station, "she" feels compelled to perform an action in response to a sentence by Michaux - "'Ich pflanze den Brotbaum' [...] Der Satz windet sich in ihr wie eine Schlange, und sie kann ihm nicht widerstehen, sie blickt umher, um Erde zu suchen" (230) - "'I plant the breadfruit tree' [...] The sentence is like a snake inside her, and she cannot resist it, she looks round in search of earth" (105). At moments such as these, the protagonist seems to experience poetic language as part of her body, in a more organic, less abstract way.

Compared to the obsessive productivity that manifests itself through the anagrams, the protagonist's hallucinatory experiences are related to "creativity" without leading to an extra-textual "product" (such as the anagrams). Instead, these scenes relegate authority to the narrator, whose voice represents to us what the protagonist sees. As the following discussion of some of the hallucinations will show, they allow the reader to see the protagonist as a subject who performs (if only mentally) different versions of herself.

In these passages, the protagonist no longer carries the burden of meaningful production, appearing instead as a spectator as well as an (imaginary) performer.

Similar to Nightwood, whose narrative is often interrupted by descriptions of visual elements and dramatic "scenes," the descriptions of the hallucinations in Zürn's text function as moments in which the protagonist is less determined by the external narrative of "mental illness" than by the physical pleasure "she" takes in madness. And, while the hallucinations are as ekphrastic as the anagrams, they do not have to be "interpreted" for the reader in order to make sense within the story of the protagonist's "life." A more gratuitous form of representation, the hallucinations constitute the source of madness as well as its creative aspects: as brief poetic moments within which the protagonist is shown to luxuriate, they allow the reader to share her own attraction to her "illness": "Wenn jemand ihr gesagt hätte, daß es notwendig ist, verrückt zu werden, um diese, besonders diese letzte Halluzination zu sehen, so wäre sie gerne verrückt geworden" (152) - "She would be happy to go mad if someone told her that it is necessary to go mad in order to experience these hallucinations, especially the last ones" (38-39). The hallucination to which this statement refers (the protagonist's second hallucination after the "film in the sky"), connects the pleasure "she" experiences with a sensation of disembodiment:

Große Formen - wie Flügel - schweben heran, öffnen und schließen sich - zuerst wenige - bis sich das Zimmer langsam mit ihnen füllt [...] Wenn diese grau-schwarzen Flügel ohne Vögel zu dicht an sie heranfliegen, hebt sie ihre Hand in plötzlicher Angst und schlägt sie zurück - für einen Augenblick weichen sie in den Hintergrund des dunklen Zimmers zurück, aber sie kommen wieder heran, und langsam gewöhnt sie sich an diese seltsame Gegenwart, bis sie merkt, daß diese Flügel ohne Materie sind und durch ihren aufgerichteten Körper hindurchfliegen, als sei sie selbst körperlos geworden. Das entzückt und entsetzt sie zur gleichen Zeit. Genau betrachtet, so haben diese Wesen nichts Schreckliches an sich [...] es geht eine große Würde, ein unheimlicher Ernst, etwas sehr Nobles von ihnen aus. (152)

Large shapes - like wings - float up to her, opening and closing - few at first - until they slowly fill the room [...] Whenever these greyish-black wings without birds fly up too close to her she raises her hand in sudden anxiety and fends them off. They retreat for a moment into the background of the dark room, then approach once again, and slowly she gets used to this strange presence until she notices that these wings are insubstantial and can fly straight through her upright body, as if she herself had become bodiless. This both entrances and appals her. Looking at them carefully, these creatures have in fact nothing terrifying about them [...] they radiate an enormous dignity, an uncanny seriousness, something very noble. (38-39) [translation modified C.R.]

Similar to Hardenberg's poetry, the loss of physical boundaries is here represented as a positive, transformative experience. But unlike Hardenberg's speaker, "she" does not delight in expanding her body to merge with the space but rather in the vision of her own effacement. The phrase "als sei sie selbst körperlos geworden" - "as if she herself had

become bodiless" implies that it is possible for her to feel herself without a physical body at all, whereas Hardenberg's speaker always perceives herself *through* and *in relation to* her body. While Hardenberg, at times, disconnects the "I" from a space in which it then appears to "float" as a linguistic signifier, independent of its original environment, "she" takes herself out of space entirely. And, while Hardenberg's voice is the creator of its own space, ceasing to exist with the disappearance of the subject, Zürn's protagonist is placed in the "dark room" by a narrator who continues to represent her, even if "she" remains physically absent.

To some extent, the scene relates to Michaux's description of the lunatic's experience of his body:

For centuries [...] the lunatic has complained. He says he is beside his body. That his body is elsewhere [...] that he no longer weighs anything [...] that he is transparent [...] that he is empty, that he has been changed into a doll, that he has no more organs [...] that he is artificial, that he is fake, that another occupies his body... and so forth. .(134)

Michaux describes disembodiment as an essential property of madness. Unlike his "lunatic," however, Zürn's protagonist does not "complain" about her condition: having withstood the attack of "this strange presence," her newly found lack of bodily substance comes across as positive, allowing her to disarm an imaginary enemy within the "space" of her own fantasy. Renouncing all physical resistance,

"she" seems free to experience the pleasure of yielding to the creatures her own imagination generates. Perhaps seized by the (outwardly projected) symptoms of her "illness" - the creatures seem to invade her body like a virus - "she" comes to appreciate the absence of her physical self in terms of a "mental" pleasure.

What connects this to Michaux is that these experiences are represented in relation to madness. Although Hardenberg's poetry may represent similar mental states at times, it does not contain any references to madness. Instead, Hardenberg works with the concept of "nature." And, whereas her language, like Barnes', "twists and turns" dramatically, conveying the movements of the speaker's body in a way that draws attention to language as "art," the hallucinatory passages of Der Mann im Jasmin continue to be written in a realistic style.

From a clinically detached perspective, the narrator shifts attention away from the possibility that these hallucinations are also verbal constructs, created by the narrator. This, in turn, permits her to make the protagonist's experience seem "real" for the reader. As I have indicated before, the connection between representation (signs, anagrams, writing, drawing) and the body is negative insofar as "she" represents her body as fragmented in her manuscripts, mutilates herself in the attempt to inscribe symbols into her own flesh and dissects language in order to "create" meaning relevant to her physical self. All of this

indicates a "dis-placement" between the protagonist's physical person and her mental (image of her-) self, leading, apparently, to either fantasies of disembodiment or to an excessive emphasis on the "flesh," as the following passage, which describes her third hospitalization, indicates:

Hier liegt in jedem Bett ein Berg von weißem röchelndem Fleisch [...] Und sie vergißt, daß sie selbst ein solcher Berg von totem häßlichem und übelriechendem Fleisch gewesen ist, in den schlimmsten Zuständen der seelischen Abstumpfung - in der totalen Depression. (246)

Lying on the beds are mounds of white, wheezing flesh [...] And she forgets that she herself had been just such a mound of dead, ugly, foul-smelling flesh during the worst moments of her mental stupefaction - in her total depression. (119)

In contrast to the "flight of fancy" of the hallucinations, depressions, i.e. the other side of the illness, are characterized by a sense of being a "mound of flesh," a metaphor which is also reminiscent of the text's very beginning (the mother). The narrator suggests the disturbing nature of "flesh" several times, especially in relation to other patients. Although here, "she" is said to forget ("vergißt") that she, too, feels weighed down by her body at times (in fact, "she" spends more diegetic time being depressed than hallucinating) the body returns with a vengeance in scenes such as this:

In einem Rollstuhl führt man sie über das Flugfeld zum Flugzeug nach Paris [...] Eine lange Zeit, mit

Injektionen und Medikamenten, vergeht, bis sie wieder laufen kann [...] das sieht aus, als wenn sich ein Roboter auf den Weg macht. Wenn sie zu lesen versucht, so sieht sie, wie die Schriftzeilen schräg zusammenlaufen [...] Wenn sie ihre Hand bewegt, so erschreckt sie sich vor dieser Bewegung, als sei es nicht ihre eigene Hand, als gehöre diese Hand nicht zu ihrem Körper (215)

She is rolled across the tarmac in a wheel chair to the plane for Paris [...] A long time, filled with injections and medicines, passes until she can walk again [...] she resembles a robot walking along. When she tries to read she sees the lines converge at an angle [...] When she moves her hand she is startled by the motion, as if it were not her own hand and did not belong to her body. (92)

Following a scene of attempted suicide and subsequent masturbation,<sup>13</sup> this physical reaction of developing strange motor disturbances is most likely caused by the effects of hospitalization where "Mit geschlossenen Augen [...] verbringt sie Wochen und Monate in ihrem Bett. Sie will sich nicht mehr waschen, nicht kämmen, nicht sprechen" (240) - [transl.]. However, "she" interprets this a punishment for masturbation and the reader is likely to notice that this temporary "paralysis" is reminiscent of the original paralysis of the Man of Jasmine. Considering that this condition may thus reflect her identification with the Man

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<sup>13</sup> The issue of "masturbation" relates to the beginning of Freud's essay, i.e. his use of Näcke's definition of narcissism as a perversion. However, Der Mann im Jasmin is not the best text by Zürn to address this topic, which she brings up only once here. For further discussion, consult the introduction to my translation of Zürn's Dunkler Frühling (Dark Spring, Boston: Exact Change, forthcoming 1999), a text in which masturbation is a dominant theme.

of Jasmine as well as her alienation from herself (the "robot" may symbolize the automatism of blindly following the Man of Jasmine), it seems essential to her well-being to envision herself as a physically intact human being in the dance-hallucinations I am now going to discuss.

### **Performances**

The antidote to a body which is a pile of "flesh" or a malfunctioning "robot" may not have to be an organic entity: compared to Hardenberg's poetry which is, really, concerned with transcending the body, the body in Der Mann im Jasmin is either profoundly disturbing in its massive presence or virtual, capable of supernatural transformations. While Hardenberg's voice maps an internal landscape as a spatial exploration, Zürn's protagonist projects her physical self onto a two-dimensional surface. As I have mentioned, in her hallucinations, "she" sees herself perform as if she were in a film but it is a "film" not previously recorded. And, as the "film in the sky" and the "wings without birds" have shown, all hallucinations involve some kind of separation between the protagonist's observing and performing "selves." Finally, as I have also indicated, even though the protagonist's "reality" remains virtual and her self "split," the hallucinations can be read as a way of performing a more integrated self, one in which "she" takes pleasure in watching the performance she "produces" without having to "dissect" its meaning.

Shortly after "she" leaves her "friend" to write the "manuscript of her illness," she finds herself, once again, alone in a hotel room, where she experiences a whole set of hallucinations, lasting all night. Taking up several pages of the narrative, they interrupt the frame narrative to focus on the protagonist's "body" as an event. At first, as in a circus, the white man is introduced as the "director" of the spectacle about to begin:

Wer ist es, der ihr mit seiner unmenschlich großen Liebe das Geschenk dieser Halluzination bereitet?  
ER!  
Ihr Vertrauen, ihr fester Glaube in seine überirdischen Fähigkeiten, in seine große Kunst, sie vollkommen zu verklären, zu verwandeln, sind unendlich - unendlich...  
Welch ein Programm hat er sich für sie ausgedacht!  
Welch ein Regisseur! Welch ein Meister in der Inszenierung von Wundern! (217)

Who is it that has made her a present of this hallucination with his supreme love?  
HE!  
There is no end to her trust, her unfaltering faith in his supernatural abilities, in his great ability to transfigure her completely, to transform her...  
What a programme he has thought up for her! What clever direction! What a master at staging miracles! (93-94) [translation modified C.R.]

Expressing admiration for the Man of Jasmine as a deity of art, the narrator is euphoric, using capitalization, three dots and exclamation marks. After a few other images, the stage appears with an audience and "she" becomes part of the scene he directs:

Eine große, leere, fast dunkle Bühne erscheint - nicht als Halluzination, sondern vielmehr als ein

deutliches Bild, das in ihrem Inneren entsteht. Aber warum eine Bühne, warum plötzlich der starke Strahl von Licht, der sich als Scheinwerfer auf die Mitte der Bühne richtet? Da tut sie einen Sprung mitten in diesen Lichtstrahl hinein und beginnt sich von nun an selbst zuzusehen. [...] sie fühlt sich dazu aufgefordert, den alten, hoffnungslosen Wunsch ihrer Kindheit zu verwirklichen: Tänzerin zu sein. [...] sie weiß: Irgendwo in der Dunkelheit ist er, der sie dirigieren wird, wie der Tanzmeister den Schüler. Ob sie es will oder nicht - der erste Finger beginnt sich zu bewegen, das Handgelenk biegt sich, die Hand beschreibt einen kleinen, zierlichen Bogen in der Luft, ihr Tanz hat begonnen. (218-19)

A large, empty, almost completely dark stage appears - not as a hallucination but rather as a distinct image which rises up within her. But why a stage, why the sudden strong beam of light which spotlights the centre? Then she jumps into the middle of this beam of light and from now on begins watching her own self. [...] she feels she has been invited to fulfil the old, hopeless wish of her childhood: to be a dancer. [...] she knows: he is somewhere in the darkness and will direct her like a dance master directing his pupil. Whether she wants to or not - the first finger starts to move, her wrist bends, her hand describes a small, elegant curve in the air, her dance has begun. (95) [translation modified C.R.]

Compared to Hardenberg's organic dancer, who is motivated by an internal physical tension and whose movements appear based on the accumulation and release of natural energy, this dancer seems mechanical: directed from elsewhere like an instrument, her first movement is to "describe a small, elegant curve in the air," a gesture of art, dictated by form. In fact, throughout the performance, there are references to physical "mastery," and as the performer's technique becomes more accomplished, she begins

to perform humanly impossible movements: her spine is compared to a "snake" and she begins to rise and fly; in the air, "she opens out, forming a shining star made of countless new arms and legs and necks and heads, she becomes a beautiful, flower-like monstrosity" (96) - "Sie entfaltet sich. sie formt einen leuchtenden Stern, aus unzähligen neuen Armen und Beinen und Hälsen und Köpfen gebildet, sie wird zu einem schönen, blumenhaften Monstrum."

In a second dance, which is more like an improvisation, "she" is asked to transform herself into a "bird" and, after that, into a "tiger." It becomes increasingly difficult to meet these challenges but the performer discovers her own hidden talents. The voice backstage explains that "Wer fähig ist, ein Tier darzustellen, nähert sich der Meisterschaft" - "anyone who can portray an animal has almost attained mastery." Commenting upon the degree of technical difficulty, the narrator uses *erlebte Rede* to represent the protagonist's response to this challenge: "Ha, that's easily said - but how - how can one do that?" - "Ha - das ist leicht gesagt - aber wie - wie macht man das?" Heroically, "she" continues to execute more and more difficult roles, judging her own performance along the way.

Meanwhile, the "director" is lurking in the background, commanding the performer to outdo herself in a magnificent suicide:

das, was 'man ihr befiehlt,' jetzt zu tun, ist  
kein Tanz, sondern die verhältnismäßig kurze

Handlung, die einen Selbstmord darstellt: Sie ist der Skorpion, der sich selbst tötet. [...] ihre Beine und Füße [wachsen] zu einem gefährlichen langen und wie zu einem spitzen Dolch geschliffenen Stachel zusammen, der sich langsam und in einem sehr eleganten Bogen nach oben biegt, bis seine Spitze genau über dem Mittelpunkt ihres Sonnengeflechtes steht. Sie senkt ihre Augen auf dieses Kostbarste, was sie besitzt, und es zeigt sich ihr unter der durchsichtig gewordenen Haut in der ganzen Schönheit seiner feinen und allerfeinsten Verzweigungen, die unter ihrem Atem wie Silber zu glänzen beginnen, und das gleicht einer Landschaft im Licht, die sich in verschlungenen Wegen verliert und unendlich die Sehnsucht erweckt, darin umherzugehen, um ganz neue Entdeckungen zu machen...  
 Welch eine Grausamkeit, welche Teufelei, sie dazu zu bringen, mit ihrem eigenen Stachel in diesen Glanz hinein zu stoßen. (222-23)

what she is now 'being ordered' to do is not a dance but the relatively short action which constitutes suicide: she is the scorpion which kills itself [...] her feet and legs grow together to form a dangerously long sting like a sharp pointed dagger, then curl slowly upwards in an elegant curve until its point hangs just above the centre of her solar plexus. She lowers her eyes to this, her most precious possession, which reveals itself beneath her now transparent skin with all the beauty of its tiny and minuscule branchings which start to glisten like silver under her breath, and which resembles a paradisaical, illuminated landscape which loses itself in its twisting paths, constantly awakening the desire to wander about within it and make completely new discoveries...  
 What cruelty, what devilry to compel her to stab this glory with her own sting. (98)

In this final scene, "she" discovers the "paradisaical" vision of her own solar plexus, "her most precious possession," which the text relates, on another occasion, to an "inner kingdom" which has been created from encounters with "music, books and objects of art" (198). Performing the

"scorpion" for the white man, she must turn her own body against this realm, yet this self-destructive move also reveals a previously "invisible" internal landscape to herself. Although the moment of discovering her own internal landscape tragically coincides with the moment of death, the narrative continues after the performance, revealing the performance itself to have been the ultimate work of art.

The question becomes one of catharsis: does this symbolic death lead to a permanent transformation of the way in which "she" sees herself or is it simply another in a series of virtual scenes? - In terms of the frame narrative, little changes: "she" ends up in yet another asylum and the story of her illness continues to spiral downwards. Considering that, once again, the text shows a preoccupation with death, one might consider this "suicide" in relation to the author's death, yet this does not suffice to explain the fantastic nature of this image. Whether or not this scene is significant in relation to the story, its very theatricality helps to establish a perspective which differs from the realistic frame narrative.

Ironically, the white man seems to "direct" her only so that "she" may find the freedom to transform herself in performance and to "discover" her own center, if only in death. Considering that he, too, is part of the protagonist because she imagines him, I would argue that "she" endows him with significance by imagining both of them working together. Based on this, I would argue that the Man of

Jasmine/white man has to be interpreted as an extension of the protagonist's state of mind, i.e. a part of herself that wants to "direct" her own production in a way that makes it differ from the production dictated to her by "the friend." In this sense, the white man is not so much a Bellmer-figure as he is a kind of authorial super-ego with whom the author struggles in order to define an identity.

Entering the space of the third (virtual) reality which was, originally, occupied by the Man of Jasmine, the protagonist has now joined her childhood vision on a stage, i.e. in public. Perhaps, the "suicide" could be read as a way of discarding the virtual body, an attempt to overcome the gap between "real" and imaginary self and thereby, once again, pass through the mirror. After all, this symbolic "death" is performed as the connection between two parts of herself (the "dagger" and the solar plexus), which makes it a particularly violent but also particularly intimate fantasy. While one might be tempted to interpret this passage as the violation of a "womb" by a "phallus," as some have, these elements are part of the same body and self-destruction is the scorpion's nature, in any case. Instead, I would argue that the protagonist experiences her own annihilation with a kind of masochistic pleasure, especially considering the triumphant mood in which the narrator portrays her the morning after: "Hier ist jemand wahnsinnig geworden, vor Freude über seine in dieser Nacht entdeckten übermenschlichen Fähigkeiten! (224) - "someone has gone mad

with joy at the superhuman abilities she has discovered this night!" (100).

**Conclusion: Continuation**

Even after this "virtual suicide," nothing really changes for the protagonist. The remaining "plot" is a series of repetitions: another attempt at "independence"; another hospitalization (a period of over a year, now recounted in just a few pages); another vacation with the "friend"; and then the cycle starts all over again, resulting in another hospitalization, and so forth. What distinguishes the hallucinatory "scenes" from the scenes in Nightwood is that they remain isolated moments within a narrative that is "mechanical" insofar as the illness is autonomous.

As I have tried to show, Zürn's "mechanical" subject comes to life only during performances from which her physical body is, by definition, excluded. The frame narrative moves her body between Berlin and Paris, hotels, vacation places, and various mental institutions, but her inner life takes place only in relation to a virtual space. The people "she" encounters, friends, strangers and doctors, remain sketchy and the only figure she takes seriously, the Man of Jasmine/white man, is imagined by herself.

On the other hand, "he" helps her: temporarily visualizing her body engaged in transformations, the protagonist sustains herself under the illusion of some kind

of change during and after her hallucinations, even though the narrative of "illness" continues just the same. In fact, after his disappearance (following the scorpion-scene), her "performance" becomes rather less "poetic." In the following scene, for example, she performs alone in a prison cell after having been arrested:

Sie führt zum ersten Male und für sich alleine eine lange Pantomime auf, an deren Bedeutung und Einzelheiten sie sich später nicht mehr erinnern kann. Aber während sie sich auf eine graziöse und phantasievolle Art mit ihrem Spiegel beschäftigt, denkt sie flüchtig daran, daß jetzt jemand da sein sollte, um diese Pantomime in einem kleinen Film für immer festzuhalten - aber niemand ist da.  
(232)

She performs for the first time, just for herself, a long mime-show whose meaning and details she is later unable to recall. But while she occupies herself with her game in this gracious and imaginative way, she thinks briefly that there ought to be someone to record this mime for posterity in a little film - but there is no one.  
(106)

"There is no one" and even the protagonist does not seem to be fully there: without the director of her mental theatre, she is unable to "remember" the actions of her own physical self and the narrator, instead of performing linguistically, shows the protagonist in need of "someone" to record her - a function the narrator herself does not seem to be able to fulfill without the Man of Jasmine's "presence."

Having invaded the protagonist's story, after "she" was exiled from the paradise of childhood in the beginning, "he"

seems to have abandoned her after her "fall" from the paradise of imaginary bodily integrity (the scorpion-scene), leaving her with only the perpetuation of her "illness." Showing her to be caught in a vicious circle, the book ends with the following passage:

'Ich fühle mich wie in einem Gefängnis,' so sagte sie einmal zu ihrem Psychiater, und seine Antwort war: 'Sie selbst sind ihr eigenes Gefängnis.'  
 'Ich befinde mich wie in einem Kreis,' so sagte sie zu einem anderen Psychiater. Und dieser antwortete: 'Ich glaube nicht an den Kreis.'  
 Aber 'Kreis' und 'Gefängnis' verschwinden - man wird wieder fähig zu arbeiten - bis zum nächsten 'Ping' - von gegenüber - bis zum nächsten Geräusch des Hammers, der die 9 oder 6 Schläge auf einem Dach auf eine beunruhigende Weise wiederholt. Es kommt darauf an, sich zu merken, daß das 'Ping' entsteht, wenn eine unbekannte und unbedeutende Frau ihre Teller abwäscht und daß die neun Hammerschläge notwendig sind, um einen Stein bei den Maurern zu zerteilen --- wäre das eine Rettung? (255)

'I feel as though I am in prison,' she says to a psychiatrist on one occasion. and he answers: 'You are your own prison.'  
 'I am trapped in a never-ending circle,' she says to another psychiatrist. And he answers: 'I do not believe in this circle.'  
 But 'circle' and 'prison' disappear - the ability to work returns - until the next 'ping' - from across the way - until the next sound of a hammer, repeating those 9 or 7 blows on a roof in an unsettling manner. It's all a question of remembering that the 'ping' occurs when an unknown and inconsequential woman washes the dishes and that hammer blows are necessary when masons have to split a stone --- would that save her? (126)  
 [translation modified]

Referring to her auditory hallucinations - against which "she" would have to protect herself by way of

"remembering" the reality of the world of work and material objects - the text ends with an open question. Considering that "the ability to work" is connected with the Man of Jasmine and, therefore, the illness, there does not seem to be any way out. The reader simply does not know whether the Man of Jasmine will come back or not. And, in the end, the freedom to perform a different self during the "night of hallucinations," perhaps even eliminate (kill) the self to become another person, proves to have been one illusion among many. However, in order not to deteriorate any further into the "mechanics" of its own structure, the text has been shown to depend upon such illusions for its "life."

## CONCLUSION

My motivation for this project has been the intuitive knowledge that reading and writing amount to more than just a "representation" of a reality that is already "there." As I would argue, representation plays an active role in structuring human subjectivity. To the extent that we reflect ourselves in texts, texts are our reality. There are, however different kinds of texts: in this dissertation, I have been looking at texts which claim to represent subjectivity, i.e. a reality of feelings and desires which does not exist in terms of "objects" in the natural world but rather in their "expression" through language. Insofar as they are self-reflective, they can be characterized as texts in which "narcissism" plays an important role: a speaker reflects upon her own voice in relation to a "body" whose shape is a textual landscape; the flow of a predictable narrative is interrupted to render an absent lover present in verbal and visual reflections; and, a protagonist whose identity seems split between an autobiographical and a fictional subject projects her desire to write onto an imaginary figure who confines her to a narrative of mental illness but also provides imaginary escapes through visions of a virtual

body - all of these texts are at once utopian in their apparent attempts to open up unknown textual spaces and, at the same time, marked by the impossibility of a merge between the text and its subject. Narcissus' drama is the inability to merge with the image he desires and each of these texts makes the reader painfully aware of the "difference" between that which can be said and that which seems to escape language.

Still, as I would conclude, nothing truly escapes language, for it is precisely the effect of this apparent difference between fiction and reality that makes it possible to conceive of a third, the possibility of what it would be like to merge, to enter that other space which is not real - or, on the other hand, the illusion that it is possible to escape from the image other than through death. The paradox is that we are determined by fictions because this is the only way we can conceive of the difference between "reality" and "fantasy." As each of these texts shows, writing fictions which seem to reflect ourselves is a way of fashioning who we are. And yet, I would not presume to say that I have come to know Hardenberg, Barnes and Zürn as "persons" through reading their texts. Their physical bodies differ from their texts and, at the same

time, their texts create the illusion that we may get to know them through their texts.

However, based on the myth of Narcissus, it is dangerous to assume that the image can ever contain the subject: although the image seems infinitely more important, it is still his body that allows him to see. And, as Zürn has shown, the difference between "life" and "art" must be upheld in order to maintain one's sanity, and one's life. Which is another paradox: on the one hand, art seems to have the power to deflect madness and to restructure subjectivity, on the other, its "danger" consists precisely in this power to seduce the subject into thinking that immortality is an option.

In this sense, Freud's discovery of the ego ideal is essential: he describes it as a refuge from mortality, a way of not acknowledging that time does, in fact, pass; he does so, however, by excluding the body from the picture, as if the body were not itself invested in the construction of the image, as well as connected to it. After all, Narcissus does not love until he begins to love the image of himself; the image is what destroys him but also what animates him.

In Freud, as I have tried to explain, the power of the image, which is the ego ideal, can only be acknowledged

with reference to "primary narcissism," a hypothetical condition which presents us with a kind of lost paradise, a time in which the terrible image did not yet exist and we were, somehow, one with our bodies. That this is in itself an imaginary construct should have become clear from my analysis of Freud's essay. That such a fantasy is desirable, however, becomes clear when one reads Hardenberg's poetry: as I have tried to show, "primary narcissism," if we suspend our disbelief as to whether or not it exists, is not mute but rather, a way of connecting the body with language, a language which appears to be primordial and, somehow, engaged in the definition of the subject as something beyond images. This, of course, bears the risk of escaping representation altogether. As I have also tried to show, Hardenberg's subject often escapes its text which, in turn, contains the struggle to transcend itself by way of anticipating silence.

As my discussion of Hardenberg's poetry has shown, it is possible to articulate that which Freud circumscribes but it is not possible to represent subjectivity "pure." This confirms my initial thesis that the image is always already there, even if the relationship between it and the "body" is subject to changes. And this is also where Freud and Hardenberg meet: as I have explained, Freud's quote of

Silberer's research on dreams points to a new connection between the body and representation,<sup>1</sup> a connection in which the body may function as a "medium." This, in turn, raises the question of the text as something more material, a kind of "body" in its own right, as I have suggested in my discussion of Hardenberg. And, while there is no definitive "proof" that the body and the text are connected, I believe that my analyses raise enough questions to provoke further thinking in this direction.

So what is the "body"? - Looking at Barnes, it does not seem to exist. In Nightwood, everything is subject to linguistic reflection so that desire itself becomes a function of language. Compared to Freud, whose thinking is based on biology and the idea that "nature" comes before "culture," Barnes shows that "nature" may be an artificial construct and that, in the end, everything may be a function of a text. This does not mean that Nightwood lacks

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<sup>1</sup> This refers back to Freud's early work on hysteria (see Freud and Breuer, Studien über Hysterie, 1895). However, in comparison to what seem to be mere physical "reactions" in hysteria, the ego ideal appears to be focused on an intra-subjective relationship between the ego and the "body" providing the subject with more autonomy, i.e. she would not be in need of Freud to "interpret" her physical condition because she may "picture" it in her own mind. Still, considering that Freud came up with the term "talking cure" in relation to his studies of hysteria, it would make sense to relate the specific connection between

references to an emotional center, a subject beyond language, which escapes from the text, as it does in Hardenberg. But, whereas Hardenberg's strategy is to try and recuperate this subject by way of decentering it, Barnes' text focuses in on the figure of Robin who is at once the absent center of the novel and the locus of desire. The desire for Robin, in turn, results in language, more and more speeches that evoke her and yet make her absence more obvious. Like the image in the pool for Narcissus, Robin signifies that with which Nora cannot merge. No matter how many words Nora utters, it seems as if she is doomed to reflect nothing but her own self. She describes her love for Robin as "always impossible [...] loving each other, we no longer love. Yet we love each other like death" (116). And yet, as in Narcissus' case, this love is also what animates and sustains Nora, who was lifeless before she met Robin.

Here, the fictitious nature of "art," i.e. Nora's visions and the narrator's descriptions of Robin, seems more "alive" than the initial narrative of genetic determinism. In this sense, Barnes' novel challenges Freud's continued emphasis on biology, including his

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the ego ideal and the physical body in "On narcissism" back to his work on hysteria.

assumption that the "body" is, somehow, extra-textual. Still, as I have tried to explain, Freud himself compromises his own way of thinking with the introduction of narcissism as a form of object relations. Just as Robin, the "object" of desire in the novel, cannot really be an object because, as I have argued, she merely reflects, i.e. does not provide physical resistance (like the image in the pool, she is an "other" who cannot be grasped), Freud's equation of the ego ideal with primary narcissism in the love relationship suggests that "love" may be an imaginary construct. In this sense, Nightwood is, in fact, a love story, for it represents "love" in terms of narcissistic desire and thereby reveals that all desire may be narcissistic. Perhaps, the object of our desire can never be "real" and yet the very fact that we do desire someone, even if it turns out to be a mere reflection, indicates our capacity to differentiate between ourselves and others. In keeping with this, narcissism would be, in fact, at the heart of all relationships based on desire. This, in turn, is where the Lacanian critique of object relations theory (in which love is based on need instead of desire) raises questions this project has only begun to address: what is the role of mediation through language and images in human relationships? Is there an object from which desire

originates (i. e. the mother) at the moment of its loss? Or does desire itself construct its "object" in the first place?

These are the kinds of questions currently pursued by feminist-psychoanalytic discourses situating themselves somewhere between Lacan and object relations theory. Considering that both schools of thought begin with Freud, my contribution here is meant to return to the source which may itself be in need of revision.

My reading of Barnes' novel was meant to complicate Freud's categories of the "narcissistic" and "anaclitic" types, as well as his notion of the "actual" and the "ideal" ego. Looking at her text, one may return to Freud's essay with the understanding that the "actual" ego is an imaginary construct and that it is representation, i.e. language, that performs identity.

This brings me back to Zürn, who made it seem as if her life was, in fact, a text, so that the reader is confronted with the absurd possibility that her very suicide was, somehow, "scripted." In this way, Zürn's text undoes the oppositions life/art, fiction/reality, which seem to inform Freud's nature/culture opposition. The madness performed by her texts suggests the possibility of a different relationship between the subject and her text,

perhaps one in which "madness" may also be seen as a text. This opens up the possibility of a reconfiguration of subjectivity through writing and, at the same time, forecloses the utopian possibility that the text may be some kind of alternative space. As the scorpion-scene shows: the moment of seeing oneself is also the moment of anticipating death - the "glimpse" of paradise (in the abdomen) remains just that. Again, merging with what one perceives to be an image of one's self proves to be impossible. However, "death" in Zürn is more vicious than what it appears to be in her hallucinations: the loss of paradise does not result in the liberation from physical constraints. Instead, the narrative "machine" continues, as the subject is confined to the pattern of her illness, including the illusion that it would be possible to break free from it.

In this sense, Zürn "literalizes" the notion of the body as a "medium": confined to what appears to be a more or less mechanical textual structure (the frame narrative), her body is no longer physical either; unlike Hardenberg's seemingly organic body, which is charged with the eroticism of "nature," Zürn's hallucinated body appears in alienation from its real counterpart and controlled by another (the Man of Jasmine).

Whereas Zürn's "real" body is shown to be in pain, Hardenberg's voice conveys the impression that language is, somehow, organically connected to the "body" of the subject of enunciation, which then permits its transcendence through the act of writing. This, too, is related to death, yet here it is the metaphor for death, silence, with which the text is interspersed, rather than the description of actual, physical self-destruction that is evoked by Zürn's text. Paradoxically, Zürn's text refers to the extra-textual more than the other two, each of which seems to explore language as possibility rather than a virtual threat.

Nevertheless, Zürn's work also celebrates the possibilities of art. After all, her real-life mental illness and her writing are connected only if one buys into her portrayal of art as power. Zürn's text can be traced back to the Romantic paradigm that madness is essentially connected to creativity. As the hallucinations show, it is part of the pleasure of fantasy to know that they are autonomous creations, which may exist apart from our actual bodies. Zürn's "body" seems to have been assimilated into her writing so much that hallucinating it as separate from her becomes the only solution. This, in turn, would introduce yet another angle to the myth of Narcissus, whose

infatuation with his reflection may represent, in fact, an escape from an even more destructive condition. For what would sustain us if not our fictions?

When "she" sees herself dance, she knows that she hallucinates and yet these visions are important to her because they are precisely not connected to her body. In order to escape the "signs" that control her physically (she inscribes them into her skin, they make her sick in a movie theater, etc.), she resorts to the pleasure of fantasy, like a child who indulges in reading fairy tales when the real world seems too difficult to understand. After all, narcissism provides the illusion that it may be possible to momentarily suspend the historical narratives by which we seem to be determined. While the subject gazes at her own reflection, she perceives what looks like an objective rendering of herself, an apparent extension of herself, to which she is, somehow, fatally connected, and yet she may also gain the knowledge that this "image" is, in fact, another.

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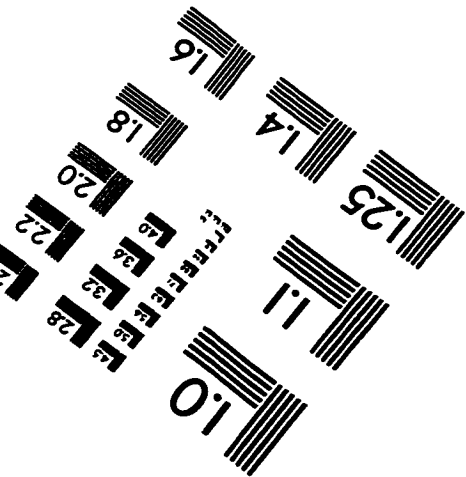
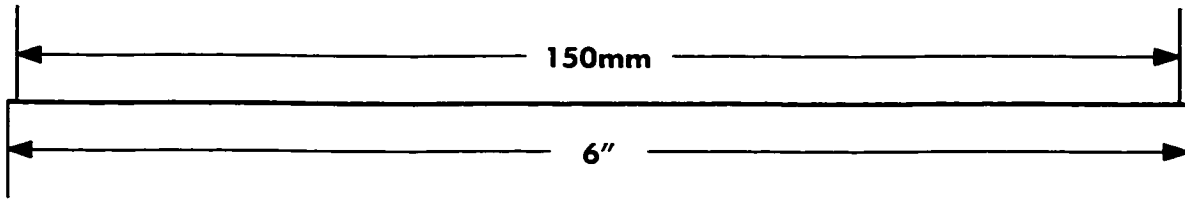
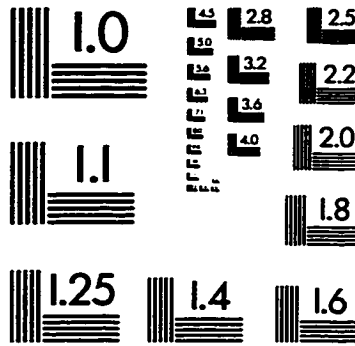
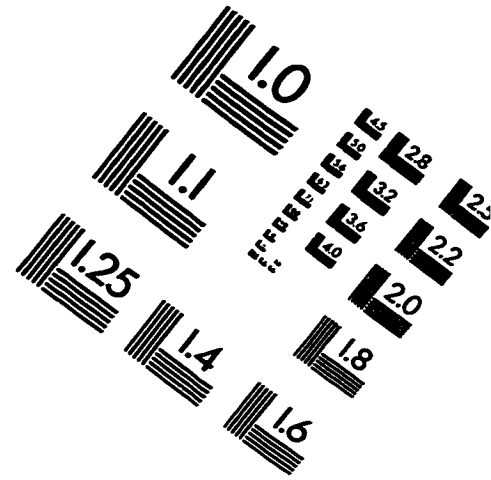
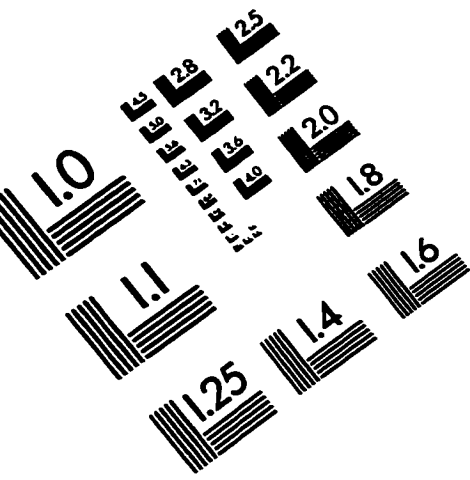
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